The Promise

by flslp87

Summary

Killian and Emma are longing for love. Come along on their journey of True Love, filled with romance, passion, and challenges as they fight for their Happy Beginning in The Promise.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes.
Chapter 1

August 2014

Killian Jones had been born on the right side of the tracks on a night when the stars were in perfect alignment. He lived a life having parents who were overjoyed by his birth because they had given up hope of having a second child, a brother who allowed him to tag along wherever he went, and friends he loved and whom he could depend on whenever needed. He also had a solid head on his shoulders and grew up with such a thirst for all types of knowledge that he kept his mother busy taking him to and from the local library, where he would check out books on everything from 'How to Grow the Best Orchids' to 'Making the Most of a Design'. Killian wasn't a one-dimensional child either, for he had inherited his mother's appreciation for beauty and could describe a painting as easily as he could recite poetry. From a very young age, he loved visiting all types of museums and asking questions of his parents and, eventually, of his teachers and their answers satisfied him for a time. But as he grew, while he continued to strive to learn and understand the world around him, he always felt that there was more out there. A part of him that was always searching for that elusive something that he knew was out there; but what or whom it was, the search continued.

As a young boy, his parents had been inseparable, and their love and affection for each other and for their children was apparent to anyone they were around. There was a sense of the Jones family against the world and, in a way, it had always been that way, as Katherine's parents never warmed up to the boy from the wrong side of London, whisking their daughter away from the society where they thought she belonged. Even after Brennan had made his way as a successful banker throughout Europe, a distance still existed, and for that reason their small family remained isolated, spending their summers together picnicking, boating and playing football, and skiing, skating and visiting museums in the winter.

Since learning had always come easily to Killian, he had high marks and found his way into the Imperial College London to study engineering at the young age of eighteen. Moving away from home and into dormitory life, where he met his best mate Robin Locksley, gave him a freedom that he had never known, and much to his mother and father's consternation, he had ended up on academic probation after the first year. A stern lecture by his father and the threat of being forced to join his brother in the Royal Navy seemed to be just the motivation he required for not only his status within the program but also his behavior in general. During his second and third year his standing improved, earning him top awards. But then tragedy struck, taking both parents in one fell swoop and he had spiraled down, no longer caring about himself or anyone else, and wishing the person responsible for his parents' death hadn't died with them so he could extract his own revenge. Only well-placed guilt from Liam had pushed him to complete his final year and graduate.

Once it was official and he was an engineer, he found it brought him no joy and he had set off to find himself. Thankfully, his fairly level-headed mate, Robin, had followed and managed to keep them both from causing too much damage. Then one night they sat around after too much rum and too little sleep listening to music when a classic rock song came on and both started singing. For the next several years, they wound their way through Europe, joining in with other musicians they met along the way, playing gigs at bars and pubs, taking responsibility for only themselves, and that was in a
very superficial manner. And then life had once again taken a dive and the brother that he had always known as a happy, loving, caring and emotionally connected person had become a jaded, bitter shell of his once charismatic self.

Over the course of the next few years, their father's best mate since college, Dakkar Nemo, had taken Liam under his wing, finally convincing him that a change was needed, and he had quickly left his old life behind and moved to the States. Once Liam had felt settled in his position with Nemo's business, every correspondence between them called for Killian to give up his vagabond lifestyle and move to New York. It had taken another year, but there was something about staring thirty in the face and having nothing to show for it that made him feel it was time to wake up and be the man his mum would have been proud of. It had been almost ten years since his parents' death and while he finally had his priorities straight, to smoothly integrate himself into what Liam and Nemo were creating, he needed to further his education. Because he wanted what his parents had, and their romance had begun at Harvard University, he applied and when accepted, everything seemed to click into place. Something was telling him that, if he was open to what life held the time to fill the empty spot in his heart was now. Now that he was here, he couldn't wait to see where the journey led.

Arriving at the Harvard campus, he was curious to retrace his parents' steps and after strolling the campus found himself back where they told him it had all begun. As he walked out onto Harvard Yard, he slowly turned a full 360 degrees taking in the buildings and the trees around him. There was so much history, not only history of the school itself, but the history for his family. His parents had met and fallen in love right here, outside the Widener Library. His mother, Katherine, a young 18-year-old British woman away from home for the first time and his father, Brennan, a roguish older gent of 25 who was working on his graduate degrees in business and finance, with plans to take the international banking world by storm. Two individuals, who on paper should never have met, much less fallen in love, but to hear their story, one look had been all it had taken for them to fall for the other and stay that way until their death at far too young of an age.

Killian remembered he had been around five and was sitting on his father's lap, waiting for his mother to finish dressing, when he had heard their story for the first time. He had been looking at the chunky ring his father wore on his right hand, admiring the gold coloring and trying to read the letters written on it when his father had asked him, "Killian, my boy, did I ever tell you the story of how I met your mother?"

"No, Papa," he had answered, but inside his head wondering why this information was important because, like every child, he had assumed that there was no beginning of his parents, just like there would be no end. They were and always had been together.

"Well, Killian, sit back and listen carefully. It's quite the love story," he had replied. His mother had walked through the room then and when his father had winked at her, she had smiled that special smile of hers that she reserved just for Brennan; the one that always made Killian feel as though he were walking in on a secret that they didn't want to share with anyone but each other.

After she had left the room, he had leaned back against his father's chest. "Alright. Papa, I'm ready.

"I had just moved into my new place of residence for the next few years, Weld Hall, one of the freshman dorms on the Harvard campus, where my job was to be a Proctor. That, my boy, is similar to my being your father, except it wasn't as much fun." He had tickled his stomach, which had earned a giggle and then continued. "In my twenty-five-year-old infinite wisdom, I decided that a good way to get to know my new charges would be a pick-up football game, the American kind. Little did I know that my life would change forever that day."
Brennan listened for the cadence and as soon as the center had hiked the ball and it was in the quarterback's hands, he took off. His goal was to get around the others, catch the ball, make the winning score and then meet up with his mate Nemo at The Burren for a pint. He watched the ball as it spiraled toward him, wrapped his hands around it and instead of putting his head down and running for a touchdown, he ran into a wall. Thankfully he had the wherewithal to drop the ball and twist his body so that the wall landed on him and not the other way around.

"Bloody hell," his wall spit out. "Let me go you beastly ponce!" Long legs and arms moving simultaneously to untangle from his.

Brennan looked up into the bluest eyes he had ever seen gazing back at him. Rimmed by long, dark lashes under the gentle arch of thin brows, her eyes shone like beacons, igniting a fire within his soul unlike any he had ever known. He smiled at her, watching as her eyes followed the line of his lips and darkened with something that could only be described as awareness. When he glanced at her mouth and could see the tips of her white teeth between perfectly pink lips, it was as if a lightning bolt had come out of the sky right then, for he knew without a shadow of a doubt that she was the woman he was going to marry. He opened his mouth to introduce himself and what popped out was, "Will you marry me?" instead.

Her eyes went wide and this time she was able to push herself up. As she bent over to pick up the books that he had knocked out of her hands, she tossed over her shoulder, "You might be dishy, but you are quite dim!" And with a toss of her head that brought her glorious mane of dark hair to his attention, she flounced off.

Brennan looked down at Killian, "And that my dear son is the story of how I met your mother."

Killian licked his lips and furrowed his brow. "But Papa, what about the game? Did your team win?"

His mother had walked into the room as he finished the question and started laughing. "Killian," she came over behind his father and leaned over his shoulder, "your father doesn't care for that part of the story. Am I right, my love?"

Brennan kissed her hand and a self-deprecating smile crossed his face. "You are right, my love." He cut his eyes to his son. "Alas, we did not win that game. While I was falling into your mother's eyes, I had dropped the ball and the other team, picked it up and scored. Not the way I wanted my charges to see me, but once your mother allowed me to court her, I no longer cared."

Coming back to the present, Killian noticed that since he had been sitting various activities had taken over the yard. There were people tossing Frisbees, kicking a football, and throwing an American football; nubile young men and women, many their first sojourn away from home. They made him feel old, really old. Checking the time on his gold watch, the last gift from his parents before their deaths, he realized hours had passed instead of mere minutes as he had thought. Pulling out his phone, he sent a quick text to Robin.

K: Where are we meeting again?

R: The Burren in Davis Square, it's open mic night.

K: Alright.

R: Want your Gibson?

K: You want to play tonight?

R: The ladies do love it.
K: Wanker

Pocketing the phone, he took one last look around the square, wondering if he would be as lucky in discovering love while at Harvard as his parents. With hope on his side, he left to meet up with Robin.

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The stars had not been perfectly aligned when Emma Swan had been born, ostensibly on the wrong side of the tracks. She had been born on an unseasonably warm night in the middle of fall, not far from the group home in Boston where she grew up. Hours after her birth, she was left in a basket, wrapped in a blanket with the name Emma embroidered on it. The only other item in the basket was a note tucked inside that read, "For your best chance," which Emma kept tucked inside a box with other mementos. She didn't have a family by blood, and most of the people that she knew growing up were individuals whose paths crossed hers as they would move in and out of her group home over the years. Ruby and Ashley had lived in the home as long as she and were the only two she called friends. They had her back, just as she had theirs. A family of sorts, if only in the minds of lost little girls who seemed to be searching.

The home where Emma lived was presided over by Sister Blue, a rather austere woman on one hand, but on the other, one who could be very kind. She had taken it upon herself to help the girls grow up to be the women they were meant to be, and as such had encouraged the girls to read and challenge themselves, often pushing them to think outside the box; to expand their horizons and make dreams that they never thought would come true, but ones that inspired them to never stop trying. Because of her tutelage, all three girls excelled in school and higher education was not an insurmountable dream, but one that was theirs for the taking.

Emma's younger years were spent inside her head, as in there she could create the perfect world and a perfect family with parents who loved her and never would have thought to leave her to grow up alone. When she turned five the Sisters gave her a gift, and that gift gave vision to her dreams. The gift, a copy of Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales, filled her dreams with faces and places that, even though she knew were never real, made the loneliness bearable. She imagined her parents were Snow White and Prince Charming and the reason they had abandoned her was because they were cursed and that someday they would be reunited. Ruby and Ashley quickly became Little Red Riding Hood and Cinderella and she filled pages with simple drawings, often drawing her thoughts instead of using her words, until they teased her that she was the mouse in Cinderella's story. She didn't agree with them, though, for she saw herself as the ugly duckling that would someday grow up to be a beautiful Swan. So enchanted was she with the story that she asked for it as a last name, and was granted her wish when she was ten.

She saw herself as a woman who was of average height, her body weighing slightly more than she wanted, and topped by a round face, slight overbite and blonde hair that she wore parted in the middle and straight. She was neither happy nor unhappy with the way she looked but she did like her eyes. They were dark green with flecks of gold and brown in them, and they darkened when she was sad and lightened when she was happy. And inside where it counted, Emma was comfortable with the person she had become, because her life experiences had served in making her into the person who looked back at her from the mirror, and that was someone of whom she could be proud.

Her ability to draw paved the way to several awards at her school as well as at a local art museum, which held contests for children's artworks in the summer. As her confidence grew with her artistic abilities, so did her confidence in other aspects of her life, except when it came to allowing others to get close to her. Some called them walls, but she called it self-preservation. After all, what can't touch you can't hurt you. And protecting herself from being hurt became even more important as she
moved through her teens and watched Ruby and Ashley fall in and out of love over and over again. Allowing herself to be vulnerable enough to fall in love with anyone was not something that she could even imagine at sixteen, unless the vision that was her secret crush walked into her life, and then, she thought with a smile on her face and a flutter in her chest, all bets were off.

The possibility of that, she knew, was minuscule as he was someone created with her vivid imagination. He wasn't someone that she had conjured out of thin air, but that she had created from the detailed description that J.S. Barrie had given his version of the one and only Captain Hook. After numerous readings of the story, her mind's eye kept creating a face for him, until one day she pulled out her charcoals and sketched what she envisioned: Dark, wind-tousled hair that constantly fell over a high forehead, a strong jaw that was never quite clean shaven, and blue, blue eyes surrounded by thick dark lashes that pierced her very soul. And his smile was one that involved his whole face, causing his eyes to crinkle and deep grooves to appear in his lean cheeks. So enamored was she with her dream man that the mere mortals that she saw in school every day didn't stand a chance, which gave her friends something else to tease her about. What could she do when her heart wanted what it wanted?

The part of Boston, Dorchester, where Emma's group home was located, had its share of difficulties, yet Emma and her friends tried to stay away from the groups of rougher individuals, which often created tense situations. None more so than when she was fifteen and one of the boys, Neal, tried to get her to date him, not taking too kindly to her refusal. For weeks, afterward he had followed her, attempting to intimidate her enough to make her change her mind, until he was just gone and her defenses had dropped. Unfortunately, that was when he was the most dangerous, setting her up to take the fall for a crime he had committed. But with the support of Ruby, Ashley and Sister Blue, the real story came out and he was sent away to prison.

When they had turned eighteen the three young women had moved out of Dorchester area, leaving behind the only home they had ever known, in search of a new home. They ended up not far away in Brookline Village. Financially bolstered by a few scholarships and jobs, the girls were able to live in a nice apartment and go to school studying the areas they loved. Emma was at Massachusetts College of Art and Design pursuing her interest in art, and Ashley and Ruby at a local small private college, one taking education classes and the other trying to decide between being a healer of animals or to be a healer of people.

When they had all graduated with their bachelor's degrees, it had been a joyous occasion but also a sad one, as for the first time in many years the girls would be going their separate ways. Ashley and Ruby where moving on to take graduate courses at Boston College and Emma was going to work full time at the Museum of Fine Arts. After several years, Emma found herself getting bored and, deciding she wanted more for her life, applied to and was accepted to Harvard University, where she planned to get her MBA, and where she was going to be able to get back into painting. Her grades from Mass Art and a generous recommendation from her employer helped her get a top fellowship which not only paid for her school but left enough for her to live in a small apartment on her own. And her experience from the museum helped her achieve a position as a teacher's assistant to one of the art professors, allowing her to pick up a brush and create, something that she had missed deeply.

"Earth to Emma," snickered Ashley.

Emma glanced up quickly from the box she was taping shut. "Sorry about that," she gave her friend a sheepish smile, "just remembering."

Ashley smiled softly, her eyes twinkling, "We had some good times here didn't we?"

"We did, and then you and Ruby moved off and Phillip and Sean moved in." She looked around the
room to see what else needed to be done. "This is the last box. Is everything else loaded?"

"Let's hope so, as they already left with Ruby. We are supposed to bring the rest of the stuff in Sean's car." A dreamy smile crossed her face.

"How's that going?" Emma was happy for her friends, who had been dating several months. The women made a quick walk through the apartment and after loading the car started the drive to her new residence.

Once on the road, Ashley answered, "He's wonderful Emma. I think maybe he's the one," she giggled and her cheeks turned pink. "So, what's the deal with you and Phillip? Sean told me he asked you out."

As they drove, Emma filled Ashley in on Phillip and how she had told him they were just friends and before she knew it they arrived at her new apartment. She had been fortunate in discovering that the professor whom she was the teaching assistant for, Sarah Fisher, had inherited an old Victorian home in Cambridge and had converted it into apartments; three, one-bedroom apartments and one two-bedroom suite that she only rented to graduate students. Thankfully, one of the them came available and Emma was going to have her own space for the first time in her life. A new apartment, a new position and a new school. Wondering what else new was awaiting her, she exited the car and ran up the steps to her new home.

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Killian walked into The Burren, a popular pub in Davis Square, to see Robin was already up on stage warming up with the band. After arriving he was introduced to Leroy, the drummer, Walter, on keyboard, Tom, who played bass and sang back-up vocals, and the lead singer, Doc, who also played guitar. Collectively, they were known as The Minors, a rather interesting group of musicians who had met in college over ten years ago and were seen regularly around the greater Boston area club scene.

Lifting his guitar strap over his head Killian strummed a few notes, tuning his instrument before joining the band on a few songs. While Doc sang, he played mindlessly and was able to observe the patrons. The place was crowded, small groups, large ones, and everyone seemed to be having a good time. Killian noticed Robin smiling at a few females and shook his head at his mate and his quick moves. There were many beautiful women in the pub, many obviously available but none reaching inside to touch that part of him that said, "I am worth your time. Know me," and so he continued to play, getting lost in the music. He and Robin also sang a few songs, and as they moved seamlessly from Nirvana to David Bowie, he found himself relaxing more and more. As the set wound to a close, the band left the stage and moved into a back room to rest and regroup. Would set two be any different, he wondered?

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Emma waded her way through the crowd of people, hurrying toward the table in the corner where she was joining her friends Ruby, Ashley, Sean, Phillip and one of her new housemates, Elsa. Grabbing a beer at the bar, she scooted between Elsa and Ruby. "Sorry I'm late. What did I miss?"

Ruby smirked at her. "Nothing. We were just trying to decide what to order." Once that decision was made they talked about innocuous things and Emma spent time getting acquainted with Elsa, who shared the larger apartment with her sister Anna. Elsa was a second-year law student and her sister was finishing her undergraduate studies and preparing for the MCAT. Emma found her to be a soft-spoken woman who was genuinely kind and also seemed to fit in nicely with her friends. She was even pleased to see that Phillip had turned his eye to the blonde. "Well, you must have not broken
Phillip's heart too badly," Ruby whispered in her ear.

Emma rolled her eyes. "I see that. Think I should warn her about his wandering eye?"

Ruby peered around at the two, and noticed that Elsa's attention had moved off Phillip and she was looking up at the stage where instead of the normal loud rock music, the music was soft, haunting almost. Glancing in the same direction, Ruby immediately noticed what had drawn Elsa's attention as there were two new men, both playing guitar, "Forgive me Father, for I'm thinking impure thoughts," she muttered.

Emma heard her comment and started laughing, "Since when aren't you thinking impure thoughts Rubes?" When Ruby didn't answer, Emma turned in her chair to see what had caught her friend's attention.

Walking back up onto the stage, Killian noticed how loud the atmosphere had become as the night wore on. As he strummed a few chords, his attention was captured by the melodic laughter of a female sitting off in the corner with a group. He couldn't see anything but her profile, but the joy he heard in her laugh captured his attention unlike any other. Her friend on the right turned his way as did her friend on the left, sending a wolfish smile toward the stage. As they played the opening bars to his song, he decided he was singing to the mystery woman in the middle.

"I've been alone with you inside my mind
And in my dreams, I've kissed your lips a thousand times
I sometimes see you pass outside my door
Hello, is it me you're looking for?"

He saw her turn in his direction as he continued to sing.

"I can see it in your eyes
I can see it in your smile
You're all I've ever wanted and my arms are open wide
Cause you know just what to say and you know just what to do
And I want to tell you so much, I love you."

When Emma turned to see what had captured Ruby's attention, the waitress had been standing there with their order. Passing the plates around she heard a voice start singing *Hello*, a song she always enjoyed listening to, but this man's voice took the lyrics to an entirely different level. Smooth, rich and sexy quickly came to mind. Wondering if his looks matched, she turned and what she saw caused her pulse to race and her breath to catch, for she was looking at what came close to being her very own Captain Hook come to life. The face from her dreams after reading Peter Pan so many times was singing, and as their gazes locked across the sea of people, Emma felt his words were meant just for her.

"I long to see the sunlight in your hair
And tell you time and time again how much I care
Sometimes I feel my heart will overflow
Hello, I've just got to let you know
Cause I wonder where you are and I wonder what you do
Are you somewhere feeling lonely? Or is someone loving you?
Tell me how to win your heart, for I haven't got a clue
But let me start by saying I love you."

Feeling her face flame, Emma turned back around, "Ruby, you see the resemblance too, right? I'm not dreaming, am I?"
"I see it." She clutched Emma's hand. "You know what this means, right? It's fate. He's your destiny."

Emma turned back around as he sang the last few bars of the song.

"Hello
Is it me you're looking for?
Cause I wonder where you are and I wonder what you do
Are you somewhere feeling lonely? Or is someone loving you?
Tell me how to win your heart, for I haven't got a clue
But let me start by saying I love you."

As the music faded, he tilted his head in her direction, just a slight nod to indicate that he was feeling something too. But could she take a chance?

"My destiny? Right!" She finished her beer. "My destiny is school on Monday. I don't have time for anything else."

Ruby glanced at the stubborn set to her jaw and looked over at Ashley who shrugged her shoulders. "Can't fight destiny, Emma. But we'll play it your way tonight."

They finished their food and cashed out, all going their separate ways with promises to get together soon. Since she and Elsa were going in the same direction, they stopped at the ladies room on their way out and, as was usual in a pub, had to wait in line. Listening to the women around them, she learned that it had been the first time the man who had been singing and his friend had played with the band. She also learned that if he chose, he would not be going home alone tonight, which reiterated her thoughts that a man that nice to look at had playboy written all over him. There was no way he would be interested in an average girl like her.

"I hope this line moves faster or we won't make the next train." Elsa's comment stopped her wayward thoughts.

"Fingers crossed," she mumbled as they inched their way forward.

Killian saw her and her friends leave the table and head toward the exit, and really wished he could go after her. He had felt something sizzling through the air and he wanted a chance to see her up close and not through the haze of a dark room. When he saw her and the blonde turn in the direction of the facilities, he let out a breath and finished playing the song before following.

Turning the corner toward the hall leading to the ladies room, Killian was hit in full stride hard enough to take his breath away. Unconsciously he caught her arms and started to ask if she was alright but when she looked up at him, he got lost in the dark green of her eyes. "It's you," he whispered.

Her eyes crinkled at the corners as she smiled "It's me," she laughed before she was pulled from his arms by the other blonde.

He reached out and caught the side of her bag. "But wait, what's your name?"

Her friend tugged again, pulling her bag from his grasp. She looked over her shoulder as she followed her friend out the door. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

Killian watched her race off. "Perhaps I would," he mumbled. "after all it is customary for the groom to know his bride's name." Looking down at his hand he realized something from her bag had broken off and he was holding one end of it. What he saw caused a huge grin to light his face, for he
was holding a broken paintbrush, which he was sure might give him a clue about her identity. He started to toss the broken brush into the garbage until he noticed it had writing on it. "Emma," he read. Walking back to the stage, he finally understood what his father meant about one look being all it took for him to know that his mother was the one for him, and it seemed that there was a very good possibility that one son had just followed in his footsteps.

Stay tuned for Chapter 2 and if you are curious about the song that Killian sang to Emma. It's Hello, by Lionel Richie.
Chapter 2

Chapter Summary

It's been months since they ran into each other at The Burren. Join Emma and Killian as they move through their second year of graduate school and are unable to get the other out of their minds.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

January 2015

Killian walked into the apartment he shared with Robin, located in the Windsor at Cambridge Park apartment homes, dropped his books on a table, kicked over a trash bin and flopped down into a nearby chair. "I can't believe it's been six months and I still can't find Emma. You don't think she's hiding from me, do you?" he tossed out at Robin, who was sitting at their dining room table which doubled as a desk.

Robin dropped his pencil and pushed back from the table, knowing it would be a while before he would be able to get back to his studies. "Could be, mate, but it's a big campus. Could be it's not time for you to meet her yet."

"It doesn't seem fair, does it?" He got up and went into the kitchen, coming back with a couple of apples, tossing one to Robin before biting into his. "I meet the woman of my dreams and being with her has eluded me for six bloody months."

"And you even gave up your carousing ways," deadpanned Robin. "There should be some reward in that."

"Bloody right there should be." He munched on his apple for a few minutes thinking about all the places he had looked for this woman, yet after six months, he was no closer to finding her than he had been the day after their fateful encounter in The Burren. Finishing the apple, he tossed the core in the trash, "Hungry?"

"I could eat. What do you have in mind?"

Leaning his head back against the chair, he tried to think of someplace that he might get lucky enough to run into her. A place where they hadn't been in a while. "Feel up to a game of billiards? We could see if Kristoff and Graham can meet us."

Robin picked his pencil back up, "Sounds good to me. Now bugger off and let me finish this assignment. It's due before midnight."

Shaking his head at his friend's procrastination, Killian disappeared into his room, dropped down onto his bed and sent a quick text to Graham and another to Kristoff to see if they could meet them at Lucky Strike.

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Emma finished tying her bowling shoes, pulled her ball from her bag, shined it carefully and set it on the ball return. "What should I order, ladies? Our usual?"

Ruby looked up from slipping on her bright red bowling shoes. "Sounds good to me." She turned to the other two ladies on their team, "Ash, Elsa, the usual?"

Both women agreed and while they finished their preparations, Emma went to the bar and ordered a large pizza, half pepperoni, half Hawaiian, and then carrying the pitcher and four cups, made her way back to their lane. "Beer's cold. Pizza up shortly."

"Thanks, Em." Ashley called as she picked up her powder blue ball with the tiny glass slipper engraved on it and stood up to take her turn.

Emma watched Ashley's ball rolling down the alley and smiled at the memory it elicited. As she, Ruby, and Ashley had entered their teen years, they had each developed attitudes that weren't always conducive to being cooperative with others. Neither were they always considered to be good listeners and so after a weekend of several instances where the girls had been in constant disagreement, Sister Blue had enrolled them in a bowling league because she thought it would teach them teamwork. Surprisingly, they had all enjoyed not only the time they got to spend with each other and Sister Blue but also the game of bowling. That Christmas they were all given their very own balls. Ashley's was powder blue with a Cinderella type glass slipper, Emma's was white with a small swan and Ruby's was red with the head of a wolf. The balls, as well as the girls' friendship, had survived and here they were almost twelve years later, continuing to play the game. This year, however, Blue had opted out so they had coerced Elsa into being their fourth. Hearing Ashley's shriek, she glanced up and snickered as Ashley's ball rolled into the gutter.

"Did you see that?" She threw her hands up in the air and stomped back to the ball return. That was horrible!

"It's okay, Ash," Ruby laughed, "you can still get a spare."

Ashley rolled her eyes at Ruby, picked up her ball and after lining up a shot, let it fly. As luck would have it, she knocked down the rest of the pins earning a spare and they were off. Next was Elsa, then Emma and lastly Ruby. As the game continued, they took turns moving ahead of each other until game one was completed and Ruby had won by two pins.

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Killian and Robin arrived at the Lucky Strike first and moving up to the second floor were early enough to grab their favorite booth, as it had easy access to a billiard table as well as a dart board. They had just sat down when Graham strolled in followed closely by Kristoff who had brought a newcomer. "Guys, I'd like you to meet the newest cardiologist at Mass General, Victor Whale."

Kristoff pointed at the men in turn. "Victor, meet the guys, Killian, Robin and Graham."

"Have a seat, mate." Killian stood up and pulled a chair over from a nearby table. "We just ordered. What will you have?"

"Whatever you're having as long as it's cold." Victor sat and looked around the place. "Interesting environment."

The men made small talk as the waiter set several baskets of wings on the table as well as several different dipping sauces. A cold bottle of Bells Two Hearted Ale was placed in front of each and as they ate and drank their fill only minimal talking was heard. Once the wings were gone and new bottles replaced the empty ones, Robin and Graham each grabbed a pool cue, and games for
bragging rights and who would buy the next round began.

Killian listened to them trash talking each other and shook his head before turning back to the table where Kristoff and Victor were both staring across the room smiling at something, or someone. Curious as to what was drawing their attention, he turned to look in the direction they were staring but saw nothing out of the ordinary. "What are you two blokes staring after?"

Kristoff looked sideways at Victor. "We saw one of the nurses that work at the hospital and let's just say," he snickered at Victor, "her hospital persona does not match her night out one, right, Victor?"

He shook his head, "I think that would be an understatement. Sex kitten meet nun would be more like it." He looked back out across the room at a large number of people milling around, talking, eating, playing pool and other games, but several deep at the bar. "Are there always this many nubile young women hanging around like this?"

Shrugging his shoulders, Killian responded, "Aye, I guess. I never really noticed." He took another drink and realized that Victor was staring at him. "What?"

"You mean," he looked over at Kristoff, "you've never noticed all the women here before?"

Killian shrugged a shoulder again, a slight frown appearing between his brows, "No, I can't say I have." He tilted his bottle draining the last of the ale.

Victor tilted his chin down, "Oh, okay. Well, there are quite a few men," he got out before he was interrupted by Killian's coughing and choking.

Kristoff patted Killian on the back and laughed, "Killian met, and I say that loosely, a woman last August at a bar and has made it his mission to find her."

"Really?" Victor looked over at Killian, who was scratching his neck, a sheepish smile on his face. "Best of luck with that."

They discussed how Victor and Kristoff had come to know each other as well as the different areas to live close to work. Victor had been looking at places in Cambridge and Beacon Hill and while he hadn't decided which would be the best one, he was leaning toward Beacon Hill. He had heard that it was the best place for young professionals.

"So how long have you known these guys?" Victor tossed at Killian.

Killian, who had been peeling the label from his bottle, pushed it away as he told his story. He explained about meeting Robin at University in England, traveling throughout Europe and moving here to complete their graduate studies, and the plan to go to work for a family friend in New York. "Graham lives in our apartment complex and helped us move in that first day, and we met Kristoff through him."

Conversation after that moved from sports to food to traveling, before eventually moving back to women. After watching numerous females walk in and out of their section, Victor stood up. "I think I'll take a look around. Care to join me?"

"Nah, I'm good," Kristoff yawned. "I'm beat and might head out before long."

Killian stood up, "I'll come. Never know when I might get lucky." He pulled the broken paintbrush from his pocket. "After all, I need to find the owner of this."
Emma sat doodling on a napkin while they nibbled on their celebratory order of Belgian fries. "My bowling sucked tonight." She tossed her pencil aside, realizing that just like every other unconscious drawing that she had done in the past six months, she had drawn the singer from The Burren, except this time she had added scruff. He could be the Captain Hook she had been drawing for years, but why, she wondered, did her mind insist on combining the two.

Elsa flipped the napkin around, "You still have no idea who he is?"

She nibbled on a fry while thinking about how many times her mind said she saw him, only to find out she was wrong and she didn't even want to admit how many times she had dreamt of him. That was her secret. "No, I have no idea."

"But, Emma," sing-songed Ruby, "how come you refuse to go back to The Burren?"

"We've been back there," she ducked her head, "once or twice," she mumbled.

Ashley wadded up her napkin and tossed it in the middle of the table, giggling over Emma's answer. "Once or twice," she rolled her eyes and held up one finger, "the first time was on Halloween when everyone was dressed up in costume so even if he were there, he wouldn't have known you. And two," she held up another finger, "for an early lunch when there was no chance of live music."

"What are you so scared of Emma?" Ruby asked quietly.

She leaned back in her chair and looked around the room wondering why she was really afraid. "I can't afford to be wrong about him." She picked at a split cuticle on her dry hands thinking she needed some lotion. "Besides, I don't know who or where he is."

Ruby reached over and put her hand on Emma's shoulder. "But you haven't tried to find him either, have you?"

"And Emma," Ashley added, "what if you aren't wrong about him? What if he's your person?"

Emma looked at Elsa, "And you? Do you have an opinion too?" She snapped out the question a little too harshly if she were being honest with herself.

Elsa smiled, used to her prickly ways, before picking up the napkin and looking at the likeness of the man that she had drawn. "Emma, if you don't want him, can I have him? Or maybe he has a brother. He's hot!" She giggled and tossed the napkin back on the table.

Twirling the napkin around, she looked into the man's eyes and admitted, yes, he was sexy, at least if she had remembered his looks as well as she thought she had, he was sexy. And his eyes, she remembered, which couldn't be drawn with pencil, were so blue they had invaded her dreams. "Ok," she all but shouted, "if we find each other I will give him a chance."

"Good." Ruby stood up. "Elsa, help me put the balls in the lockers." They each took two bags and disappeared toward the lockers.

"So, Ash," Emma leaned closer so she wouldn't have to yell, "tell me about Sean. Things still going well?"

Ashley smiled shyly, "Yes, of course." She looked around as if afraid of being overheard, and then whispered, "I think he's going to pop the question."

Emma felt her mouth fall open. "Really? I must really be out of the loop as I didn't realize things had moved so far along." She was very happy for her friend but felt a bit disconcerted as each of them
getting married and starting families would change their dynamic.

Ashley frowned, "Emma, you like Sean, right?"

Quickly, she reassured Ashley that she did like Sean, very much, but just the thought of one of them getting married was scary. Ashley squeezed her hand, "Emma, we will always be there for each other, you know that right?"

Taking a deep breath, Emma squeezed Ash's fingers, "I do know that. I'm just being silly, it's been a long week. Here come Elsa and Ruby, and you can tell us what Sean has been doing to make you think he's going to pop the question."

She looped arms with Ruby and they threaded their way through the crowds toward the stairs accidentally walking in front of a blond guy taking a picture. Ruby smiled at him, "Sorry, we didn't mean to get in the way."

He stared at her as if he were awestruck and didn't know how to respond, until finally he smiled and said, "No problem," before following them down the stairs, stopping at the second floor.

Ruby looked around Emma, "Do either of you know him?" Once she determined that neither of them had seen him before, she sighed, "Darn and he was really cute. Did you see those dimples?"

As they left the Lucky Strike and walked into the night, the girls separated but not before making plans for the following week. Then Emma and Elsa headed back to their house in Cambridge and Ruby and Ashley back to their apartment

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Killian looked up from where he was lining up a shot as Victor stumbled back to the table, falling into his seat. Pushing up he looked over at Graham, "Any idea?"

Graham shrugged, "No clue."

Killian watched Robin engage Kristoff in conversation before both turned toward Victor. "Think we should go over?"

"See blood?"

"No."

"Then no. Now take your shot so I can beat you."

He lined up the ball but when he shot, the angle was wrong and it bounced away from the pocket instead of toward it. "Bugger that!"

Graham sauntered up to the table and positioned the cue ball. "Let me show you how's it's done, son." He tapped the white ball so it knocked his solid one neatly into the corner pocket and then lined up the eight ball, sinking it also. "And that is how it's done," he grinned at Killian as he put the pool stick away. "Next rounds on you."

"Wanker," Killian called good naturally as he left to go order another round of drinks. Walking back to the table he couldn't help but check out the females in the room, and not to "check them out" as Victor had been so obviously doing earlier, but to see if one of them might be Emma. He knew he hadn't imagined her so she had to be out there somewhere, didn't she?
Robin was waiting for him when he arrived back at the table, "Killian, I think you're going to be interested in hearing what Victor has to say."

"Really?" He raised his brows in question.

Pulling out a chair, Robin waved him toward it, "Have a seat."

"I'm quite fine standing." He gave him a strange look wondering what was going on.

"No," Robin insisted, "you want to be sitting down for this, trust me."

Shrugging his shoulders, he looked into the expectant faces of his mates trying to get an answer, but when they were not forthcoming, he sat down as instructed. "Alright, I'm sitting. Let me hear your story."

Victor grinned at him and, as if enjoying being the center of things, launched into a tale of how, after Killian had been called to take his turn at pool, he had decided to see what else the Lucky Strike included, and had left to wander around. He had initially ended up on the first floor where there was dancing and after checking out the view, he had moved on up to the third floor where his attention had been captured by a table of four women: a leggy brunette and three blondes.

Killian sat up a little taller, remembering that night in The Burren when Emma, a blonde had been sitting with two other blondes and a brunette, and several males. "Go on, you have my attention."

Victor smiled at him, "Thought I might." He had stood back and watched them talking and while trying to think of a decent pickup line had watched them rebuff several sets of males who had stopped by, seemingly to talk, or more. "That's when I got the brilliant idea to take their picture, but then the brunette and one of the blondes got up, carrying bowling bags and disappeared.

"Was Emma the blonde who got up and went with her?" Killian asked, excitedly thinking that maybe he would get a break.

"No," Graham broke in, "I believe that was a woman named Elsa."

Killian frowned at his friend, "We'll get to why you know Emma's friend but have failed to help me find Emma in a moment." He rubbed his hands on his pants' legs and turned back to Victor. "Go on."

Victor went on to say that he had tried to follow but had gotten caught in the middle of a crowd going the other way so had just scooted against the bar and waited. Shortly his patience had paid off and they returned and all four women got up to leave, but not before he got a quick picture of them while sitting. "See?" Victor pulled up the picture in question and held the phone out toward Killian.

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"Is this the only picture you took?"

He put his finger on the phone screen, not caring if he left a print behind. His shoulders slumped as it resembled her, but without getting an opportunity to look into those green eyes, how could he be sure? "Bloody hell, Doc," he looked up at Victor, anguish and frustration evident in the tone of his voice, "I can't see anything but the brunette who is all legs and teeth. Is this the only picture you took?"
A sheepish grin flitted across Victor's face, "I tried to take one of them as they stood up, but someone walked in front of me so I'm not sure about it. Slide to the next picture."

Killian advanced to the next frame and there she was, his Emma. "You did it!" He said in awe, a huge smile covering his face. "You found my Emma."

He stood up as if preparing to go find her right then but was interrupted by Victor, "Killian, she's gone." Sorrow could be heard in his words.

Dropping back down onto the chair, Killian stared at the doctor who had taken him from the highest high and then jabbed a knife into that hope within the span of five minutes. "Gone? When? Where?" He asked quietly.

I'm not sure but I walked down the stairs with them earlier and heard them talking about catching the train home. Maybe," his eyes lit up as if an idea had just come to mind, "think it's possible they left something behind?"

Without hesitation, Killian stood. "Can you show me where they were sitting?"

"Sure, let's go." They got up to leave and after only a couple steps, Killian turned back to Graham. "So, why the hold out? And how do you know Elsa?" An undertone of annoyance could clearly be heard.

Graham looked taken aback by the accusatory tone in his friend's voice, and answered using the voice that rankled those he arrested when performing duties as a detective for the Boston Police Department, "1-if you remember, I wasn't with you the night you met her so I had no clue what she looked like, and 2-I only know her friend's first name, as she is a law student and as an assignment, she tagged along in a cruiser one day, and that's how she was introduced. Elsa, law student."

Kilian studied him, tilted his head in silent apology, and turned to follow Victor to the third floor. Taking the steps three at a time, he burst through the stairwell with not only Victor on his heels, but the others as well. "Our drinks," he reminded them.

Robin took a step forward. "We told them we would be right back. Let's go check for clues as to the identity of this mysterious Emma."

Victor pointed out the table where the women had been sitting. Killian noticed it hadn't been cleared yet and almost ran to check for hints. His cursory glance revealed nothing out of the ordinary except empty glasses and old napkins, until he shoved the napkins aside in frustration and a folded one opened as it fluttered to the floor. When he looked down and saw the drawing there, his breath caught in his throat. "Bloody hell."

April 2015

Emma opened her bleary eyes to the early morning light sneaking around the edges of the curtains and rolling over picked up her phone to squint at the time. "Ugh," she blew out air forcefully. "Sneaking into my dreams and stealing my sleep, just like a dirty pirate," she scolded the painting that had kept her up half the night. "I'll show you," she continued her tirade, "sneak around like a pirate then you become a pirate."

She snuggled back under the blanket, not quite ready to face the day, but unable to resist slipping on her glasses to stare at her latest work. Captain Hook himself stared back at her from the canvas across the room, dressed all in black, complete with a long leather duster that would swirl around him as he pillaged and plundered. The image so like the one she had been drawing for years, yet this time, no
facial hair adorned his strong jaw, for she had given him the innocent face of the singer, complete with his beanie.

"Serves you right," she muttered, "for daring to steal my sleep." Placing her glasses back on the table, she tucked herself around a pillow hoping to get at least another hour of sleep before the busy day ahead.

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Robin picked up a pillow off the floor and chucked it at Killian's head, "Wake up lunkhead, we leave in fifteen."

Killian frowned at his friend's chipper behavior so early on a Saturday. "Lunkhead? What the devil is a bloody lunkhead?"

Robin shrugged his shoulder, "No clue. Heard a couple guys use it the other day and thought to myself it might come in handy some day and, hey," his grin grew larger, "it must be your lucky day."

Pushing himself up to the side of the bed, he rubbed his hands over his face, trying to wake up. "And where are we going again?" He called to Robin, who had gone into the other room.

"Some rowing race, Harvard vs. another school that's a color, I think." Robin clarified as he came back down the hall. "Black, maybe? No, Brown, that's it."

Making it to his feet this time, he grabbed some clean clothes. "And why are we going?"

Robin huffed as if he had given the same set of instructions numerous times, "I'm not sure why, but they made it a requirement for class."

Killian opened his mouth to ask another question but was interrupted before getting very far. "I wasn't listening that closely either, but we have to go. Leaving in ten." And he practically ran down the hall as if worried there would be more questions.

Killian showered, shaved and dressed and came out of the bathroom ready to go in eight minutes, only to find Robin on the computer scrolling through some site on his computer. "Come on lunkhead," he smirked at his friend. "Time to go." Robin gave him a disgusted look, to which Killian shot right back, "You know, you're right. That is a good word."

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Emma met Ruby at the shuttle stop by the Currier House and after getting off at the Widener Gate, they sauntered toward the Weeks Footbridge. "I'm so glad the sun is out." She tilted her face to the sun hoping to get a little color on her cheeks.

"Me too," Ruby held her arms out, "I really need a tan."

Emma side-eyed her friend, "Oh so that explains the outfit. I thought I missed the memo that we were going to the beach." Her friend had on minuscule shorts and a tight tank exposing a lot of skin to the first sunny spring day in a week.

"Oh poo," shooshed Ruby, "I'm perfectly covered, but I say, when you've got it, flaunt it." She winked and then giggled when they passed by a group of boys who whistled. "I'm sorry Emma, I know you aren't too fond of it, but I do love it when 18-year-old boys whistle at me."

"Of course you do." She rolled her eyes and laughed at her friend's silliness. They walked a little
way in silence, enjoying the warm day and catching up with each other until finally Emma asked about Ashley.

Ruby smiled, "Well..."

It had been a rather interesting year for their friend Ashley. Turned out she wasn't wrong when she had told Emma in January while at Lucky Strike that she thought Sean was going to propose to her, because propose he did. In fact, not only had he asked her to marry him but he had been so excited about being her husband that he had convinced her to drive to Atlantic City one weekend and they had come back married.

It hadn't stopped there, for a few weeks ago she had continued her surprises with the one that she was eight-weeks pregnant and due around Thanksgiving. With their friend eloping and now expecting a baby, they had decided to throw her a combination bridal shower/baby shower in a few hours but thankfully, Blue had volunteered to host it in the group home where they had grown up, leaving Emma and Ruby free to be college students for a few hours.

Arriving at the bridge, she followed as Ruby wiggled her way past several groups until they were pushed against the railing of the footbridge and able to relax and wait for the race to begin.

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Killian followed Robin as they wound their way along the banks of the Charles River where Harvard had been competing since the late 1800's. They were finished with their required classwork, which today consisted of helping some undergraduate environmental engineering students set up some soil and water tests, and now they were free to watch the race.

Finding a place to stand with a good view was important and they ended up not far upstream from a boathouse, in the middle of several groups of students, but able to see quite a bit of the race.

Robin dropped his rucksack onto the ground, reaching in for his sunglasses, a ball cap and carafe. "Coffee?"

Killian peered down into the bag. "Any chance you have something to eat in there?"

Pulling out a wrinkled Dunkin bag and holding it aloft, as if he were presenting Simba, Robin bragged, "Have I ever let you down?"

Killian stood there for a few minutes with his hands on his hips, "Well, there was that one time..." he started to say, but when Robin turned to take his donuts with him, he acquiesced, "Sorry mate. You've always been perfect."

Rolling his eyes, Robin handed him a donut. "No need to be cheeky." Busying himself, he poured coffee for both and turned back to the river to watch the preparations continue.

Killian took his coffee and sweet and walked away from the others, noticing the number of students who lined the banks of the river as well as the footbridge. Was Emma here, he wondered, wishing that they were closer to the bridge where there seemed to be a large group of people as well as vendors peddling their various wares.

Finishing his coffee, he collected their rubbish and deposited it in one of the temporary receptacles that had been placed along the path. Contemplating wandering around, he decided looking for Emma in these crowds would be like looking for that proverbial needle in the haystack and made his way back to where Robin appeared to be holding court.
When Robin bent over to dig around in his bag, pulling out a pair of binoculars, Killian frowned at his friend's zealous behavior over his first racing competition. "Your eyes not good enough for you to see everything?" He teased his longtime friend.

Robin held up the binoculars, "You talking about these?"

"Aye," Kilian admitted, "what do you plan to do with them?"

"I don't plan on doing anything with them, lunkhead." He took the binoculars and shoved them into Killian's stomach hard enough to cause him to grunt in pain. "I thought maybe Emma would be here."

It took Killian a few seconds to process what was said. "Oh," he stopped and then started again, "you're good. Thanks man! I hadn't thought of that." A large smile lit his face.

"I know I'm good. Now get busy looking. The quicker you find her, the quicker you can stop moping around." He moved off to talk to some people from class who had just arrived.

Killian didn't have to be told twice, but brought up the binoculars and started scanning the crowd.

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Emma watched the boats coming toward them on the relatively quiet river, Harvard in their crimson and Brown in white, and nudged Ruby's shoulder. "Know anything about rowing?"

"Not really," Ruby whispered quietly, "but I do know that one team wins and one loses. How's that?"

"'Bout all I know, too." She leaned on the railing, looking around at all the students watching, talking, milling about, mostly in small groups, some in large, but on both sides of the river. There were plenty of smells too on this spring day. Not only the natural smells from the river and newly mown grass along the banks, but sweat, sunscreen and various smells from the vendor carts. Subconsciously, she caught herself scanning the groups close to the bridge where she was standing, looking for anyone she knew or, if she were honest, for someone she wanted to know.

Once Robin had given him the binoculars, Killian moved away from the others and, carefully lifting them, he systematically moved the glasses from group to group looking for a certain blonde that had captured his attention over nine months ago.

Starting with the far bank, he moved the glasses from person to person, realizing it was going to take longer than he had originally thought, because people were wearing hats and sunglasses. Exhibiting the patience that he had always been known for, he covered the far bank and moved closer to the water so he could look up and down the shore where he was standing. Unsuccessful with his search, he focused the binoculars on the crowded footbridge, not really having much hope of finding her, but realizing a little hope was better than none.

"Find him yet?" Ruby hip bumped her. "You've been looking quite intently."

"What?" She tried to go with confusion but when Ruby gave her an all-knowing look, she changed her answer. "Not yet, but I didn't really expect that I would."

"Chin up girl. Day's still young."

"Actually, it's not." She pulled out her phone to check the time. "We don't have a lot of time before we have to get ready for the party."
"True. I'm excited to see Ashley and rest of the old gang. I don't think I've seen Blue, Green or Astrid for a month or more."

"Agreed. It should be fun." She turned so her back was toward Ruby. "I brought us some water. Can you pull them out?"

Slowly moving the binoculars along the bridge, Killian sighed with disappointment. He hadn't spotted her on the bridge, but decided to give it one last scan for good measure. Nearly ready to give up, he caught sight of a blonde, but her face was obscured by large sunglasses and the bottle of water she held to her lips.

Moving on, he saw she was standing next to a brunette who was holding a bottle against her face as if she were using it to cool off from the heat. When she lowered it, he removed the binoculars from his eyes and blinked them rapidly several times as if trying to clear his vision.

Lifting them back to his eyes, he once again located the brunette and saw that he had been right. "Bloody hell."

"What did you find?" He heard Robin asking.

Killian didn't respond but with his heart in his throat and his breath coming rapidly, he moved back to the blonde and he couldn't believe that he had finally found her. He opened his mouth to say her name but found that he couldn't get any words past the lump in his throat. Swallowing hard, he took a deep breath and tried again, "It's her. It's Emma."

As soon as the competitors slid under the footbridge and headed toward the Anderson Bridge, Emma was ready to go. She followed Ruby as they worked their way around and between all the people, some moving in the opposite direction. Once they exited the bridge, they passed by the Leverett House and turned left on Mills Street and then back right on Plympton Street.

Robin punched Killian in the shoulder, "Then why are you still here? Go get her."

Killian handed over the binoculars and took off at a sprint for the bridge. He had to dodge vendors, joggers, and people pushing baby strollers before finally arriving at the bridge and making his way over it to where he had last seen her. When she wasn't there, and he hadn't passed her going the other direction, he continued in the only direction she could have gone.

Once he exited the footbridge, he stopped to get his bearings, thinking if she took the shuttle it seemed that the Mather House Route would be a safe bet and the closest stop was at the Mather House. Turning right on Cowperthwaite Street he ran up to the stop to see students still waiting, and a quick perusal of the crowd revealed no Emma or her friend.

Thinking the next stop would be one of the libraries, he cut through the Leverett Towers to De Wolfe Street.

Passing Quincy House on the right, Ruby and Emma took a left at Rosovsky Hall onto Mount Auburn Street and passed the Harvard Lampoon building on the right on their way to Linden Street.

Crossing over Grant Street on De Wolfe, Killian kept running, St Paul Church standing majestically ahead. Next intersection was Mount Auburn and then he could choose to go straight, cross Bow Street and reach Lamont Library, or he could take Mount Auburn and cut through to the Widener Gate.

At Linden Street, Emma and Ruby turned right and passed by Adam's House on their right and Fairfax Hall on the left, arriving at Widener Gate where they stood and waited for the shuttle.
"Assuming we continue to make good time, want to stop for lunch before heading to the Home?"
She looked toward Lamont Library where she could see the shuttle already heading in their direction.

As it drew to a stop, Ruby followed her up the steps. "You know you never have to ask me twice about food.

Sliding into a seat, Ruby next to her, she stared out the window watching as the bus loaded.

Killian slid into the Lamont Library stop after the bus left, but he could see it in the distance picking up riders. A deep breath and he took off running at a sprint arriving just as it took off up Massachusetts Avenue toward Harvard Square.

Stopping to catch his breath, he felt like screaming but saw that the shuttle had gotten stuck in traffic before turning the corner, so he took off running again.

He had just caught up with the bus as it turned onto Peabody Street and just before the driver picked up speed, he spotted her sitting toward the back of the bus. "Emma!"

Emma wasn’t sure what made her turn around and look out the window after the bus had turned off Massachusetts Avenue, but when she did, the sight caused a huge smile to light up her face.

"It's him," she said in surprise as the shuttle picked up speed. Turning to Ruby, she grabbed her arm in excitement, "It was him, Rubes.

Ruby stretched across her to look out the window. "Are you sure, Emma? It's been almost a year."

Thinking about the quick glimpse that she had gotten of the guy, she asked herself the same question. "Ruby, I'm an artist and am trained to memorize faces. It was him," she said with finality. Besides, she thought, he's taken up residence in my dreams, both sleeping and waking.

"Sorry, Emma. Is there anything I can do to help?"

She sighed, "Unless you have magic and can find him, I don't think you can help this time."

Ruby squeezed her hand, "Things will work out the way they should."

"I hope so Rubes. I really do."

They changed to a shuttle at the Caspersen Student Center that would take them to Currier House, where they departed for the yellow bug that Ruby had parked at Botanic Gardens.

Ruby pulled the key out of her bag and tossed it toward her. "Here, you can drive. I know how much you love her."

Emma laughed with glee, "Yea me!" before adjusting the seat and starting the car. "You know, Ruby. I feel like he and I are destined to be ships that pass in the night."

"Don't say that, Em. Have a little hope."

Putting the car into gear, she pushed the button for the oldies radio station and eased out onto the road, laughing at the song that was playing on the radio.

"We're two ships that pass in the night.
We both smile and we say, "it's alright"
We're still here, it's just that we're out of sight
Like those ships that pass in the night"
"See Ruby, even Barry Manilow agrees."

Winded, Killian stopped and leaned forward with his hands on his thighs, trying to catch his breath. He knew he could continue chasing her, and that damned shuttle, but had no idea where she would get off. He also thought perhaps she had seen him when he called her name and she had looked out the window, but again, nothing definite. He felt as if his emotions were on a roller coaster with the next step being either another uphill climb or a free fall drop, and all he could do was stand there on the precipice, waiting.

Once his breath had returned, he dejectedly started walking back toward the footbridge to try to find Robin, even though he really didn't feel like conversation. He kept thinking of the colorful words that Liam had learned, and shared with him, from his years of service to the Royal Navy, but decided that while it might serve to let off steam, a colorful vocabulary was not a very mature way to solve problems. That would require patience and planning, both areas in which he excelled.

Arriving back at the spot where they had been standing, he found Robin there, alone. "You run everyone off?"

"They scattered in different directions, but want us to meet up with them later at a place called *The Rabbit Hole.*" He finally looked around, realizing Killian was alone. "You didn't find her?"

Killian sighed, "More like I couldn't catch her." He explained about chasing the bloody shuttle around campus only to lose them at the Square. "But I learned more about her. I learned that she knows her way around campus and can easily get on a shuttle, so I think she's a student."

Later they walked into *The Rabbit Hole,* and squeezed between some dancers while making their way to the bar. Taking a stool, Killian and Robin looked around for anyone they knew. "See anyone?"

"Nah, but the night is young," Robin finished, just as someone Killian recognized but didn't know by name walked up, hugged Robin and asked him to dance. "Grab me a beer?"

Killian signaled for two beers and drummed his thumbs on the bar along with the beat, thinking about the day's mishaps, going over every action after Robin had handed him the binoculars and wondering what he could have done differently. "Should have started on the bridge," he mumbled under his breath. He was so lost in self-flagellation, he didn't hear someone sit down next to him until he recognized the laughter as the man repeated, "Should have started on the bridge for what reason?" and saw that the stool was now occupied by another classmate, Arthur Campbell.

Killian gave him a dirty look and grunted, "Looking for my mystery woman. Slipped right through my fingers yet again."

"Need some pointers on how to catch a woman, Jones?" Arthur grinned, "I'm sure I could come up with a few suggestions."

"Get stuffed, Campbell, I don't need ideas from the likes of you. How you captured the heart of the sweet Guinevere, I'll never know."

Arthur tapped his bottle against Killian's. "That makes two of us, my friend. I thank the gods every day."

Nodding his head in agreement, Killian smiled, "I'd be thanking the gods, too, if they sent Emma my way." He added, "Speaking of the lovely wife, where is she? I didn't think she let you out alone very
Arthur looked up and a smarmy smile crossed his face, "My lovely wife is at a combination bridal/baby shower tonight," and then he continued in a self-deprecating voice, "and if I'm truthful, I am not always willing to share our time. Being married to a baby doctor can be difficult at times." A cheeky smile crossed his face. "Interruptions can occur at the worst times."

Killian stopped, his bottle half way to his mouth and thought about what Arthur had said, and was tempted to say something crass, but instead responded, "Better interrupted than not at all."

"True that," Arthur patted him on the back. "Keep your pecker up my boy." He slid off the stool, "I think I'll head out. Catch you later."

Watching him go, Killian couldn't help but be a bit envious that while Arthur's wife wasn't currently at home waiting for him, she would be in a few hours. Looking for Robin, he passed off his bottle of beer and went outside to get some fresh air. Stretching out on the step, he stared up at the night sky, admiring the stars. In the distance, a shooting star caught his attention and he wondered where Emma was at that moment. His wish was that wherever she was, her thoughts were of him.

cs~cs~cs

Emma looked around the room at all the women who had come to the party to support Ashley. Quite the eclectic group from several phases of her life, but a testament to what kind of person Ashley was, that she had remained close with them all. She smiled at Blue who had sat down next to her when Ashley started opening her gifts. "You are amazing for getting so many of her friends here for this celebration. You know that, right?"

Blue smiled maternally at her and then looked back out at the room. "I enjoyed it. It was like having all my girls home again."

"I recognize most everyone here, but who's the dark headed woman sitting over there next to the party girl?"

"That's Guinevere Campbell, Ashley's OB/GYN."

"Emma sat back and raised both brows, "That's interesting. How did they meet?"

"Hmm," She wrinkled her forehead while trying to remember what she had heard, "I think Sean introduced them, but how he knows her, I'm not exactly sure."

Sipping her wine, she continued observing the group, happy that Ruby had volunteered to make the list of the gifts so she could sit back and relax. Once the last gift was unwrapped and they had moved on to the cake, Emma felt like she needed a breather from the noise, and hoping to get a moment to collect her thoughts about the day, moved out onto the front step and stretched out, looking up at the sky.

The stars seemed brighter tonight, she thought, wishing that her mystery man had arrived at the shuttle stop just a few minutes earlier. What would she have done this time? Exchange numbers? Ask him out to dinner? She wasn't sure but considering he had been living front and center in her brain for nine months, it would be nice to just talk to him, she thought. That was her wish, she admitted to herself as a shooting star lit up the sky. As it faded from sight, she smiled and went back to the party.

Chapter End Notes
Thanks for reading. Please let me know what you think.
Chapter 3

Chapter Summary

It's been a year since Killian and Emma first locked eyes. Are they still thinking of each other? Will their luck change? Read on and see.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 3

August 2015

Emma was bored. She had thirty minutes before she could leave the TA office and make the trek across campus to the Caspersen Student Center where she was meeting Elsa to attend some seminar. The topic escaped her at the moment but Elsa had promised she would be riveted, however she was reserving judgment. She figured if she was bored, she could draw. A tactic for entertaining herself she had been doing for many years, why stop now, right?

Taking a blank piece of paper, she did what had become second nature to her. Put a pencil in her hand, allow her subconscious free rein, and she created. Her hand swiftly sketching, outlining, and blending until the eyes that had haunted her nights more often than she cared to admit were staring right back at her. There he is again, she thought, my mystery man from the bar. Do I know you?

Noticing the time, she shoved the drawing into a book and, picking them up, ran out of the building. Getting lucky, she caught the shuttle at the Quad and was able to get off close to the Caspersen Student Center where there were multitudes of students both leaving and arriving, often creating traffic jams on the staircase. With minutes to spare she ran in the door, turning right at the stairs as instructed. She looked down at her phone briefly to check her next instructions and didn't see the railing which caught the corner of her books, knocking them from her arms. "Gonna be late, gonna be late," she muttered repeatedly as she quickly picked up the books and headed around the corner, not noticing the paper floating to the ground in her wake.

cs~cs~cs

Killian lay in bed and thought back over the last year of his life. Certainly not what he expected to be doing after he turned thirty; going back to school full-time, studying, and spending many waking moments thinking about a woman he'd seen once yet felt more connected to than should be possible. Now that it was his last year of graduate school, would fate intervene and bring her into his life?

Rolling over, he looked at the likeness of himself that he had found at the Lucky Strike some eight months ago. And while it had been eight months, he somehow remembered that night as clearly as if it had been last week. He could admit now that after finding the napkin, he had behaved like a crazy man, questioning the servers and the other customers, but none of them knew her. Of course, it could have been that they thought he was crazy and were worried about their friend, too, but he didn't think so. They seemed genuine in their denial, and he had been left with another instance of so close, yet so far away.
A quick check of the time told him he needed to get his arse in gear or he would be late and the project he had completed wouldn't get turned in on time. Rolling out of bed, he rubbed his hands over his face and wondered if he wanted to take the time to shave or go with a bit of scruff. Same with his hair, he thought as he caught sight of his reflection in the mirror and realized it had gotten long enough to fall over his forehead into his eyes, and was currently standing up in several directions. Deciding there was no time to do anything about either, he took a quick shower and was on his way out the door with time to spare.

Robin stopped at the top of the stairs, in Casperson Student Center, to take a drink of the hot coffee he had picked up before his next class. He'd needed the caffeine to help him stay awake after pulling an almost all-nighter to finish a project. As had become his habit, he was also mentally kicking Killian's arse for talking him into coming back to school when his attention locked in on the blonde racing through the glass doors at the bottom of the stairs.

By the time his sleep deprived brain had registered she was Killian's Emma and he had swallowed his hot coffee, she had dropped her books, picked them up again and disappeared around a corner. Pushing his way down the stairs, he changed from mentally kicking Killian's arse to kicking his own for not having the wherewithal to call her name before she vanished. "Bollocks," he muttered to himself as he rounded the corner to see if he could determine which way she might have gone. All that awaited him, though, were a couple of pieces of paper laying on an otherwise pristine floor. Picking them up, because he appreciated tidiness, he tucked them away to discard later and scanned the area in front of him.

The corridor ahead of him was long with multiple doors lining each side, each an exact replica of the others. As he passed the first set of doors, he realized they didn't have windows and so the only way to see if she were inside would be to open every door, which meant using time that he didn't have if he wanted to get to class. Deciding that at least they had discovered a building in which to look for her again at a later time, he turned to leave when a couple of the classroom doors opened and he was pushed along with the masses of students who had been set free. Unable to go in any other direction, he shortly found himself deposited outside and pulled the papers out to toss into the trash cans when a glance at one left a huge smile on his face. "Killian will be gobsmacked."

Emma slid into her seat next to Elsa just as the speaker stood up to begin his presentation. "You're late," Elsa leaned in and whispered.

"Sorry," she whispered back, "I got sidetracked and then I dropped my books in the hallway."

"Sidetracked," Elsa smiled at her friend, "let me guess." She pretended to think it over, "Drawing?"

A sheepish look crossed Emma's face. "Maybe."

Elsa held her hand out and wiggled her fingers in a give me fashion, "Let me see it, although I'm assuming it's another copy of the same subject you've been obsessed with the past year."  

"I'm not sure obsessed is the right word. I'm interested in him as any artist would be interested in a subject she was drawing. His bone structure is just so…," she hesitated to actually give it a label.

"Mmm," Her friend murmured, "delicious, sexy, studly, shall I continue?"

Emma giggled, "Well, those fit too, but I was thinking symmetrical." She glanced sideways Elsa.
Flipping open her book, she noticed that the picture was no longer where she had stashed it and shrugged her shoulders. "Moot issue anyway as it's gone. Must have fallen out when my books fell."

"Wouldn't it be funny if it ended up in the hands of the subject you've been drawing so rabidly since you met him?"

"Oh, right. But would it be funny as in ha ha or funny as in oh dear?" Emma asked quietly before turning to listen to the presentation about tax laws and your business.

cs~cs~cs

Killian waited outside Pierce Hall for Robin to show for class. "Where the bloody devil are you?" he muttered as he watched the other students entering the building. He really didn't want to be late as Professor French, a rather stodgy older man who always smelled of cigars and roses, was notorious for marking students down if they got onto his bad side. Making up his mind to give him five more minutes, he resumed his pacing and went over what he needed to say during his presentation, but once his monologue was completed, and still no Robin, he went into the room to find a seat, leaving his mate to deal with the wrath of their professor on his own.

The doors were shut, the power point started and the classroom quiet when, with a bang, the doors flew open and Robin slid into class. All eyes turned toward the door where he stood, a huge smile lighting his face.

"Good of you to join us, Mr. Locksley." the professor chided. "Please have a seat so we can continue."

Instead of being embarrassed, Robin gave him a cheeky grin and a slight bow. "Pardon my tardiness, Professor," and practically skipped to the empty seat next to Killian.

Killian raised a brow at his behavior but when Robin sat down he didn't offer any hints as to what was on his bloody mind. Knowing his friend like he did though, something big had happened, as the man had been up most of the night working on his project and should not be this chipper.

Not wanting to give any indication that he was curious, Killian laid back in his chair, stretching his legs out in front of him. He noticed Robin open a book and flip through a few pages before pulling out a piece of paper that he laid flat and smoothed out carefully. The sound of his hand continually brushing across the paper started to annoy him, and before long he found himself making fists to keep from reaching across the desk, grabbing it, making a ball and tossing it across the room. The fact that the lecture was continuing to go on around them, just as if no sound was being heard had him flummoxed and wondering if these kids were deaf!

When Robin finally stopped, Killian relaxed not only his fists but his jaw where he had been inadvertently gritting his teeth and he tried to tune back into the lecture. He had just about lost himself in the presentation on clean energy when the paper Robin had been pressing landed on his desk.

Killian looked down at the page, swallowed hard and then over at Robin. "Bloody hell," he blurted out.

Professor French looked in his direction. "Something to add, Mr. Jones?"

"Excuse me, Professor," Killian apologized, "I was taking notes and my pen ran out of ink." He hoped the excuse was accepted and he could ask Robin some questions.

To his chagrin, three females sitting around him brought him extra writing utensils, and he had no
choice but to smile his thanks and pretend as if he were paying attention. As the lecture continued, Robin just sat there with that cheeky smile on his face while Killian sat in consternation as time moved slowly along.

cs~cs~cs

Emma covered her mouth as a huge yawn seemed to come out of nowhere and just as that stopped, her stomach took it upon itself to announce that it was empty. Elsa, who had been completely engrossed in everything about the lecture, gave her a dirty look, causing Emma to slink farther down in her seat. "Sorry," she mouthed. "I forgot to eat."

Elsa dug in her bag and handed Emma a granola bar whose wrapper had seen better days, but Emma didn't care as long as it was edible. "Thanks." She took the bar and after Elsa turned down a share, started to munch as she listened to the speaker with half an ear, feeling her eyes glaze over. Thirty more minutes. "I can do this," she told herself over and over.

Why in the world would Elsa even think she would enjoy this, she wondered. But then she remembered their conversation when she had been talking about wanting to own her own business someday and Elsa said, "Emma, there's a lot to know if you want to own."

Well, duh, she thought. At least now if I do start a business and someone tries to take advantage of me, at least I will know. Seriously though, the logical side of her brain told her she needed this information, as well as the information she was gleaning from the courses she was taking to earn her MBA. But the artistic side of her brain had been doing a lot of eye rolling and barely survived International Economic Issues. And this semester, she was already not thrilled with her Federal Taxation of Business Entities and school had been in session less than a month. Art, on the other hand, brought her great joy in many ways.

Thinking about the art class she was teaching reminded her that she still needed to line up a male and a female model to use periodically throughout the semester. She could have used other art students but found that students from outside the art world often came into the environment curious, and therefore their facial expressions were more real and often more challenging for the students to imitate on canvas. A male with an expressive face like her mystery man would be perfect, but sadly she knew nothing about him, so the chances of that happening were probably slim to none, leaving her feeling melancholy at that prospect.

As the speaker completed his presentation, Emma helped Elsa gather her books and hurried her out of the room, worried that she would want to engage the man in conversation. "I'm starving still. Do you have time for lunch?"

Elsa frowned at her, "What's the hurry, Emma? I had a few questions for that guy."

"Sorry," Emma shrugged her shoulders, "if you really want to go back in, go ahead. I think I'll go grab a bite at the Grill, though."

Shaking her head at her friend's transparency, Elsa acquiesced, "Ok, you win. Grill it is."

"You sure?"

Elsa looped her arm through Emma's and directed them toward the Grill. "I'm sure. So, tell me about your classes."

They spent the time walking to, ordering and getting seated talking about their classes and busy schedules. Since the semester had started, and with their bowling league still on hiatus, they had been
so busy that their conversations had been hit and miss and it was nice to catch up.

Pushing her tray away, Elsa wiped her hands and tossed the napkin on the table. "How's the class you're teaching? You've talked about everything else today but that."

Emma smiled and picked up her folder. "So far so good. In fact, I need a favor." Pulling a couple of pieces of paper out, she handed them to Elsa, "Can you post these on the student boards in the law buildings? I need a couple models to call on periodically throughout the semester."

"Sure, I'll put these up for you. They're just supposed to text you?" She tucked them into a book for safe keeping.

Emma nodded, "That's fine, or they can call, too." She picked up her phone to check the time. "Guess I'd better go to class." She deposited her trash then picked up her books, making her way out of the building. A boring lecture but maybe I'll get a good model out of coming over this way, she thought as she hopped on the shuttle to make her way back across campus.

cs~cs~cs

Killian had checked the clock above old man French's head every five minutes, it seemed, once his project presentation had been completed. He wasn't sure class had ever moved as slowly, but thankfully he had only five more minutes and then he would be free, and the git that was his friend could tell him the bloody hell was going on. A, why he was being so cheeky with the professor and, B, how and where he had ended up with yet another rendition of him, theoretically drawn by the mysterious Emma.

As soon as class was over, he turned to Robin, locking in on him with question after question, "Alright, time's up. Now spill." He held the picture up, "Where did this come from? Please tell me you found her."

Robin tilted his head, "Well, I saw her-"

"You saw her?" Blurted out Killian and then without waiting for an answer, continued tossing questions at Robin. "Was she alone? Where was she? Did you talk to her?"

Robin pantomimed zipping his lips and then pretended as if he were going to leave if Killian didn't listen. "Alright, I'll listen. Please tell me what you can."

Robin led Killian down the path of seeing Emma, giving every little detail, until Killian once again had clenched his fists and teeth, almost giving himself a headache in the process. Finally, the meat of the story came out. "...and as I was getting ready to walk down the stairs, there she was. Took me a few seconds to register that it was indeed her and once I had, I raced down to find her, but alas, she was gone. Sorry 'bout that, mate. I know you've been hoping we could find her for almost a year."

Killian licked his lips, his mouth suddenly dry from all the questions while his brain struggled to put together Robin's story. Last year at The Burren, he had come away with her broken paintbrush leading him to the conclusion that she was an art student of some kind, however, the art classes were taught all over the bloody campus.

Almost sighting number two had been at The Lucky Strike, where the impressive drawing of him on the napkin had been left behind, but again he had been no closer to locating her, nor was he able to find any other clues as to her whereabouts.

And then, he sighed, sighting number three at the rowing competition last spring, when he had been standing on the shores of the Charles River enjoying the warm sun and had looked up on the
footbridge and there she stood, next to Victor's leggy brunette, her hair shining in the sun and a huge
smile on her face as she spoke to her friend. But he hadn't gathered his wits quickly enough and by
the time he made his way up to where she had been standing, she had been gone. He had kicked
himself quite vociferously in the arse for weeks after that event as well as scoured YouTube for
videos of the event, looking for her to appear.

He heard his name being called, and focused to see Robin staring at him with a concerned look on
his face, "Killian, you still want to find this Emma, right?

Killian's first thought was, *are you bloody daft, of course, I want to find her*, but then he realized that
Robin hadn't been privy to his thoughts. "Of course, I want to find her!" Before giving any more
thought to the 'what ifs' he gathered his stuff and was almost through the door before realizing that
Robin hadn't followed him. He stopped and turned to see Robin sitting in his seat with a huge smile
on his face. "What?"

"Finally!" Robin repacked his bookbag. "I'm happy to see a smile on your face again."

Killian thought about his behavior over the past few months and realized he had been rather
melancholy. "I almost lost hope, you know?"

Robin nodded his head once, "Glad you didn't. Now let's go find your girl."

cs~cs~cs

Elsa watched Emma disappear out the door and decided this might be a good opportunity to catch up
on her *Evidence* classwork, but first, she would put the art flyers up on the student boards around the
center. Flipping open the folder where she had stored them, she read over Emma's
description: *Needed male and female models for Art 101, days and times varied. For more
information, call or text Emma: 617-555-0815.*

Simple and to the point, she thought. Emma shouldn't have too much difficulty getting a few people
to contact her. She closed her book, stood up and had just taken a few steps away from the table
when a flurry of commotion drew her attention toward the door. What she saw brought a huge smile
to her face and quickly changed her mind about leaving. Three steps back and she sat down waiting
for the show to start.

Walking up to the Caspersen Student Center, Killian couldn't stop his eyes from moving over every
female in a cursory fashion to see if he could see Emma. She had been here just a few hours ago, so
the odds of finding information about her in one building versus the entire campus were odds he
liked. It was a huge building though, with a lot of doors so the question of where to start weighed
heavily on his mind. "Where do you suggest we begin?" He glanced sideways at Robin as they
walked up the stairs to the Center. "You've already lost her once, mate. How do you propose we not
do that again?"

"Oh, ye of little faith," Robin quipped before suddenly stopping in the middle of a crowd and turning
to Killian. "I'm not sure how to explain this but I have a good feeling about you and Emma." He
started walking again, seemingly with a specific destination in mind without checking to make sure
Killian was keeping up.

"Robin," Killian called just before losing him in a group of students who had just exited one of the
lecture halls. When Robin moved out of the flow of traffic and he caught up with him, he looked
around and saw endless doors and corridors, with, he assumed more endless doors. "Where are you
going?"
"What do you smell?" Robin asked him as if talking to a small child.

"Fried foods, coffee." He shrugged his shoulders in confusion, "Why?"

"Because, my dear mate," he resumed walking, "that smell to me means lunch, which I believe is a good place to look for Emma."

Killian felt like a fool for a split second before deciding if anyone saw Emma in there, it should be him and he pushed his way ahead, not seeing the cafe worker coming around the corner, her arms loaded with trays. They both stopped quickly to avoid running directly into each other, however, the momentum of the tall stack of trays caused a large number of them to spill out of her arms and onto the floor, the noise reverberating throughout the large room.

"Sorry, love," Killian apologized, "let me help you clean this mess." They helped her pick up the trays and turned to stack them onto the racks when they both noticed a familiar face sitting against the wall smiling at them. "Well, well, Robin. I think your hope speech paid off."

Robin set his trays where indicated, "Shall we?" Killian didn't have to be asked twice.

Elsa made eye contact with Emma's mystery man and watched as recognition came over his face. When he smiled at her and then at his friend, before walking her way, she knew that Emma would be in good hands.

Watching them walk toward her, she had to admit he was quite good looking but looked different than he had last time they had seen him. He sported a scruff, and that, with his longer hair falling rakishly over his forehead and his very blue eyes, all combined to make a pretty potent impact. His walk as he sauntered across the room reminded her of a panther stalking his prey with a single-minded determination. Why his intense behavior didn't cause her to worry, she didn't know but was anxious to hear what they had to say.

Emma's man stopped close to her table and held out his hand, "I'm Killian Jones and this," he stated in a decidedly British accent and pointed at the sandy haired man standing next to him, "is my best mate, Robin Locksley. May we join you?"

Elsa looked at the man he had introduced as Robin, who hadn't said anything but stood there with a twinkle in his eye. Lifting a thin brow, she inclined her head toward the chair that Emma had just vacated. Interestingly enough, Killian nodded his head for Robin to sit in the chair at the table while he pulled one from another table and flipped it around, straddling it.

Looking back and forth between the two men, she waited for one of them to say something, finally deciding that she was going to help them along. "You're here for Emma." She looked directly at Killian waiting for him to admit or deny her statement.

He met her direct gaze with one of his own, "Aye, lass, I am. Is that going to be a problem?"

"It depends," she looked at him for an extra second and then moved her gaze to his friend, "I would not like it if my friend were hurt. She's special."

Killian folded his arms on the back of the chair and leaned closer. "I can promise you that if I were lucky enough to earn Emma's heart, I would treat it as though it were my own."

Elsa gave him a small smile, almost as if she wasn't sure that he was serious, but his expression never wavered, his sincerity impressing her. Robin, who hadn't said anything yet put his hand on top of hers, "I've known this gent for almost fourteen years and if there's one thing I've learned about Killian, it is that when he loves, he loves hard. Emma's heart would be in the very best hands." He
smiled at her, his dimples creating craters in each cheek. "Can you say the same about Emma?"

*What to say about Emma without telling her story*, Elsa wondered, finally settling on saying simply, "Emma is very loyal and protective of those she loves."

"Elsa," Killian said quietly, "Will you help me meet Emma?"

"I have an idea," she said hesitantly while she fiddled with the pages that Emma had left behind, "but, I'm not sure..." Her voice drifted off.

"Tell me," Killian interjected, "I'll do anything."

She pulled the paper out of her folder and placed a copy in front of each man. "Emma is a TA for a freshman art class and every semester periodically needs models. She asked me to post these on the student board, and I thought, maybe…” she hesitated hoping she hadn't tossed something out there that Emma wouldn't like.

Elsa had been looking down at the paper as she talked and when she quieted and looked up at Killian, the smile on his face eliminated any feelings of insecurity she had about what she had done. Something told her she had done the right thing.

"I'm in." Killian pulled out his phone and added Emma as a contact. "Are you going to tell her you met me?"

"I probably should," she acknowledged, "but I'm going to trust that you will make it special."

"Thanks, lass," Killian smiled at her. "You won't regret this."

Elsa gathered her books and stood up. "See that I don't, Jones or I might have to kick your ass." Giving them a sassy wink, she left the room.

~ cs ~ cs ~

Class was uneventful and while she thought about going to the campus gym, but decided she would much rather go home, get comfortable and maybe paint. Hopping on the red line she got off close to her apartment and after picking up a sandwich, walked rest of the way home.

The house was quiet and as she made her way upstairs she could hear soft music playing from Elsa and Anna's place, but nothing from Sarah's. The fourth apartment remained empty since Fiona had moved out and she really wished Ruby could move in, but since she wasn't a student at Harvard, nor was it close enough to Boston College, knew it would never come to pass. Two good reasons, but she still felt a bit sad thinking about it.

She tossed her books on the chair closest to the door, the bag with her sandwich on the small table and left her shoes in a pile near the chair. Her layers followed and by the time she made it to her bedroom, she was down to her panties and bra, which she quickly switched for a soft tank and drawstring pants. Pinning her hair haphazardly up, she poured herself a glass of water, squeezed in some lime and tossed a couple cherries in for good measure before sitting down with her sandwich and laptop to catch up on what was going on around her.

~ cs ~ cs ~

Killian's first inclination, once he had her phone number, was to immediately give her a call; however, with what she hadn't said when he tried to talk to her at *The Burren* and with what her friend hadn't said about her made him think she was a woman whose trust needed to be earned and
wasn't given easily. Once that decision had been made he then had to decide the best approach. He had been looking for her for a year, what was another few days?

Once back in their apartment, he still hadn't come up with a good idea of how much time was too little and how much was too much. "How much time do you think I should wait before I contact her?" He asked Robin as he started pacing back and forth in front of the door, worrying his thumbnail with his teeth.

Robin stopped on his way into the kitchen. "Killian, you have been mooning after the girl for a year. I've never seen you shy away from anything or anyone you wanted. Why stop now?"

Running both hands through his hair causing it to stick up in all directions, he thought about Robin's words. "You're right. I'm behaving like an arse."

Robin smirked, "Of course, I'm right." He continued on his way into the kitchen. "Lunch and then you can contact your Emma."

"My Emma. I like that," Killian crowed as they worked together over lunch.

cs~cs~cs

Emma stood in front of the blank canvas and after starting and stopping several times threw her brush down in frustration, went to the kitchen and removed a pint of Brownie Core Ben and Jerry's ice cream. Taking the container and a spoon, she dropped down onto the sofa and slid the spoon into the frozen confection making sure to get a little vanilla, a little chocolate, and some fudge all on her spoon at the same time. When she put it into her mouth the cold hit her tongue, bursting with sugary goodness before sliding coolly down her throat causing her to groan in ecstasy.

Leaning back, she scooped another bite, licking it from the spoon slowly while staring at the blank canvas in front of her. "Why is it," she muttered, "that I can draw anything if I specifically sit down to draw?" So, if she wanted to draw a bird, no problem, she could draw a bird. Same with a flower or a dog, yet since that night a year ago, every time she let her mind fly free, it flew straight to her mystery man. Why was that?

Suddenly as if a picture had just appeared in her brain, she needed to paint. On her way to put her ice cream away, she flipped on some music and reached in her case for her true and trusty round brush. Pulling the broken end of the brush that had been a favorite, she mentally lamented its demise before tossing it back and getting a slightly larger round one. Sure, it would be a bit more difficult to paint the way she wanted, but she was always up for a challenge. Dipping the brush into the blue she placed it on the canvas and let her mind's eye take over, and moving from one color to another, didn't stop until she felt it was complete. Not allowing herself to second guess, she cleaned her brushes and put them away before standing back to view her work.

She had painted a beach, and not just any either, but Revere Beach, the easiest one to get to from Cambridge and one she visited quite frequently. The water was so blue it was almost violet with intermittent white waves rolling onto the shore. In the distance, a cloudless sky touched those waves, seamlessly blending them together, realistic enough that she felt like she could almost smell the saltwater as the waves moved to and fro.

In the foreground, the beach's soft sand touched by the sun was pristine, except for a lone set of prints that ran along the shoreline, some starting to fade as the tide rolled in. On the far left of the beach sat a woman, leaning back on her hands, legs stretched in front and her long blonde hair flowing down her back. Her face was hidden save for her profile as she stared up the beach, a flirty smile playing on her lips.
Following her line of sight, a man could be seen, his jeans rolled up above his ankles, shoes held tightly in one hand, his other tucked in his pocket as he walked through the surf. He was wearing a t-shirt, covered by a plaid button up, unfastened and billowing out behind him as he moved quickly toward his destination. Emma knew before she even glanced up at his face whom she had painted, and when her suspicion was confirmed, she couldn't help but roll her eyes at her predictability.

She assumed that she had painted him wearing his beanie, just like she had every other time and so was very surprised when she saw that she had given him hair. Black, thick and long enough to blow across his forehead, just enough to shield his eyes periodically. His smile satisfied, happy.

"What is it that draws me to you," she asked the man who was heading toward her, "and why of all nights was this what I painted?"

Not expecting a response, she was startled when her cell phone vibrated and a quick glance showed a number she didn't recognize. Sliding her thumb across the screen to open the message, she read;

Emma, do you still need a model for your class?

cS~cs~cs

As soon as he had sent the text, he wanted to kick his own arse for sending such a bland message, worried that she would either ignore it or send a response back telling him to jump off a cliff. When an immediate response didn't arrive, he tossed the phone onto the bed while he went into the kitchen for a bottle of water.

Emma read the message and smiled at its simplicity. "Good," she told the phone as she started typing a response, getting halfway through when there was a knock on her door. Leaving the phone on the sofa, she opened the door to see Elsa leaning against the wall. "Oh hey, is my music too loud? I can turn it down."

Elsa pushed off from the wall, "That's alright. I knew you had to be painting so I came to see." She walked into the apartment. "Will I be surprised?"

Giving her a sheepish smile, Emma followed her to the painting. "Maybe?" She looked at her work again, "Ok, probably not." She stood quietly as Elsa looked over the picture.

"Emma, this is breathtaking," Elsa gushed, "but I see your mystery man made an appearance," she teased gently. "You gave him hair, that's different."

Emma shrugged her shoulders. "Yeah, I'm not sure where that came from, but I like it." She stopped, lost in thought for a few minutes, "Think I'll ever meet him?"

"I'd bet on it." Elsa gave her a small smile. "Speaking of, have you heard from anyone regarding modeling?"

Squinting at her friend, Emma thought there was more to that statement than met the eye but decided not to pursue it. "Actually, I was responding to a text when you knocked."

"Oh?" Elsa started walking toward the door. "Ok, I'll get out of here so you can get back to it. Ta ta." And was gone.

"What just happened?" Emma asked the room at large, before pulling out her phone and answering.

E: Yes, I do. Volunteering?
The response was almost immediate.

Yes, I am. Specifics?

E: Class is Tuesday and Thursday at 10. Either day not work?

*Thursday doesn't work as I have class.*

E: Ok, no problem. And what was your name?

_Sorry about that. My name is Killian Jones._

Emma smiled at his response imagining that he was annoyed with himself for not giving his name in his first text. She stored his name along with his number.

E: Thanks for volunteering Killian. Would a week from Tuesday work for you?

When Killian read her response this time, he couldn't stop the smile that bloomed on his face. Less than two weeks was nothing after waiting an entire year.

K: I'll be there. Shall I come early?

E: 15 minutes early?

K: See you then.

Emma checked 'male model' off her list and added that to her class agenda. Going to the bathroom, she completed her nightly ritual of brushing her teeth and washing her face before climbing into bed. Just as she reached over to turn off the light, her phone buzzed to life.

K: Forgive my manners, Emma, but you are Emma what?

E: Swan, my name is Emma Swan.

K: Very pleased to finally meet you, Emma Swan. Sweet dreams

Emma wondered what he meant by finally meeting her, but chalked it up to him being a younger student who might have been too shy to say something sooner. Turning off the light, she allowed herself to fall asleep where she dreamt she was sitting on a beach, watching and waiting for her mystery man.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for reading. As always, let me know what you thought. Stay tuned for Chapter 4. Now that Killian has found her, how will things play out?
The chapter you've been waiting for and it is very squeeweworthy. Enjoy.

See the end of the chapter for notes

Chapter 4

Early September 2015

The time seemed to drag for Killian while waiting, but he tried to keep busy and finally the Tuesday when he was to meet Emma arrived. He woke early and was in the kitchen whistling while making an omelet when Robin strolled in half asleep at 7:30 and groused, "Can you tone down the happy a little?"

Sliding the fluffy omelet onto a plate, he set it on the table. "Sit and eat." Pouring coffee, he placed that on the table for Robin also. "Today is the day I finally get to meet Emma and I couldn't sleep."

Robin dug into his eggs, "These are quite tasty." He looked Killian over when he sat across from him eating his own omelet, squinting while trying to figure what was different. "Aren't you going to shave?"

Running his hand along his jaw, Killian felt his scruff and then scratched behind his neck, giving Robin a sheepish smile, "Well," he began, "I'm feeling a bit superstitious about this."

Robin took another bite of egg while trying to read his friend's mind. "Superstitious how?"

"For 12 months, I looked everywhere we went for Emma, yet never found her, right?"

"Right," Robin answered, wondering where he was being led with this line of questioning.

"And for those 12 months, I shaved pretty much daily, right?"

"Well," Robin began, "I'm not sure I collected all the data on my diary but, okay, I'll go with that."

"So," Killian said, "The one day that I didn't shave, Emma was found. Therefore," he concluded, "this is my new look."

Robin looked at him a little longer before saying, "And have you thought what you will do if Emma is a lass who doesn't care for facial hair?"

A contemplative look crossed Killian's face which was quickly replaced by a cocky one. "I look devilishly handsome this way. The lass will still fancy me."

"You sound confident," Robin commented as he cleaned his plate and put it in the dishwasher.

"I have to be," Killian stated quietly.
On his way to the shower, Robin touched his shoulder softly, "Good luck today. You deserve to be happy."

As he worked to tidy the kitchen, he thought about how he wanted the day to go and really hoped he didn't muck it up

Cs~cs~cs

"Late! Late, late," she chanted to herself as she ran to catch the T, hoping it was on time and not too crowded. Arriving with seconds to spare, she scooted between the doors, slid onto the first empty seat and thanked her lucky stars that she had made it. Since a certain mystery man had been invading her thoughts and taking over her sleeping patterns, her tendency to be punctual had disappeared and frankly, she was getting annoyed.

Her phone buzzed signifying an incoming text, and seeing Killian's name, she fretted that he was going to cancel on her, and so squinted at the text with one eye. When she saw what he had asked, the first smile of the day graced her face.

K: It might help if I knew where I'm to meet you today.

Sending him the room number and building, she then added an extra.

E: Thanks for not cancelling.

It wasn't too long before he responded.

K: I would never leave you hanging? Why would you think that?"

E: No reason. It's just been one of those days.

K: Anything I can do to help?

This man sounds quite caring, she decided, before covering her mouth as a huge yawn interrupted her thought processes.

E: Got magic? I didn't get my dose of caffeine.

K: Would you like me to bring you something from Starbucks, Emma?

E: You would do that for me?

Another example of him being someone who cares for others, she thought.

K: I would. What is your heart's desire?

She smiled at his question and instead of asking for a simple coffee, requested her favorite.

E: How about a hot chocolate with whipped cream and a dash of cinnamon? I'll pay you.

K: I can afford to buy you a sweet drink, Emma.

Oops, I offended him.

E: Ok, sorry about that.

K: Quite alright Emma. It will be my pleasure.
E: Just who are you, Killian Jones?

His response was quick and ratcheted her curiosity up just about as far as it could go.

K: Wouldn't you like to know?

E: Perhaps I would.

She giggled as she flirted with him but found that to be true. The more she had exchanged texts with Killian Jones, the more she became curious about the man himself and why he had volunteered to model for a bunch of freshman who would look at him as if he were a slab of meat. There seemed to be more to this man than she knew.

K: I'm glad. I'll see you in a few.

E: Ok thanks again.

Putting her phone away, she exited the train and hurried to her classroom, wanting to get the room set up and be sitting behind the safety of her desk before this Killian Jones arrived. Something told her she might even want to be sitting down for it.

cs~cs~cs

Killian pocketed his phone, deciding he'd drive instead of catching the T. Parking might be problematic but presenting Emma with a hot cup of cocoa was worth it, he thought as he grabbed the keys off the wall hook and left the apartment.

The drive-through line at Starbucks was out into the street, so, finding a space, he parked and went inside. Thankfully, the line inside wasn't as long and he was able to order her hot cocoa, and while he thought about ordering something for himself, decided against it. He felt excited and anxious and something told him that being around her was going to be stimulating enough.

Hoping the ride to campus was easy, he got back into his car and drove carefully out of the parking lot.

Flipping on the radio, he pushed the button, finally settling on a song from the movie *Grease*. Knowing that he needed to learn the songs for a party later that month at *The Burren*, he turned the volume up and sang along with John Travolta.

cs~cs~cs

As she walked around the room between the easels, she smiled at the drawings that were left behind by the last class. They had been practicing drawing facial features, more specifically eyes, and trying to imitate the set of eyes she had drawn as an example.

Glancing up front at her own drawing pad and the large set of eyes that were looking back at her, she wasn't too surprised to see that they belonged to her mystery man. His eyes had mesmerized her from across a smoky room, and for that brief time when he was close, they had pulled her under their spell so expertly that she wasn't sure she could ever be free. "Fanciful thoughts, Emma," she murmured, finding herself woolgathering about him again. "Now, get busy."

Mindful of the passage of time, she moved from easel to easel, removing each student's work and gently moving it to their portfolios hanging against the wall. Once this task was complete, she went into her well-stocked storage room and, carrying the drawing pads out, placed them on the appropriate easels.
Her last task before her model and then her class arrived was how she wanted to display him. Did she sit him on a stool so he was perched up high? But then she had to worry that he was uncomfortable. She could put him in her desk chair, which was more comfortable, but he would be lower than the students and some might have difficulty seeing him. Did she move a table out and lay him across it and put an apple in his mouth like a slab of meat? Ugh, she groaned silently, why am I feeling so much conflict this semester about a model? Maybe I'll just ask him how he would feel the most comfortable. "That feels right," she shared with the all-seeing eyes before folding the paper over on the pad and covering them.

Sitting down to enter grades into the computer, she was surprised by the incoming ping of a text.

Ruby: Summer days, drifting away, Em.

Emma smiled at Ruby's corny line and picked up her phone,

E: Tell me more, tell me more.

Laughing at her response because she knew exactly what Ruby's comeback would be, and wasn't disappointed.

R: Was it love at first sight?

E: He's not here yet. Is this the only reason you pinged?

R: No! I wanted to make sure we are on for rewatch this weekend?

E: Grease weekend it is.

R: Great. Fill me in after he leaves.

E: Bye Ruby.

After she put the phone down, she thought about their Grease-watching history and smiled at the memory. She couldn't remember why Blue had started the girls watching it, but she thought it had something to do with one of them liking the bad boy, or maybe it was the time Ashley had wanted to dye her hair pink, or, the list could go on and on.

Getting back to logging her grades she found herself humming the songs and by the time she was finished she was singing her favorite one from the show. As she sang, she stood up and turned to look out the window watching for a certain someone who somehow, with one look, had captured her devotion.

*My head is saying, "Fool, forget him."

> My heart is saying, "Don't let go.

*Hold on till the end."

*And that's what I intend to do

*I'm hopelessly devoted to you.

Parking the car had been as difficult as he had anticipated, but once parked, he turned off the engine and leaned his head back against the seat. The moment that he had been hoping would happen for a
year was within his grasp and he had to admit he was scared. His heart was beating rapidly and his breathing was so shallow and quick, he was afraid he might hyperventilate and fall at Emma's feet.

Taking some deep cleansing breaths, he finally succeeded in calming his nerves and, flipping the visor down, he looked in the mirror and thought about what he wanted to happen once he walked into that building; thought about Emma and everything he hoped they would become. With that last idea in mind, the man who was confident in what he could have with Emma once again looked back at him and a smile lifted his lips and caused his eyes to sparkle with life. She didn't know it yet, but she filled those dark spaces inside.

Feeling lighter, he brushed his hair back, allowing it to fall rakishly over his forehead. Then he smiled and pulled his lips back making sure his teeth were clean before lastly using a technique from his teen years of blowing into his hand and smelling his breath. Bad breath at his meeting with Emma would be bad form.

Walking up to the room, he heard singing and thought maybe she had left the radio on, but then realized that he couldn't hear music, just a sweet voice singing softly.

My head is saying, "Fool, forget him
My heart is saying, "Don't let go.
Hold on till the end."
And that's what I intend to do
I'm hopelessly devoted to you.

Feeling like a man who had been walking across a desert for too long without water, as her voice faded he stepped into the doorway and one look was all it took for him to feel like his thirst had been quenched. She made those empty places inside his heart and soul come to life, making him wonder if she were the one who was needed to provide nourishment so they would grow and flourish. With her, was he whole?

She was facing away from him, toward the window as if watching for someone. A flitting thought skipped across his brain that maybe she had been on the hunt for him, just as he had been for her. Was it possible that when their eyes connected across that smoky room and his soul said, "You're mine," hers had agreed? He wanted nothing more than for that to be true.

The sun shining through the window surrounded her, like a golden aura, pulling him closer. Her hair flowed loosely down her back making him want to run his fingers through it before burying his face in the golden tresses to inhale her scent. Her trim figure was encased in skinny jeans that cupped her backside, fitting her legs snuggly.

He couldn't decide if she looked peaceful or lonely, but above everything, she was beautiful. Needing to hear her voice and look, once again, into her green eyes that spoke to him in a way that no others did, he reverently said the name that had been running through his dreams for months. "Emma?"

cs~cs~cs

The timbre of a voice calling her name in a devoted fashion captured her attention, as if the owner of the voice had heard and understood the words of the song she had just been singing. Feeling like she was in a trance, she slowly turned away from the window, allowing her vision time to focus before lifting her face to meet the very set of blue eyes that had haunted her dreams for the past year. For a brief second, she couldn't get her breath and blinked rapidly, several times in succession, to make sure she wasn't dreaming. When he didn't fade from her sight, she smiled tenderly and, feeling goosebumps work their way up her body, whispered, "It's you," in a voice made breathy by
hope, surprise and excitement.

He smiled a gentle smile that made his eyes sparkle, and raised a brow. "Aye love, it's me," he whispered back, before taking a measured step toward where she was standing behind her desk. "Do you," he started before taking another slow step, "know how very long," his voice dropped another notch, if possible, "I have been needing," he hesitated, letting the meaning sink in, "to find you?"

When he started toward her, she had to grab onto the desk to keep from falling into her chair, as the intense look in his eyes locked with hers caused her knees to feel weak. Each step he took, her heart beat a little faster until she felt there was just a flurry of activity inside. But not fear, no this time those feelings were caused by sheer and total happiness.

As he spoke he continued to move closer and by the time he had reached the end of his sentence, he had arrived next to her desk. That obstructive piece of furniture didn't deter him from his mission as he continued moving around it, causing her to turn her body so her back was to her desk with him directly in front of her, stepping into her space. Unable to think clearly, unable to breathe deeply and her heart in her throat, she sighed, "You have?"

"I have." She not only heard but felt him whisper the words as he leaned closer and reached around her. So close she could see the whiskers in his scruff weren't just dark, but sported shades of auburn, and just below his ear, he had three freckles that she could easily lick if she desired. Would he like that? She almost giggled she felt so giddy.

Drawing in his scent, equal parts body wash, a musky cologne and something that was uniquely him, she knew that forever that smell would be engraved in her mind and whenever any one of those scents were near, she would remember him.

Her hands were gripping the edges of her desk as he straightened back up, and finally her brain started functioning again. "Wh...What?" Was all she could manage before she twisted and saw that he had set a Starbucks cup on her desk. A small pucker appeared between her brows as her brain raced to connect the dots, and lifting her eyes to his, she tilted her lips slightly, "You're my model?"

He took a small step back and held up his hand, "Allow me to introduce myself, Killian Jones."

Emma's green eyes locked with his blue, trying to read the secrets hidden behind them. When she saw nothing but sincerity, she put her hand in his. "Emma Swan."

He squeezed her fingers, and softly kissed the back of her hand, making her pulse take off again.

"I have something for you," he broke into her thoughts as he let go of her hand and took a half step closer.

She swallowed the lump in her throat with difficulty wondering what it could be. "You do?"

"Aye, I think you will like it." His grin turned flirty, reaching his eyes causing them to lighten and crinkle at the corners.

Feeling comfortable enough to match his playful smile with one of her own, she encouraged, "Can you tell me or," she pushed off the desk and took a half step toward him, causing his eyes to darken, "is it something you have to show me?"

She noticed his brow go up and his eyes continued to stare intently into hers, trying, she ascertained, to decipher exactly what was happening. He must have seen what he needed for he opened his mouth, but "Oh..." Was all he managed to get out before they were interrupted.
"Ms. Swan," she heard her name called by several students before Killian looked beyond her shoulder and with a sheepish smile stepped back, but not before giving her a look that said this will be continued.

Making sure to give him one of her own that said, I hope so, she turned to direct the those, who were filing into class.

cs~cs~cs

Killian watched Emma move around the room, fascinated with how she was handling the class. Answering, directing, listening, whatever was needed. He found her ability to orchestrate what was happening around her captivating as if she were a mage working her magic on her subjects just as she had worked her magic on him. Not only by enslaving him a year ago and stealing into his thoughts and dreams, but by turning the situation earlier from one where he thought he had the upper hand to one where he had no idea what end was up. Would it always be like that between them? Blimey, he hoped so. To find a woman who met him word for word, action for action, was his dream. To have with Emma something like the love his parents had would fulfill all dreams, both known and unknown.

"Killian…" He startled when she took his arm to lead him forward, "will be our model this semester." She smiled at him and glanced back at the class. "He's here to help you become better artists, so be nice."

She positioned him on a stool, sitting him so he was half facing the class, and walked around behind him and placed her hands on his shoulders. He hadn't been ready for her touch and could feel his pulse steadily increase as his awareness of her increased, a fact that might embarrass them both if he didn't get his thoughts away from the current trajectory. Bending one leg, he balanced on the bar around the bottom and stretched out the other leg for comfort. His movement must have concerned Emma because she whispered in his ear, "Sorry about this. I hope you have no objections to my touching you."

Her hot breath against his ear sent his nerve endings haywire and a tiny shiver shook his body. He turned his head slightly toward her, "No, love, not at all." He closed his eyes and took a deep breath, inhaling her scent.

"Good," she hesitated as their gazes locked, "I wouldn't want you to be uncomfortable."

Ha, he thought, if you only knew. And then to keep himself out of trouble he turned back to the students and made eye contact with a few of them. Not only did that cool his ardor, but it succeeded in bringing him back to at least part of the reason why he was sitting here in the first place - to help Emma.

He watched her as she taught, thinking how natural she looked. He had just started to relax, when she moved back to where he was sitting and reached toward his face. He tried to prepare himself but when her cool hand cupped his cheek, he couldn't help his subtle lean into her as she spoke to the class. "Today we are going to use the Andrew Loomis approach to drawing faces."

When she spoke, she was close enough that her thigh rested against his, making his body tighten unconsciously. She placed one hand on his brow line, "When you draw a face and need to determine the length, you measure it between the brow line and the nose line, here," she placed her other hand along his top lip, just under his nose. He could smell the lotion she must have applied earlier and a scent that belonged to just Emma, and swallowed as she continued with her presentation. "And the same distance between the nose line and the chin." She moved her hand from his forehead to his chin.
When she removed her hands from his face and moved to the pad of paper, she showed the students what she had been referring to by drawing a quick sketch of his face. He was amazed at the ease with which she quickly drew an almost exact replica of his face, as if she had been doing it on a regular basis, and then he recalled the two images that had come into his possession and wondered if perhaps there were other drawings.

To explain the placement of the eyes and the nose, she moved her finger tips almost delicately around his eyes pointing out their shape, nearly causing him to squirm in his seat. When she smoothed her fingertips over his brow, he couldn't help the little groan that escaped and, looking up into her green gaze, he could have sworn there was a hint of something hiding behind them that she quickly hid by moving away, allowing them a moment of rest.

After completing her rendition of his eyes and nose, and he heard her mention the mouth, he was curious to see if she was as affected by his nearness as he was by hers. Gathering his strength, he waited for her to step close once again.

Her hand lifted toward him and she must have seen something because she turned to the class, "Take ten, guys. Killian needs to stretch his legs."

"Alright, Emma?" He looked her over, trying to decipher her sudden need for a break.

"I thought you looked like you needed a break," she shrugged her shoulders. "That's all." Draining the last of her cocoa, she grimaced and tossed it in the trashcan before disappearing into what he assumed was a storage room.

Killian watched her go, curious about the sudden break, but ready for the next step in the process. Heaven help him, though, as the feel of her hands running along his lips and her eyes staring at them, might very well cause combustion.

Cs~cs~cs

As soon as she was in the storage room, Emma sagged against the shelves, wondering how she was going to be able to maintain this air of indifference for the next hour. Heaven knew if she climbed onto Killian's lap and laid one on him, her inner self, who had been dreaming of him for months, would stand up and cheer, however, it might not do much for her professional career.

Realizing that break time was about over, she pulled two bottles of water from the small refrigerator and went back put into the classroom. Killian was standing next to her easel surrounded by several of the girls from the class. Hanging back, Emma observed him interacting with them and thought back to that night at the pub, when females were throwing themselves at him. Why was he still free? Was it possible he had been waiting for her too?

When Killian looked up and met her gaze, she started walking toward him and was surprised when he walked over and met her halfway. When she handed him the bottle and their hands touched she felt a little zing travel up her arm and, based on the slight flair of his eyes, he must have felt the same thing. "Thanks, love, I'm quite parched." He opened the bottle and took a long drink.

She watched his throat bob up and down as he swallowed, and nodded her head in the direction of the girls he'd just left. "From the conversation with your entourage over there?"

A confused expression crossed his face as he looked toward where she had nodded, that was replaced by a look of understanding, "Those are schoolgirls. Besides, I made sure they knew I was taken by someone." He grinned at her and took another long drink.
Emma wasn't quite sure she heard him correctly, and rather than get into a heavy conversation, simply responded, "Oh?"

He gave her a cheeky grin, "Aye, you. At least I hope so." He tapped his bottle against hers, drained it and tossed it in a bin in the corner, before sauntering back to the stool.

She had to forcefully work to keep her mouth from hanging open, and swallowed hard thinking, "Holy moly, I'm in deep." Mentally redirecting her thoughts, she walked back to her easel and called the students for the rest of class.

Once everyone was seated, she tried to pull herself back from going over and over the moment when he had said, "Aye, you," and couldn't help but wish that were true. "Where was I?" she murmured softly, looking up at him. When he tapped his bottom lip, she bit her own to keep her mouth closed, and when the move caused his eyes to darken, she seriously thought about dismissing class early. As she continued cataloging his facial features and her eyes skimmed over his full lower lip, he licked it slowly from corner to corner. Closing her eyes, she took a deep breath and turned away from him to set her bottle on the desk in an attempt get herself under control.

"Ok class," she started, "one mistake that many make when drawing a mouth is they try to draw the entire mouth first." She moved next to Killian leaning a little closer than she had before, enjoying the power she felt when his breath caught and she could see the pulse pounding in his throat. "First, you want to determine exactly where you need to place the mouth." She put one finger on his top lip, "It will be about one-third between here," and the other she laid on the bottom of his chin, "and here. Then draw a line that represents where the top lip," slowly she drew her finger along his top lip, "meets the bottom." She traced across it. When she reached the corner, she could swear he had licked the pad of her finger, but when she met his gaze, his look was innocent.

"Next, you will draw an outline of the lips," she placed her finger in the center of his lips, and slowly moved her finger toward the outer edges, "all the way around, working from the natural center." The scruff surrounding his lips was a little pricklier than she had anticipated and a sudden move sent a whisker straight into the delicate pad of her finger. "Ouch," she yelped as she pulled her hand away preparing to suck on it.

A perplexed look crossed Killian's face, "What, Swan?" He wiped his hand across his mouth, and what had happened must have dawned on him, because he immediately smirked at her and reached for her wrist, "Let me see."

Emma noticed the attentive looks from her classroom and smiled, before subtly moving away, "I'm okay." Wiping her hand on her jeans, she tried to figure out when she had lost control of the situation, deciding it must have been the minute she had turned around and he had been standing there staring at her. Focus, Emma, she scolded herself.

Taking a deep breath, she continued, "Next we look at the cross-contour lines that wrap around the lips," she scoured the grooves of his bottom lip lightly with her nail, smiling as he let out a low growl. "Also, as you place the lines for the grooves, remember the bottom lip is going to be fuller than the top."

Moving to the picture she had started of his face she finished by adding his lips, but instead of sketching them closed, at rest like she had instructed the class, she had drawn a soft smile playing along his mouth, the corners barely tilted, as if he were holding a secret. When she stepped back and realized what she had done, she reached for an eraser to change it, but he touched her arm, "No, don't. Leave it just as it is."
Stepping back, she once again looked at the face she had drawn, and then looked at her model, "He looks like he has a secret. Any idea what it could be?"

He smiled that same smile at her, "Perhaps."

She rolled her eyes and turned back to the class. "Ten more minutes, then that's all for today."

Making sure that the students were finishing up their work, she turned back to where he remained sitting on the stool. "Thank you for coming today, Killian. You were wonderful."

Assuming he would leave while she was cleaning up the supplies, she didn't pay much attention until she came out of the storage room and he was standing there waiting for her. "Emma?"

"Yes?" She had a class to attend next hour, so she was packing up her bag, getting ready to go and when he didn't say anything, she stopped and glanced up. He met her eyes, and then glanced away before looking back again. "Can I take you to lunch?" He asked her with a rather hopeful expression on his face.

_Crap, crap, crap_, Emma chanted internally, for she really wanted to spend time talking to him and finding out how exactly he knew she needed a model, but she had to go. "I would love to, but I have class in twenty." When his face fell, she felt awful. "Raincheck?"

He studied her face for several seconds, before briefly nodding his head. "Can I text or call you?"

Her smile bloomed even larger, "You had better."

She could tell he didn't want to leave her alone just yet, and if she were telling the truth, she wasn't ready to part ways, either. Picking up her bag, she started walking and linked her arm through his. "Walk me to the shuttle?"

"With pleasure."

"And how is it that you just happened to know of my need for a model?" she asked as they walked, but smiled to take the sting out of the question, "Not that I'm complaining, but you have to admit, it is curious."

They arrived at the shuttle just as it drove up. "Looks like the secret is still safe," he winked at her. "Until next time." He kissed her hand again, before squeezing her fingers goodbye. The shuttle was loading and so with no other option, Emma climbed on and watched out the window as they drove away, noticing that Killian was watching her too.

cs~cs~cs

3 weeks later

It had been weeks since Killian had found Emma, and yet besides being her class model twice, they had yet to coordinate their schedules. He hadn't realized it would be so difficult to court someone. He was hoping that tonight would be the first step in changing his luck and that she would make it to their gig at The Burren.

Leaving his room in his 'uniform' for the night of black skinny jeans and black T that he layered with a black leather jacket, he picked up his electric Gibson and waited for Robin.

When Robin finally appeared, he burst out, "Bloody hell, Robin," and ran his hand through his dark hair, "what did you do to your hair?"
Robin put his hands on his hips and turned one way and then the other, a cheeky smile lighting his face, "Like it? It's called a duck tail."

Killian walked around him, looking closely at his hair. There was enough grease on it cause a forest fire if he got too close to a match. "Not sure 'like' is the right word, but we should go."

cs~cs~cs

Emma sat next to Elsa and watched Ashley unwrapping baby gifts and smiled at how happy her friend looked. "How many sleepers does one little baby need?"

Elsa smiled, "Apparently, quite a few."

"That's good because I think she's gotten about two hundred!" Picking up her phone, she surreptitiously checked the time and sighed, wishing it would move faster.

"Ok, give," Elsa teased her, "what's going on tonight that you keep checking the time?"

"Sorry," Emma gave her a sheepish smile, "Killian is playing tonight at The Burren for Grease night and wanted me to come by."

"Ah, hon, I'm sorry." She gave her a sympathetic look, "Have you spent any time with him?"

Shaking her head, no, Emma gave a half smile, "The two times he came to class are the only times we've actually been in the same space. Other than that, just texts, as our schedules just haven't meshed."

"Well it looks like gifts are complete, so just cake and then Ruby and I are going to make sure you get to The Burren tonight."

The rest of the party was uneventful and once they had helped Ashley gather her gifts, and helped Sean load them into his truck, she looked around her apartment at the mess and sighed. "There is no way I'm going to get this cleaned up in time to make it to the party."

Ruby came up behind her and frowned, "Party, what party?" She put her hands on her hips and looked around, "I thought this was the only party in town."

"The Grease party at The Burren," Elsa answered her as she started gathering up the plates.

Ruby looked at her and then over at Emma, and a stunned look appeared on her face, "That was tonight?" They both nodded. "Well, fudge. Let's get busy, as Emma must get to that party."

Becoming a whirlwind of activity, they worked together, and within a very short time they were packing the last dish away for Ruby to take back to Blue. Emma checked the time and sent Killian a quick text.

E: Ruby, Elsa and I are leaving in ten. See you in a bit.

She didn't hear anything immediately, so assumed they weren't on break, which could be a good omen. Since Ruby had the yellow bug that belonged to the House, they were on the way just as the butterflies made an appearance.

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Killian knew the minute Emma and her friends arrived, not only because he had arranged to have them seated at a table close to the stage but because, as ridiculous as it sounded, he felt a subtle
change in the air. Thankful that he was playing and not singing, he watched her walk across the
floor, slide into a chair and turn to smile up at him. She looked beautiful and his break couldn't come
quickly enough.

When Emma turned and saw Killian, her tiny butterflies turned into a huge swarm and she met his
smile with one of her own. He looked good with his all black, as did the decorations of streamers and
balloons spread around the space. She could see people on the dance floor as well as those seated at
surrounding tables, dressed as if they were at a sock hop, common during the 1950's and the era of
the movie, Grease. Wearing a dress with a full skirt and her hair up in a ponytail made her feel like
she fit right in.

With the music playing softly in the background, Emma sipped her drink and listened to her friends
catch up with each other. When they both turned and smiled at her, she felt like she needed to look
down and check to make sure there wasn't anything spilled on her dress. "What?" She gulped a drink
swallowing it carefully so as not to choke.

Ruby assured her there wasn't anything worrisome with her appearance and finished with, "You
look happy, Emma."

"I am happy. Thanks for coming with me tonight, girls."

Elsa looked up at the band, and then back at her. "I wouldn't want to be anywhere else, and besides,"
her smile grew larger as the live music faded away and the DJ took over, "the real show is about to
begin."

Emma tilted her head in confusion. "What...?" Was all she got out before her nose told her that the
reason why she was here tonight was close. She looked up and met his smile with one of her own,
"Hi." She felt shy even though they had sent texts almost daily and were able to talk about anything.
"Would you care to sit?" His eyes devoured her with their intensity, making her feel special and very
sexy.

"Thank you." He pulled a chair out and sat, never breaking their eye contact.

She forced herself to pull her eyes away and looked across the table at her two friends, who were
sitting with elbows propped on the table, leaning on one hand with huge smiles on their faces.
Deciding it was time they met the man she had been talking, drawing and dreaming about for a year,
she turned to said man, "Killian, meet Ruby, and of course you remember Elsa. Ladies, this is Killian
Jones."

Once introductions were made, Killian was briefly content to sit and watch Emma as she interacted
with her friends, and enjoying the way that, even though she would respond when asked a direct
question, nearly all of her focus was on him.

He was especially happy, though, when his gregarious friend Robin came over to be introduced, and
took over entertaining Elsa and Ruby, allowing him to focus more on Emma. He found after
spending fifteen minutes sitting next to her, smelling her subtle fragrance and feeling her arm or leg
brush against his, that he was going to do something rash. He needed a soft song to start playing,
giving him an excuse to talk to her alone and more, importantly, giving him an opportunity to hold
her in his arms, an exercise that so far, he had only been able to do in his dreams. He needed to feel
her.

His control reached its end when she laughed at some story that Robin told and she leaned toward
him, placing her hand on his upper thigh. Neither clenching his fists nor gritting his jaw
had lessened his need, and resolving to do something then, he pushed himself up from the table.
"Excuse me," he bit out before stalking away from the table.

Emma frowned when he pushed away and stalked off. She turned, watching to see where he was going, and when he walked up to the DJ, she was even more confused because he was still supposed to be on break. Turning back to Robin, she was puzzled to see him sitting quietly but with mischief twinkling in his eyes. "Do you understand?" she questioned his friend, hoping for an answer to a situation that only he seemed to comprehend.

If anything, the twinkle in Robin's eyes increased as he watched Killian across the room. "Aye, milady," He grinned at her, "he didn't go far."

She looked just as Killian turned back toward their table and started walking, almost gliding even, so measured were his moves. She felt a little like an animal that was being stalked with a single-minded intensity, so laser sharp was his focus on her. Her pulse quickened and the swarm of butterflies in her stomach took flight.

As he reached her, he stood beside her chair for a heartbeat and holding her breath, she waited to see what he would do. As soon as the music changed from the fast song, Wake Up Little Suzie, to a slow ballad, he held out his hand, "Dance with me, please?" His eyes pleaded with her to accept.

The tone of his voice, the look in his eyes, the soft melody from the music all served to give the goosebumps free rein to come out to play. When she put her hand in his and allowed him to lead her toward the dance floor, she was very surprised that her legs even supported her body.

Once on the dance floor, Killian pulled her into his arms, and she got her first experience of what it felt like to be held and cherished by a man for the very first time in her life. Sliding her left hand up his firm chest, she allowed it to rest lightly on the back of his neck, where she could play with the soft hair resting there. Her right hand was held snug by his left and tucked closely between their bodies over his heart, where she could feel it was beating just as wildly as hers.

He pressed his jaw against her temple and as they swayed closely together, Nat King Cole sang the romantic ballad Unforgettable. Emma listened to the words, and with every stanza came to realize that not only had Killian chosen a beautifully romantic song with a haunting melody, but he had chosen one that could not have been more perfect.

As the words of it flowed over them, he leaned back just enough so he could look into her eyes and he whispered, "You are, you know?"

She felt his hot breath fan over her mouth and her pulse fluttered in her neck, "What, Killian?" She whispered back.

He pulled her closer, if possible, so close that every part between their thighs and chests touched and she could feel exactly how she was affecting him. "Unforgettable." He hesitated as the music continued to fall around them. "From the moment we met, not a day has gone by that I've not thought of you, Emma."

She smiled at him, "Good," and ran the back of her hand along his cheek, causing him to close his eyes as if savoring her touch. "Me too, you know. You've been in my thoughts every single day."

Holding her gaze, his lips hovered just above hers, so closely that with any little movement they would be kissing. Would he close the distance, she wondered? Should she?

Killian looked at her lips, his hovering so near that one small, infinitesimal move and they would be connected. He wanted that, but something told him he didn't want his first taste of her to be quick
and hurried in the middle of a pub on the dance floor. When he covered her lips and plundered that delectable mouth with his, he didn't want to be rushed, but be allowed to savor the experience that he had been anticipating for so long.

Knowing that it was almost time for him to get back up on stage, but that he hadn't spent nearly enough time with her, he asked, "Will you stay for the last set and let me see you home?"

"I would like that, but I should make sure the girls are ok with it since we came together." She leaned in fitting her cheek against his collar bone, allowing him to pull her hips even tighter to his. The friction created between their bodies was killing him, but for a few minutes in heaven, it was worth the pain.

Halfway through the last set, Ruby offered to drop Elsa by their home so that Killian could take Emma home without having to worry about a third wheel. Once his name was brought up, Emma suspected they had been talking to Robin while she was dancing, but she didn't care.

"Earth to Emma," Ruby called in a teasing voice. "You're okay being left on your own with your mystery man, right?"

Turning to look up at him, where he was standing next to Robin, strumming the guitar, she felt nothing but peace. "Ruby, I can honestly say I have no qualms at all about being alone with Killian."

Exchanging a look with Elsa, they stood up, "That's good. Behave yourself." She winked and snickered, before opening her bag to look for something, "Do you need protection, honey? I know it's been a while."

Elsa leaned down, "And if he stays over, hang something on the doorknob so we don't disturb you tomorrow too early."

Emma shook her head at the two, "I'm a big girl. And if need be, I have my own protection, thank you very much." A small smile graced her lips, "I like him, but ladies we just met. I don't plan to rush into anything. When it's right, I'll know."

Ruby squeezed her shoulder. "I'm happy you found him, girlfriend. Call me tomorrow."

She watched them wind their way through the tables on their way to the door and she turned back to the stage.

Killian watched Ruby and Elsa depart, leaving Emma waiting for him. He glanced at Robin, who raised a brow, winked and after tossing him a knowing smile, Killian suspected that some words had been exchanged while he had been dancing with Emma. An opportunity to finally be alone with her had presented itself and he couldn't bring himself to think about much beyond that and anticipating the end of the set.

As one song morphed into another, he found himself feeling anxious about the surprise that he had planned for her. He hoped he wasn't pushing too hard or too fast but while preparing the sets for tonight's performance, this song had come up and he knew it said a lot of what was already in his heart. Was she on that precipice with him? Would she take the words of the song to heart and jump, holding his hand all the way?

Emma sang along with the songs she knew and for the ones she didn't she found herself tapping her
toe, as the band seemed to prefer the faster tunes. She watched as Robin sang his version of *Johnny B Goode*, and couldn't help but compare it to Michael J Fox version in from *Back to the Future*. When he played the last riff and the music faded away, she watched Killian flip his guitar over his shoulder and move to the microphone as the lights dimmed, not only in the pub but on the stage.

Walter played a few bars on the piano and Killian sang directly to her,

> *When I fall in love,*
> *It will be forever*
> *Or I'll never fall in love.*
> *In a restless world, such as this is,*
> *Love has ended before it's begun*
> *And too many moonlight kisses*
> *Seem to cool in the warmth of the sun.*

Thinking about the words of the song brought tears to her eyes, for she felt that he was saying to her that he knew exactly how she was feeling, and that he was feeling the very same thing. That true love is one of the greatest gifts that we share with someone and that it shouldn't be taken lightly. That he was willing to let her go at her own pace and he would be there with her every step of the way.

> *And the moment I can feel that you feel that way too,*
> *Is when I'll fall in love with you.*

By the time the last note had ended and the lights on stage had faded to black, her tears were falling fast and free and there was a deafening roar as the patrons of the pub gave him a well-deserved ovation. When the lights on the stage came back up, she couldn't hold back the huge smile that lit up her face as Killian stood up there, scratching the back of his neck as if very uncomfortable. Bowing slightly, he turned away from the room at large and as their eyes met, she felt like she was the luckiest woman in the world.

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The train ride home found a drowsy Emma wrapped in Killian's jacket to ward off the evening chill and tucked into his body with her head on his shoulder. She stayed awake, barely, as they talked about everything and anything. She enjoyed listening to him speak, not just because she liked him but because he had such a pleasant cadence to his voice. As the train arrived at her stop, they got off and started the short walk to her house.

He kept her close, their steps in sync, and as they walked the thought flitted through her mind, *should I invite him in?* A few more steps, and another thought, *would he even want to?* And finally, *Will he kiss me?* Or, more importantly, *Should I let him?*

Her heart, tender and pure, was chanting, "Kiss, kiss, kiss," over and over again until she knew there was no way she would ignore that opportunity, and if he didn't initiate, then she certainly would.

Her lady parts, which had been unused for longer than she wanted to think about, were sitting on the other shoulder screaming loud and long, "Do it! Invite him in! Get it while you can!" Over and over so loudly that she was convinced he could hear them too.

They stopped outside her door and he gave her a quizzical look, "What's going on inside that head of yours?"

Knowing there was no way to tell him the truth without coming across as a nut job, she smiled and stepped closer to him, letting him once again wrap his arms around her, making her feel like she was
at long last home. "It's not important." Stepping back a half step, she brushed his jaw softly, "Thank you, for the night, the dance," she swallowed, "the song. It was beautiful."

He looked down briefly and then back once again, "I meant every word."

She kept looking at him, trying to read what was going on behind that blue gaze. "I'm glad," she told him softly.

"Will you go out with me again?" He whispered, never breaking eye contact, waiting patiently for something.

She nodded her head once, before stepping into his space, showing him, she was ready. and he didn’t disappoint but met her half way. As his lips closed over hers and his hands wrapped around her, pulling her close, she felt like she was free-falling over the side of a cliff. The kiss was soft, sweet and had more passion in it than any kiss she’d had before, giving hope and setting her dreams free. Tonight, she thought, was the night for falling in love.

He stepped back, a dazed look on his face just like the one on hers, she imagined. "I'll call you."

She took off his coat and handed it back to him, "Goodnight, Killian." He unlocked her door, opened it and handed her the keys. Walking inside, she smiled one last time at him before shutting the door and leaning back against it waiting for her heart to start beating again.

Chapter End Notes

Was I right? Let me know what you thought. Thanks for reading.
Chapter 5

Chapter Summary

Emma and Killian's connection continues to grow.

Chapter Notes

I predict you will smile a few times during this chapter.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 5

Early October

The next few days found Emma floating on a cloud, unable to tear her thoughts far from the remembrance of their first kiss. Being in Killian's arms and feeling his lips pressed against hers had felt right, perfect, in fact, and she was back hearing both of those voices in her head. Her inner heart was saying take it slow, enjoy the romance, and one day at a time, but her inner tart was saying, why didn't you invite him in? If he kisses well, what else does he do well? and Idiot, you're just an idiot.

Her problem lay in the fact that in her past relationships she had listened to her tart self, and look where that had gotten her - alone. This time she fully planned to listen to her heart side as it seemed to be telling her something. Making her feel that there was some reason why, after seeing him for a moment in time and exchanging merely a handful of words, he had never been far from her thoughts. That had to be significant and that was why it had been 2 1/2 days, she checked the time, exactly fifty-seven hours, but who's counting, since he had said goodbye after the most amazing kiss.

The next day they had exchanged a flurry of texts, but since both had previous commitments, had to settle for talking on the phone late into the night. Their conversation had run the gamut from small things like what they liked to read as children, or eat for breakfast, to stories about school including their plans for after they finished their graduate degrees the following year. His involved moving to New York City where a job working with his brother in a company owned by a family friend was already waiting. And while her dream involved opening a small gallery, she had never envisioned living anywhere but Boston. Was she listening to her wrong side? Should she listen to the other one to protect herself from pain?

Refocusing on the fact that she had a class to teach in a half-hour, she unlocked her classroom, flipped on the lights and moved to her desk to store her bags before she started setting up the room. Pulling the bottom drawer out with the toe of her shoe, she dropped her bag in and bent over to pull out her laptop when she noticed a Starbucks bag sitting in the center of her desk with a note attached. Detaching the note, she read:

Good morning Swan,

Thinking of you.
A smile curved her lips as she opened the bag and peered inside, the smell of cinnamon and yeast hitting her nose. Her stomach rumbled reminding her that she had run out of the house without grabbing anything to eat and before giving it too much thought ripped off a piece of bearclaw and popped it into her mouth. Groaning in ecstasy as the sugar and cinnamon hit her tongue, she pulled the cup of hot chocolate out of the bag and took a small sip, noticing that it was still warm. Realizing she hadn't missed Killian by much for it to be so warm was a bit of a bummer, but her curiosity was piqued by the fact that he was able to get into her locked classroom. Obviously, an accomplice, but whom?

Pulling her phone out, she sent a quick text,

E: Thank you for my sweet.

She didn't have to wait long for his response,

K: You're quite welcome.

E: I'm not complaining, but how did you get into my room?"

K: Pirate, love. You know we're always searching for treasure.

She smiled at his comment thinking if only he knew.

E: My very own pirate, huh? Any specific treasure you are looking for?

K: Your heart, Swan.

When he responded so simply, she just about melted into a puddle on the floor.

E: Oh Killian.

She sighed wishing that he was right next to her as she really wanted to kiss his sexy lips and once again feel his arms around her.

"Oh Killian, what?" She heard in a decidedly familiar British accent.

Looking up quickly, she watched him step into the room, pushing the door shut behind him. Without thinking she was around the desk, in his arms and kissing his lips before any more words were spoken.

There was no awkwardness in their kiss as was often the case when kissing someone new the first few times. Their lips meshed together as if one set had been made for other and at long last had found their mate.

The need for air finally won out and pulling away a little, she was finally able to satisfy her curiosity, "I thought you had a group meeting at 9:00?"

He kissed her nose, "I moved it to 10:00 am so I could see you." He grinned at the contemplative look on her face but didn't offer any other information.

She squinted her eyes at him, trying to read his mind, but he had a good poker face. "And what did you say to them?"

He pulled her closer and touched his forehead to hers. "I told them we needed to meet at 10 so I
could kiss my girl."

Snaking her arms around his neck, she giggled, "Well, come here then." Going up on her toes, she sealed her lips to his and showed him with her mouth just how much she appreciated his surprise as well as his need to see her with a kiss that threatened to go on until a flurry of activity outside the door tore them apart.

"I'd better go. See you later." One last quick kiss and he left the room as her students started arriving.

She looked around, realizing she had gotten so distracted that she hadn't prepared for the day. Working quickly, she was able to get them started and made her way back to her desk to finish her breakfast surprise.

cs~cs~cs

Sitting in his IT class the next day, listening to Professor Malcolm go on and on, Killian barely contained the yawn that threatened to break free any moment. A full class load, his robotics group and those competitions, performing gigs with *The Minors* and his most important activity of courting Emma, often seemed to mean that sleep became an afterthought. Easy enough to handle in your early 20's but now in his early 30's his priorities had changed. He had reached that point where what he wanted most of all was to spend time with his girl and show her what she meant to him, which with each passing day was more and more.

Leaving tokens of affection had been something his father had done for his mother when they were students here at Harvard. He remembered his father sharing the story one evening after Liam had asked how to let some girl know he liked her. Funny how it had never entered his mind again until being on the same campus where his parents had met and fallen in love. He was ready to take the leap and tokens, according to his father, were a good way to give the woman a little nudge. And based on that kiss she had bestowed on him yesterday, he thought it had been a successful mission.

Licking his bottom lip, he imagined he could still taste her mouth.

Phase two would be left for her to find tomorrow before class, thankful to his partner in crime, one of the Currier House cleaning ladies. A woman with wild red hair and a very odd laugh who said she enjoyed a good love story. After he had explained that the woman he was courting was Emma Swan, she had gotten a far-away look in her eyes and then deemed them the perfect match. He wasn't quite sure how she came to have that information since she had never seen them together, but he appreciated the thought and agreed with it whole-heartedly. All he had to do was put it all together and meet with the woman, Lena, and he was golden.

Back at his apartment later that evening, he printed out a photo of himself and Emma dancing and placed it in the picture frame. Staring at it made him feel nostalgic and shake his head at himself and the fact that he was so far gone over a woman after just a few times together. Printing another copy of the picture, he stared at it again, finding something about it hauntingly familiar, as if he had seen that scene played out before in another time, but unable to grasp the image that danced across his mind, he set it aside for later.

Pulling up the sound byte of the song that he sang the night they danced, he listened to it until he found the part that he wanted to include with the picture and finally settled on the last two lines:

"And the moment I can feel that you feel that way too

Is when I'll fall in love with you."

Playing it over once again, he decided he was happy with it and, placing it back in the box, he
wrapped it carefully. Penning a note, he slipped it under the ribbon and sat back to admire his work.

He had just picked up the phone to adjourn to his bedroom and spend time talking with his lady when the door opened and Robin walked in with a disgruntled look on his face. "What's up? You look annoyed."

Robin quirked his mouth and rolled his eyes, "Nothing new, just grumbling internally at you still for getting me involved in having to study again. Our lives were just fine when all we had to worry about was where the next gig would be and who would warm our beds if the need arose. Now it's, " he dropped a pile of papers on the table, "homework, projects, grouchy instructors, deadlines," he hesitated and sat down in a chair, and sighed, "need I proceed?"

Having heard Robin's complaints before, Killian only half listened to him go on and on until finally winding down. "But if we hadn't moved here I'd be without Emma." His statement was meant to be made in jest but instead came out solemn, as if the thought of not having her in his life was too terrifying to consider.

Robin studied him quietly for a few seconds before tilting his chin in agreement, "I know, and I am truly happy for you. Think Emma has a friend for your old mate?"

Killian shrugged his shoulder, "Perhaps. You'll know when you see her though. Something about her will pull you in and one look might be all it takes."

Robin shook his head, "Boy, you're waxing poetic these days. However, the thought that one look and I'll be gone, well," he started laughing, "is just laughable. There are plenty of butterflies in the forest and I've a few to sample before landing on one."

"We'll see," Killian closed his computer, pushed up from the table and took a few steps down the hallway. "Something tells me, though, when you meet the right one, you're going to have to work to catch her."

Emma woke with her face smashed against her phone. "Crap, did I fall asleep while talking to Killian?" She muttered as she pulled herself out of bed to get ready for class, but thinking back on the conversation, she didn't think so as she could swear that she had said goodnight. Hitting the home button, she grinned at his text,

K: Yes you said goodnight and we hung up. Hope you dreamt of me.

"Ok," she muttered to her phone, "that's just creepy how you do that." But as soon as it was out of her mouth her heart side corrected her with, No, that's a man who listens. Not only does he seem to listen to what you are saying, but also to what you don't say. He's a keeper. Of course, as she proceeded to shower and dress, her traitorous body took her right back to how she felt in his arms and how he kissed and her tart side screamed, "Jump him!"

"Ugh, shut up," she scolded herself. "Feelings, so many good, no really great feelings."

Hurrying out the door, this time with a package of pop tarts in hand, she made it to the train station, wondering if a gift would be waiting on her desk. Not that she expected one every class period but it was exciting to walk in a door and realize that someone cared enough about you to plan a little surprise for you. She smiled, thinking it certainly added to the tingles that woke up whenever he was near.
With a few stops before she got off, her mind fell back on their conversation last night. She had talked a little about going to college but he had opened up about his family. The fact that his parents had met and fallen in love here on the Harvard campus after both were born and raised in England, was a miracle. There was also the age difference between them as eighteen-year-old freshman don't always have opportunities to come in contact with the graduate students on campus. And then the fact that his mother had been born with wealth whereas his father had grown up in an orphanage, just as she had done. An amazing coincidence for sure, but was something else at play?

Walking from the train to her stop, Emma had a little extra bounce to her step and couldn't wait to get to her class. Trying not to get her hopes up, she unlocked the door and hurried across the room to her desk. No Starbucks bag waited for her. "Oh, well," she breathed out, "it's not like I expected anything anyway." Scolding herself for getting her stupid hopes up and then being let down again, she questioned her choice, "Heart side, right?" as she pulled opened the bottom drawer for her bag and spotted a simply wrapped rectangular box with a bow tied on the top.

Her eyes immediately teared and she had to bite her lip to keep from screaming with excitement, but picking it up, she set it on her desk. Wondering if she should open it or wait, she put her bag away, closed the drawer and sat back to stare at it. Her heart had picked up speed and she was in jeopardy of giggling like an idiot, knowing there was no way in Hades that she could wait until her students left. Trying to show a bit of decorum, she pulled out the note and slowly opened it. His note, so sweet and simple, turned her heart over in her chest, and she knew that, yes, her heart side was totally in control. He had written,

Emma,

*There's a song in my heart for you.*

*Killian*

"Oh boy," she mumbled, "I am such dead meat." Untying the bow, she laid it aside and gently slipped her fingers under the paper. Separating the sides, she pressed it out flat before turning the box to pull open the end and tilting it up so the frame could slip out.

She covered her mouth as her heart jumped inside her chest and, quickly dashing away the tears, pressed the button to hear what he had recorded. His voice crooned,

"And the moment I can feel that you feel that way too
Is when I'll fall in love with you."

"You are a pirate alright," she told the picture as she stared at the image of her held tightly in his arms swaying to the music. It had been almost a week, but just looking at the picture made it seem like yesterday. She could hear the music, feel their bodies touching and even smell his unique scent as if he were right here with her. Logically, she knew he wasn't, as he had class that he couldn't miss, but her senses were so in tune with him that the fact that she was still alone didn't feel real.

Placing the frame on her desk, front and center, where she could gaze at it anytime she came near, she reached for the wrapping paper. Picking it up to fold, she got a whiff once again of him, and brought it to her nose, inhaling a combination of his cologne and body wash. "Knew I wasn't crazy," she whispered as the students started arriving and she had to store it away for later. She'd thank him when they met at the library steps in a few hours. The same place his parents had first met and, according to Killian, the place where his father had taken one look and decided his mom was the woman he planned to marry. Was there a chance the son might follow in his father's footsteps? Her heart side was standing up and paying close attention.
Killian had just finished lunch at the Burger Cottage and was on his way to the Widener Library where he planned to do some reading before meeting with Emma in an hour. The street was busy and he kept having to dodge others who would stop to text or stop to talk to someone coming the other way, which effectively blocked traffic from both directions. After the third or fourth time it had happened, he was considering stepping off the curb and walking on the road, but of course that presented another set of issues.

Finally, able to move around a particularly congested area, he looked up to see a skateboarder barreling toward him and prepared himself for impact when someone jerked him out of the way against the side of a building, "Bloody hell, what the devil are you doing?" He all but shouted at the unknown person.

"Saving your bloody ass, you big oaf," shouted Graham, who was staring down the sidewalk at the skateboarder, thinking of chasing him down, no doubt.

Brushing off his leather jacket and rubbing the palm of his hands against his jeans, he gave the detective a disgruntled look. "Just because you carry a gun doesn't give you a right to manhandle people," he spat out.

Graham, who had been standing there with his hands on his hips, held them up in surrender, "Sorry, man. I was coming out of the shop and just reacted." He gave him a cocky smile, "Didn't realize you would take issue with it."

Thinking he had possibly overreacted, Killian shook his head, "Sorry about that, mate." He looked in the direction the skateboarder had gone but he was out of sight, "This sidewalk is not my favorite. Too many people and all in a hurry."

"Way of life," Graham responded as he turned in the direction Killian had been walking. "Where are you off to? I thought you had class."

"I had class this morning. Now it's to the library to do some reading then meeting with Emma in a while." They resumed walking and this time there seemed to be no issue, for people spotted Graham's holster and quickly moved out of the way.

"Ah," Graham chuckled, "congratulations on locating the elusive Emma. How did you finally find her?"

Killian explained to Graham about the twist of fate when Robin had seen her and she had dropped a drawing of him again. He went on to share how he had shown up as her model and they were in the getting to know each other stage. Parting ways at the corner, he promised they'd get together for drinks sometime soon and as he ran up the steps to the library in search of a quiet reading nook, he was already thinking of the possibility of a little party, inviting his friends so they could all meet his Emma.

Walking across Harvard Yard, Emma stopped and stared up at the massive structure that was the Widener Library. Red brick, multiple stately columns and a grand staircase leading to the inside which was just as impressive as the outside. Climbing halfway up the stairs, she moved off to the right and hopped up on one of the ledges finding the cement a little cool on her behind, as expected on this October afternoon. Hoping Killian was finished with his reading, she pulled out her phone,
E: I'm out front waiting for you. ;-)

K: Good. I'm ready for you.

E: Shall I come to you?

K: No, Swan. Relax. Be right there

Tucking her phone back into her pocket, she swung her boot clad feet over the side while she waited.

Killian had been sitting staring at the same page of his Alternative Energies textbook for a while, not really comprehending what he was reading and so when Emma's text had pinged, he was more than grateful. Not only could he take a break from the grind of being a student for a short time, but he got to spend time with his girl. What more could a fellow want? Not lingering too long on that question, he packed his satchel, pulled on his jacket and wound his way through the cavernous study places of the library until he reached the front doors.

Pushing open the doors, he got as far as the columns before he saw her sitting up on a ledge swinging her feet like a school girl. She looks so pretty, he thought, sitting up there, her blonde hair shining in the low light of the autumn sun as it headed west preparing to set. Not wanting to wait any longer, he took the stairs as fast as possible. "There you are," he breathed her name, still a little in awe that they were together, finally.

She turned her head in his direction, her face lit by her beautiful smile. "Killian! I didn't pull you away from anything important, did I?"

"Nothing is as important as you," he grinned at her, "don't you know that?"

"Oh?" She smiled shyly. "You're important to me too, Killian."

Neither broke eye contact as fellow students moved up and down the steps around them, yet they only had eyes for each other. Killian moved closer, reaching his hands around her waist to help her off the ledge and into his arms where he aligned their bodies before pulling her in for a kiss. Just like every other time she kissed him, he lost track of his thoughts and surroundings, only able to focus on her. The softness of her lips as his explored the warmth of her mouth, as their tongues communicated in a language all their own and the way her body curved into his, a perfect fit.

Even through their layers of clothing, Emma could feel his body tightening, reacting to how she affected him just as her body was softening in its reaction to him. She didn't want to, but never being one for huge public displays of affection, she separated her lips from his and buried her cold nose in the V of his shirt where she discovered warm skin and sexy chest hair. Standing there, she allowed him to hold her as their breathing returned to normal and she thought she could string words together coherently. Once she felt sufficiently calmed, she backed away slightly, and looked up into his blue eyes. "Thank you for my surprise."

Looking down at her, his emotions there in his eyes for her to see, he kissed her once again, but this time very gently. A simple meeting of lips sharing of promise of more later, before helping her back up on the ledge and then moving up to straddle his legs around her. "I'm glad you liked it, Swan."

As they sat there on the ledge and talked about their day, she thought she would never tire of being this close to him. Exchanging stories of their past, hopes and dreams for the future. Periodically, conversation would veer in a direction and his eyes would darken with an emotion not yet ready to be named but for the most part, it was the joy of being together and happy.
As he turned to look out over the yard and she studied his profile, she had a vision of a small child learning about the first meeting of his parents. "So, this is where your parents met?"

He looked back at her and gave a gentle smile, "Aye, right here at the bottom of the steps is where my father ran right into my mum."

"It's so romantic. How long before your dad was able to 'court' your mom?"

The memory of the story reminded him why the picture of them dancing had been so familiar because he had seen a picture of his parents in exactly the same pose.

"They danced at The Burren," he told her quietly, before realizing it was getting cooler and they didn't have much time. "Care to walk?" When she agreed he hopped off the ledge and helped her down.

Tucking her arm in his, he led her down the stairs and they meandered through Harvard Square and around the campus. They talked about his parents and he admitted that he had gotten his idea to leave Emma tokens from his father.

"My mum was an art major," he smiled at her, "did I tell you that?"

"Really?" She smiled up at him, "That's, interesting. Did she paint?"

"Aye, she had quite the flair for water colors." As they walked, he continued to share stories of his family, including stories of him and his brother when they were younger. "We had some good times before my parents were taken from us far too early." His voice trailed off into nothingness.

"Maybe you can share the story of your parents' passing someday, Killian." There was hope in her voice as well as a little curiosity too.

Not saying anything immediately, Killian thought about sharing that time of his life with Emma and wondered what she would think of the fact that he had gone off the deep end for a time, even as far as wishing revenge on an already dead man. Would she think he was pathetic if she learned the full story?

"Maybe someday, Swan." He hugged her tighter against his side as they continued to walk.

When Killian had gone quiet, Emma worried that she had upset him, but when he answered and his voice was still tender, she relaxed as they continued walking. "What time is your meeting?"

He glanced at his phone before answering, "At 5:00. What do you have again?"

Emma explained how Thursday evenings, she and Ruby gave homework help to the children of the Home where they had grown up. "I usually get there by 6:00 and bring pizza."

They started walking towards the nearest T and talked about their schedules over the next few days. Killian backed her against a wall, settling his body against hers and covering her lips in a drugging kiss. When he lifted his head, Emma's was swimming and she felt as if she were floating on that proverbial cloud. "So, Swan," he kissed her again, "you promised to go out with me again. Saturday?"

Emma answered his question in the same way she had answered him when he had asked before and that was by covering his lips with hers. Their lips greedier for the others' created kisses that were more heated, their hands constantly roaming, moving from waists, to hips, to shoulders, tugging each closer. Hearing the T in the distance, knowing she needed to run, she tore her lips from his, leaving
him dazed and so very desirable that her tart side said, *screw the appointment and maybe him instead?* But her heart side slapped her down when she saw the tender look on Killian's face. That she could cause this wonderfully, caring man, such an emotional expression on his face, one that scared her as much as it excited her, was powerful.

"I've got to run, as do you." She slowly pulled away, heading toward the gate.

Just before she disappeared, she heard him call her name, and turned quickly to hear him say, "I'll call you later."

With a nod of her head, she raced through the gate and he was lost from sight, but, like every other time they separated, she had already started counting down the minutes when they would be together again.

*cs~cs~cs*

Stepping out of her bedroom in tall black boots, black leggings and a long cream sweater, Emma was in the process of pulling her hair up into a pony when she spotted the look on Elsa's face. "What?" She gulped, as she tried to still her run-away heart.

Elsa wrinkled her nose, "I love that outfit but it's not very romantic." She stood up and walked around Emma. "This is your first 'real' date. Take advantage."

Rolling her eyes at her friend, she disappeared into her bedroom and flipped through her closet looking for a dress that said romance. Choosing her pale pink dress with the full skirt and fitted bodice, she slipped it on and stepped out for Elsa's inspection. One look at her friend's face and she knew she would probably end up changing all over again. "You said romance, this dress screams romance."

"I'll give you that, it does scream romance, but now that I see it, I'm changing my mind." She shrugged her shoulder and walked into Emma's room to choose a dress on her own. Sliding the hangers across the rack one by one, she narrowed it down between black or red, both form fitting and both sexy. "Here, choose one of these. You want sexy."

When she walked out of the room leaving her to dress, Emma thought about her last words, "I want sexy, huh?" She sighed as she slipped out of the pink dress, and into the black one before straightening her hair and slipping on her black heels. Looking in the full-length mirror, making sure there were no panty lines, she smoothed the dress down over her hips and turned each way. Her lips curved into a seductive smile as she imagined Killian's hands following the same path, but moving even farther down bringing her dress up as he tracked his hand along her silky thigh. The fact that the vision was so clear excited her but she was still determined to listen to her heart, even though it was the other side that was causing the sparkle in her eyes. "Behave," she whispered to it as she turned off the light and left the room.

"Better?" She asked Elsa who smiled and took a quick picture that she forwarded to someone. "Let me guess, Ruby?"

Elsa nodded her head, "Of course! I think she's probably sent it along to Ashley and several others too." She looked down to check the text she had just received and smiled holding her phone up for viewing, "You got the thumbs up. My job is done." She walked to the door, turning at the last minute, "You need anything else?"

"I'm good Elsa. Thanks." Emma closed the door behind her friend before checking her appearance in the mirror one more time. Hearing a series of pings on her phone, she wondered which of her
friends was sending messages. Checking, she could only shake her head.

**Elsa:** Hang a scarf on the door if he stays over.

**Ruby:** Let your wild side out to play, honey.

**Ashley:** Love is worth it, Emma. You deserve love.

Such good friends, she thought blinking her eyes rapidly to dry the mistiness. Checking the time, she peered out the window as she heard a car in the drive.

cs~cs~cs

As he dressed for his date with Emma, he had to make a conscious effort to slow down because his bloody hands were shaking. Stepping out of the shower, he wrapped a towel around his waist and used a second one to dry his hair before draping it over his shoulder and studying himself in the mirror. He was over thirty years old, had been on more dates than he wanted to count and could never remember being this nervous. It was their first official date, sure, but they had spent considerable time together over the past week. He knew her and felt she was really getting a chance to know him. Why, then, were his hands shaking so badly he was afraid to shave for fear of harming himself?

Deciding against tempting fate, he left his scruff a bit longer than usual, brushed back his hair and tossed the towel aside. Pulling on his boxer briefs, he padded to the closet and paired them with a pair of black skinny jeans. He buttoned the jeans and reached for the tab to zip them, when half way up the zipper wouldn't move any farther.

Killian sat on the bed, spread his legs and tilted his hips up while he tried to figure out what the teeth had grabbed hold of, carefully as he was worried one wrong move and he could unman himself. Gently he teased the cotton away from the zipper teeth, however a wayward thought of Emma helping with the task, and the pressure and friction against a certain part of his body only served to create more of an issue as the space to work with became smaller. Thinking mundane thoughts and with continued gentle prodding, he was able to release his cotton brief material so the zipper slid right up. With a huge sigh of relief, he went to the closet to choose a shirt.

Taking one of his favorite long sleeve shirts off a hanger, Killian slipped his right arm into the sleeve and then reached around to slide his left into it, but bunching around the shoulders prevented it from sliding on smoothly. Thinking a little tug would unfold it enough, he pulled, except the extra adrenaline over the excitement of spending the evening with Emma proved to be too much for his favorite shirt. and with a *rip*, the shoulder opened up. "Bloody hell," he yelled, pulling the thing off and tossing it toward the bed.

Disgusted with his dressing mishaps and realizing he was running a little later than he liked, he didn't think, but just pulled one out of the closet, put it on and left his room while still buttoning it. When he reached the bottom, he realized he had skipped a button, and so unbuttoned them and started over. Sadly, in his haste, he had once again miscalculated, and had to repeat the process a third time before getting it right, much to Robin's enjoyment.

Robin quipped, "Do you need a lesson in how to use buttons, old man?" as he watched Killian finally complete the task and tuck his shirt tails into his pants, fastening his belt.

"Stuff it," Killian retorted back as he picked up his keys to go.

Robin sobered as he got a better look at Killian's face, "You're nervous, aren't you?"
Killian picked an invisible spec of lint off his shirt. "Aye, a bit," he admitted tugging on his ear lobe.

Nodding his head once, Robin gave him a sympathetic look, "It will be fine. Now shall I expect you home tonight?"

Shaking his head at his friend, Killian responded nonverbally, before shutting the door behind with Robin's laughter ringing in his ears.

Emma watched him get out of the car, shut the door and straighten his shirt. Brushing his hair off his forehead, he started the walk toward the front steps. She sighed with how good he looked and forced herself to swallow the extra moisture in her mouth, to keep from becoming a drooling mess.

As he disappeared from sight, she ran to the mirror to check her hair and lipstick one more time. Pleased with what she saw, she took several deep breaths hoping to calm her erratic heart rate. With her hands on her stomach to keep the butterflies still, she waited for the knock on the door.

When it came, she forced herself to count to ten and walk methodically to answer it. Her hand trembled as she reached for the handle and slowly pulled the door open to reveal the man she felt she had been waiting for her entire life. When he didn't immediately say anything, she tracked from the tips of his black boots up his body to his blue, blue eyes and the look on his face stopped her heart. The way he was looking at her was unlike any she had ever seen and truly made her feel that she was the treasure for which he had been searching.

He breathed her name, "Emma," softly, reverently, but loud enough that it sent shivers up her spine, making her want to step into his arms and never let go.

When she could no longer resist the call, she took a step meeting him half way in a gentle kiss. "I missed you." Reaching up with her thumb, she wiped off the lipstick left behind, and complimented him, "The color looks good on you."

He wagged his brows at her and winked, "Feel free to share anytime."

He watched as she walked back into apartment in her tight, form fitting dress thinking that he had never seen anything more beautiful. Her heels added height and as he watched her walk there was a grace and elegance in her movements that turned him inside out. So moved was he by the sight that looking away became necessary, to regain control of the direction of his thoughts, lest they run away with him. If his mum had caught him thinking of taking a tumble with a girl before buying her dinner, she would have kicked his arse.

"What just flitted through your mind?" Emma interrupted his wayward thinking and he realized that his thoughts had traveled in other directions while she had moved up beside him and touched his arm.

He looked down at her, a tender smile on his face. "I was thinking how sexy you looked tonight."

"Uh huh," she studied him, "there was more, but I'll let you have your secrets for now." Her smile came easily as he followed her out of the apartment and down the stairs.

On the drive to Toscano's, an Italian eatery in Harvard Square, he asked about the house where she lived and she shared about its conversion to apartments and how it belonged to a rather eccentric lady who lived in one of the apartments downstairs. Their conversation flowed smoothly and he was surprised, but pleased, when she opened up about the area of Boston that she grew up in and how different it was from Cambridge. "I sometimes feel like a fraud or I'm living a dream." She shrugged
her shoulder, "Weird, huh?"

He pulled into a parking place, shut off the car and, turning toward her, lifted her hand and kissed her fingers. "From where I'm sitting, Emma Swan you are very, very real." She gave him a little smile that encouraged him to continue, "And if we're living a dream, it's a really good dream, isn't it?"

"And it just keeps getting better and better." Her happiness was on her face for all to see as they left the car behind.

Walking into the restaurant, Killian kept her close, never letting her body stray far from his, happy to be seen and wanting to share that happiness with all.

"Have you ever eaten here?" he asked her quietly as they waited for the hostess to seat them.

"No, it's beautiful. Have you?" He shook his head as they were led to their table, giving Emma a chance to look around at the warm inviting room with its rich dark paneling on one side and brick on the other. The area they were led to had small, intimate tables, each decorated with white linens and crystal stemware. As she inhaled the garlic from the pasta dishes and the warm yeasty smell from the rolls her stomach growled in excitement and her mouth watered in anticipation.

Killian held her chair for her and as he pushed it in, he nuzzled he neck, bringing forth goosebumps that hadn't made an appearance yet tonight. "Mmm, you smell good," he whispered for her ears only.

She smiled at him as he removed his jacket, hanging it on the back and then settling in his chair. Leaning on the table, he seduced her with his eyes and a sexy smile until the waiter cleared his throat to bring them back to the present.

After placing their order, they allowed the staff to choose their wine and he brought them a bottle of rose, guaranteed to go well with both their meals. Emma watched Killian settle back in his chair while his fingers stroked the stem of the glass, almost hypnotizing her with their movement. Calling to her in a subtle, yet teasing manner. Making her want those same fingers stroking her in the same way.

Emma squirmed in her chair, readjusting herself, forcibly tearing her gaze away, looking for an innocuous line of conversation. "Tell me a story."

He immediately pushed his wine glass aside and leaned his arm the table, "A story, love? What type of a story would you like?"

Her mind was racing trying to come up with a topic that would interrupt this sensual haze that he kept pulling her into. But every time she looked at him, his eyes, his lips or his hands drew her right back, and the side she was trying to keep under control kept whispering in her ear, "Do it, do it, do HIM." Over and over again, almost drowning out her other side. "An eighteen-year-old's University story?"

He couldn't quite decide what the little vixen was thinking, but the fact that her pupils had dilated, she kept licking her lips and she couldn't seem to sit still in her seat gave him some idea. As he had been toying with the stemware with one hand, the other was in his lap, in a fist, fighting the way she was pulling at him. Their pheromones were proving almost too powerful and the constant struggle to keep his hands in neutral territory was almost overwhelming.

Logically, he knew the pace was too fast, but emotionally, the connection was there. He wanted her badly. When she asked for a story, he had felt relief, but waiting while she tried to come up with a suggestion and watching her squirm in her seat brought its own share of frustration. Knowing if he
brought her into his lap and started kissing her as he longed to do, there was a good chance they both would get what they wanted. But with Emma he had decided to follow a new path, *mind, heart and then body*, but bloody hell, it was getting harder and harder, both figuratively and literally.

The waiter set their plates in front of them, refilled their wine glasses and left them alone.

He started his tale by explaining that as a lad he had a deep thirst for understanding how something worked. "You can imagine mum's exasperation with me when she would happen into a room and I had taken apart something but couldn't figure out how to put it back together. Tossed out a few appliances, as it was less money to purchase new ones instead of hiring someone to repair them," he finished as he shook his head at the memory.

Moving on with the conversation he talked about how he and Robin had met and become roommates in the freshman dorms, both engineering majors, both on their own for their first time. Smiling at a story from right after the new semester started, he added, "So, one night, or rather the middle of the night, we were just getting to sleep when we kept hearing doors open and close and the squeaking prevented us from going to sleep." He laughed at the memory going on to tell her that he had sat straight up in bed claiming Mr. Fix-It was needed. Turned out they had a can of oil in their room and so there they were in their skivvies at 2:00 am going up and down the floor of their dorm and oiling all the squeaky hinges. "Took us bloody forever," he groused.

Emma laughed, "And just how did you get all the doors open?"

"Well," he got a sheepish look on his face, "that was part of the problem, you see. We didn't want to knock and wake them so Robin picked the locks."

Her eyebrows went up in surprise at that comment, "Robin picked the locks?"

"Aye, Swan, he did. He'd make a terrific thief."

"Did everyone thank you for taking care of their squeaky doors at least?"

"You'd have thought," he groused at her, "called us arseholes, instead." He shook his head at the memory. "We got them back, though, when we souped up our electric car and it left theirs behind." A far-away look came over his face, "I haven't thought of that time in years," he told her quietly, "it was too painful, but this was nice." He gave her a gentle smile and squeezed her hand.

After leaving the restaurant, they walked around Harvard Square as long as Emma's feet weren't too uncomfortable in her heels. Killian held her tight to his side as they walked, stopping to listen to a street musician here and there until, finally, her feet protested in such a way that he led her back to the car and tucked her inside with promises of a foot rub.

On the short drive back to her apartment, he slipped in a CD of the songs they had played at *The Burren* and just before reaching her street, his song started playing.

The dark car, the haunting music and Killian's sexy voice wrapped around Emma bringing tears to her eyes. He reached across the console to take her hand while the song continued. Closing her eyes, she leaned her head against the seat and listened closely as he sang the words directly to her.

"When I fall in love,
It will be forever
In a restless world, such as this is,
Love has ended before its begun
And too many moonlight kisses
Seem to cool in the warmth of the sun."

She felt him pull into the drive and put the car into park. As the ending music started, Emma opened her eyes to meet Killian's, looking at her as if he could see into her very soul. Leaning over the console, he cupped her cheek and sang,

"And the moment that I can feel that you feel the same way too,
Is when I'll fall in love with you."

As the words faded, he covered her lips in a searing kiss that left her tingling from the top of her head all the way down to his toes.

"Emma?" He ran his thumb along her bottom lip, as he sighed her name softly.

Her eyes were so heavy, she almost felt she were drugged, but with effort, she lifted them toward him, "Killian." Repeating his name like a prayer, as if he was what she had prayed for and her prayers had been granted.

Killian was looking at her so seriously, she wasn't exactly sure what he was going to say, "Emma, if you invite me up, there will definitely be some of this," and leaning forward he gave her a hot but way too short kiss," and quite possibly some of this," he put his hand on her thigh running it up just under her dress, causing a slight hiccup in her breathing. "Anything else is up to you."

She didn't say anything but studied his face in the darkened car. He was in shadow but she could see his eyes studying her intently and the light from outside glistening off his bottom lip, still damp from their kiss. "I trust you Killian. Come up?"

The smile that lit his face was a sight to behold even in the dark space and before barely any time had passed he was out of the car, pulling her door opened and she was in his arms. Tightening her hold around his neck, she lifted her chin allowing him to sink into the kiss. She felt like a school girl who had brought her boyfriend home and any minute they would be caught necking. When a car drove by and their headlights illuminated them, eliciting a honk, they broke apart, both breathing heavily.

"Let's go up." She stated.

"With pleasure." Killian followed her upstairs to her apartment.

Chapter End Notes

Was I right? How many smiles? What do you think is next for our couple?
Chapter 6

Chapter Summary

The love between Emma and Killian continues to grow.

Chapter Notes

Some will be happy the tension carried over from Chapter 5, others might yell at me. I hope whichever camp you fall into, you will enjoy what I have planned.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Chapter 6

He was in that state of sleep where his eyes were closed and he was aware of what was going on around him, yet they refused to open and, if he allowed it, could easily sink back into that dream state. As usual, this had happened as he'd been in the throes of a really good dream and something startled him awake, pissing him off.

His dream world had started with reality when his mind had replayed over again what had happened when he followed her up the stairs after their date. A time he assumed would be replayed several more times, both awake as well as asleep. She had been exactly where he had been longing to have her for months and once he had her there, he planned to savor every moment.

Following her up the stairs to her apartment, watching the sway of her delectable behind in that tight dress had served to keep the fire burning that the outside kiss had started. Once inside her apartment, he had sat on the sofa watching her flit around the room, almost as a butterfly flits from flower to flower. She lit a candle in one corner, started music in another before pouring them a drink that neither really wanted and finally made her way to where he sat waiting.

Looking up at her as she stood in front of him, he wanted nothing more than to take her in his arms and show her how much she had come to mean to him as well as how good it would be between them, but her fear held him back. She was like a skittish colt that would run if he happened to be too close too fast. "Your home, love, your rules," his promise to her still holding true.

She hadn't said anything but had given him a skeptical look like she didn't believe what he was saying.

"Whatever we become is up to both of us. Will you meet me halfway?" A bolder comment but one he hoped didn't frighten.

When she had put her small hand in his, he had wanted to shout his happiness from the rooftops but instead drew her slowly down onto his lap where he just held her. Having her in his arms felt more wonderful than he could have ever imagined and right then he cursed anything or anyone who threatened them. She was and always would be his future.
When she had cupped his face and given him her lips, his body had stood up to join the party. Needing to feel all of her, they had stretched out on the sofa, their hands and lips busy reaching for what they so desperately needed. Their pulses racing and breaths coming quick hadn't slowed the need to touch for either as she quickly unbuttoned his shirt, running her hands up over his chest, followed closely by her lips.

When her lips had moved through the swirls of hair on his chest, it had felt like fire trailing across his skin, and the need to reciprocate nearly overwhelmed him. Slipping her dress strap aside, he kissed his way down to her collarbone while his hand was busy discovering the secrets underneath. The hem of her dress slid easily up allowing him to cup her behind, pulling her tighter into his body, letting her feel what she was doing to him.

Knowing he was falling head over arse for this woman and realizing how in sync they were was something he didn't believe he would ever be over. Their bodies were ready to take that giant leap, but their hearts needed time to catch up and, almost simultaneously, they had slowed their roving hands and lips and just held each other.

His body aching but his heart at peace had found him home between the sheets, alone as he had been every other night for over a year. And while their mutual exploration had reached an end point, in his dreams the adventures had continued.

His dream world had continued by allowing him to wrap her in his arms, in his bed, with clothing disappearing. But no matter how much he willed it, once disturbed his dream world remained elusive to him. "Bloody hell," he grunted opening his eyes to a hazy room, his body hard and wanting. Snaking his arm down, he took himself in hand, hoping to relieve some tension and groaned in pleasure as a picture of Emma filled his mind. He had just sunk into his fantasy world when a buzz interrupted the quiet around him, bringing him to the realization that an incoming text had been what had pulled him from that dream.

Knowing there was only one person who would dare text him this early, he picked up the phone, "Wanker, why are you calling me this bloody early? I could have been busy doing other more enjoyable activities."

"What do you have to do more enjoyable than greeting the new day talking to me, little brother," Liam replied cheerfully.

Lying back on the bed, Killian covered his eyes with his arm while listening to Liam prattle on about his new position within Nemo's company and how they couldn't wait until after graduation when he and Robin moved to NYC to join them. There were plans to be made and domains to be conquered by the brothers Jones.

"So, little brother," Liam asked, "anything new with you?"

Killian was anxious to share his news and finally blurted, "I found Emma, Liam."

On the other end of the line, Killian could hear Liam moving papers around as if he wasn't really engaged in what was being said. Finally, he huffed out, "Emma? Who is this Emma you speak about?"

Killian shook his head to make sure he was awake as he was positive that he had mentioned Emma. He pinched the bridge of his nose and wished-for patience, "Aye, Emma. You know, the lass I've been searching for since last year?"

"Oh, if you say so."
Figures, thought Killian as that's been typical of his behavior toward me and my life since the demise of his marriage. And since he had obviously checked out of the conversation, then what was the reason he had called? "So, Liam, why did you call me this early in the morning?"

Liam went on to tell Killian that he and Nemo were going to England in November and wanted him to accompany them. As was typical, his schedule had been dismissed as if it wasn't as important as what Liam had planned. As had become the norm when discussing his life with his brother, he was made to feel like the small child who couldn't make his own decisions.

"Sorry, Liam but I'm going to decline this time. Maybe you can come up at Christmastime and meet Emma."

Liam was noncommittal, as Killian had expected him to be and feeling properly chastised, he made his excuses and hung up the phone, feeling more unsettled about Liam's behavior than usual. Knowing there was no way he would get back to sleep, he decided a shower was in order, and then maybe if he was lucky, he could talk his girl into meeting him before class.

**Middle October**

Emma stretched and opened her eyes feeling carefree for the first time this semester. Somehow all of her exams had fallen at the same time, which meant today she was gloriously free, a strange phenomenon for a graduate student. Sadly, she couldn't say the same thing about her boyfriend who was spending the day with his engineering team at one of their competitions, and usually, those lasted long into the night.

When she checked the clock, she couldn't believe how late it was, and though whiling away the day in bed was tempting, she would save that for some day when a certain dark headed gent could join her. He was proving he was part pirate by stealing her heart; finding out what other tricks he was hiding up his sleeve might be fun too.

Rolling out of bed and dressing for the day, she couldn't imagine anything better than to spend her free day drawing, but not in her stuffy apartment. She was going to the beach. The weather was cool but with the sun shining and very little wind, it would be perfect. And then on her way home, she would have a grilled cheese at Granny's. Pleased with her plans, she grabbed a canvas bag, stuffed it with a towel, her art supplies and a bottle of water. Dressed in jeans and layers, she caught the T, arriving at one of her favorite sights, Revere Beach, in a little under ninety minutes.

The first order of business of removing shoes and rolling up pants' legs was taken care of and Emma sunk her toes in the cool soft sand. The beach in the summer, usually covered with colorful umbrellas, bright beach towels, and people, was empty save for one person using a metal detector and a lone schooner sitting on the horizon, its sails unfurled.

Walking down toward the shore, she lifted her face to the sun and soaked up what might be the last warmth from the sun until spring. With the waves crashing against the sand and the birds circling overhead she couldn't have chosen a better way to spend her free day. Finding a place close to the water, she spread out her towel, sat down and, pulling out her art supplies, started sketching her world around her.

She wasn't sure how long she had been sitting, but long enough to feel stiff, when she looked down at what she had drawn and had to shake her head. Her beach scenery had morphed with her imagination and she had drawn the schooner in the far distance flying a pirate flag and in the near distance, on the beach, a pirate - apparently Captain Hook, locked in a steamy embrace with a blonde.
Wondering if she had just come up with their costumes for the Halloween Party they had been pulled into helping at the Home, she took a picture and sent it to Killian thinking when he was on break, he would surely have a comment. She didn't have to wait long for a response.

K: Something you're trying to tell me, love?

E: What do you think?

K: I think if you could turn me into Captain bloody Hook you would.

If only he knew, Emma thought. She had shown him a few of her drawings but hadn't quite gathered the nerve to tell him that she had been drawing Hook since she was sixteen. That might be a secret for later.

E: No worries. I like you just the way you are.

K: I wish I was there so you could show me.

She giggled at his suggestive comment, realizing that since their date and subsequent make out session on her sofa, the heavier the flirting and the more suggestive the comments. They hadn't resorted to sexting or sexy pictures, but their schedules hadn't meshed much lately and if that didn't change soon all bets were off.

E: I wish you were too, but I'm at the beach so that might be difficult.

K: Haven't you heard where there's a will, there's a way?

E: And you think you have the will?

K: I'm pretty sure you've not seen a will quite like mine before.

Emma looked out at sea, letting the breeze blow across her face that was suddenly feeling a little too warm on this fall day. Trying to decide how she wanted to respond, she picked up her phone with her thumbs hovered over the keyboard, before finally, she allowed them to fly.

E: Is that so? You planning to show me that will anytime soon?

Feeling a nervous giggle bubbling up, she tossed her art supplies back in her bag and took a drink of water. When he didn't answer right away, she assumed he must have been called back to the competition and tossed her phone aside.

Leaning back on her elbows, she couldn't help but wish he was sitting there with her, holding her in his arms. The memory of their first kiss, never far from her mind, brought a silly grin to her face, making her feel giddy as if it had just happened. And what a glorious kiss it was too, she thought as she brought her fingers up and gently rubbed them back and forth across her lips.

The look in his eyes right before their lips had met touched something deep inside of her, pulling her closer and closer, causing a chill to run up and down her spine. And the way he kissed her, softly sucking on her top lip and then running his tongue across her bottom one before sealing their lips, melted her heart. The contrast between the petal softness of his lips with the coarse hairs from his beard served to cause tingling in zones that hadn't tingled in a while.

So quickly had her heart been racing that she had been amazed when her knees hadn't given out right there in front of her door. When he had wrapped her in his arms, pulling her tightly to him, she truly did feel like she was home and had no desire to be anywhere else.
She bit the corner of her lip thinking about how sweet he had tasted. A little like butterscotch, but not quite, which had surprised her as she hadn't seen him drinking anything but water. A taste that she hadn't gotten enough of and wondered when she could have more.

Of course, thinking about how he tasted led her to thoughts of the many kisses they had shared the night of their dinner date to Toscano's. When they had arrived back at her apartment and she had lain in his arms, kissing him, touching him, his taste like wine, his pasta, the rum she had poured them and something that was so uniquely him, she hadn't been able to get enough. That they had simultaneously realized that a point of no return had almost been reached and had chosen to back off at the same time, was what made him so special. Would any other man that she had ever dated done the same? She didn't think so.

Tearing her thoughts away from a set of lips that were getting her worked up just from thinking about them, she looked back out at sea to let the cool air tame her ardor. A lone bird was circling and, following his path of flight, she watched it fly off up the beach before landing next to...

"Killian," she yelled and took off running up the beach toward the very man who had been leading her thoughts in directions not meant for the public. When she got close enough to see the smile on his face, she dug in a little deeper and jumped into his arms knowing without a doubt that he would catch her.

"How? Why?" she kept repeating over and over as she peppered his face with kisses, never landing in one place for very long before moving on to another area.

He cupped her face with his hands. "I've missed you," he whispered before covering her lips with his. When their mouths touched, the world seemed to stop, wrapping them in a little bubble where the only thing that mattered was how well they meshed together. How easily his tongue slid over hers, sipping, sucking, moving easily from a shallow kiss to something deeper, threatening to take her very breath.

When they broke apart, he tucked her against his side and they began walking back toward her things. "How are you here?" She was so happy to see him, yet so very shocked at the same time.

He smiled down at her, "You did say something about wanting to see my will, didn't you?"

She turned toward him and wrapped both her arms around his middle while they walked. "That's right I did. Ready to show it to me?"

He gave her a teasing smile. "Anytime, anywhere, babe," and then laughed at the shocked look on her face. Lifting her chin up slightly with his finger, he kissed her. "You should know, love, I'm always up," he popped his p, and winked at her before continuing, "that won't ever change with you in my life."

Emma shook her head at him, and sat down on the towel, pulling him down with her. "You're trouble."

He grinned, "Aye, that's what me mum used to say, but she loved me anyway." He laid down bringing her into the circle of his arms, settling her head onto his shoulder while gently rubbing his fingers along her side. "This is nice. I've been thinking of it all day."

She didn't think he was aware of her body's reaction to his gentle ministrations but everywhere he touched became highly sensitized, waiting and watching, never completely relaxing. Focusing on what he was saying and not on the way he was making her feel was not the easiest and she had to admit that quite often while he was telling her about his day, her thoughts had veered into dangerous territory. None more so than when she slid her hand up his hard abs to tangle in the swirls of hair.
visible from the V in his shirt, and he groaned in pleasure, making her realize she had no idea what he had just been talking about.

Kilian's voice trailed off, "Emma?" His came out sounding strangled and tight.

"What?" She pushed herself up on an elbow so she could look down into his face.

"You know what I need?" His pupils were large, even in the light, almost covering the blue of his eyes and they burned into hers, searing her soul.

She didn't answer him with words but bent down covering his mouth with hers. He immediately opened his lips rolling them onto their sides, aligning their bodies. As the kiss continued to deepen, he palmed her behind, tugging her even closer, inserting one leg between hers and pushing it tight against her body. Emma's breath left and she had no thoughts but to capture that elusive feeling that was rising up inside of her. Pushing herself against his leg, her slow movements applied just the right pressure in just the right place. Higher and higher she rode, her hand moving up and down Killian's back, before slipping into his back pocket pushing his hips into hers even more. She could feel what she was doing to him and, wanting nothing more than to experience it with him, she poured herself into the kiss.

Killian moved his hand, tangling his fingers in her blonde locks, pulling her head back and burying his lips against her neck. He couldn't stop himself from latching on, where he would suck just hard enough to bring a little sting, and then he would immediately soothe the sting with his tongue. She moaned and her hips picked up speed, creating both heaven and hell at the very same time. He wasn't sure how much longer he was going to be able to continue before the place of no return was reached, but she felt so good, he was willing to endure a little more pain.

From a distance, Killian heard a buzzing that would stop, and then start up again, like a swarm of bees or a pesky fly that is persistent in your ear. Finally, he couldn't stand it any longer, blurting, "Bloody hell, Emma! What is that infernal noise?"

Emma gazed at him, still in an erotic haze, hearing but not registering, her lips still swollen from his kisses. Finally, as if awakening from a trance, her eyes cleared and as she registered the sound, she clambered away to dig through her bag. Pulling out her phone, he saw her eyes go round and her face lose color as she read a text message and immediately listened to her voice message. When her hands dropped in her lap and tears filled her eyes, he felt fear.

"Emma?" He moved closer to her and reached down for her hands, squeezing her fingers. "What happened?"

She leaned her head against his shoulder, "It's Blue, Killian." She stopped to rummage in her bag for a tissue before continuing, "She had a heart attack and is in the CCU at Mass General. Will you take me?" She raised her eyes to his while waiting for his answer.

"Of course, love." They picked up the towel and while she was putting on her shoes, he folded it, storing it back in the bag. Taking her hand, he led her to the car and they left the beach for the drive to Massachusetts General Hospital.

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They got off on the Cardiac Care Unit floor and were walking down the hall toward the waiting room when Killian spotted Victor Whale walking toward them, a chart under his arm.

"Jones," he shook Killian's hand, "looks like you found your girl." He smiled at them standing
"Aye, Whale, I did. This is Emma." He pulled her closer to his side afraid that she would fall. "We're here to check on a friend of hers, Blue..."

"Emma?" Ruby, recognizing Killian's voice, came out of an open door.

"Oh, Ruby," Emma rushed forward and hugged her friend. "What happened?"

Ruby sniffed and wiped her eyes, "I don't know exactly. Marion found her collapsed on the floor of her office and called 911. I told her to stay with the kids, then I called you and here we are." She frowned and looked back and forth between Emma and Killian. "Where were you, by the way? It's not like you to take so long responding."

Emma felt her face flame and looking over at Killian saw the tips of his ears turning red. "I was drawing at the beach and Killian found me." She shrugged her shoulders, "Besides you know how noisy the beach can be?"

Ruby raised a brow, and then smiled mischievously, and flicked her long red nail, pushing Emma's collar aside, and winked, "Good thing Killian found you, isn't it?"

Emma pulled her collar closer and moved her hair around front, "Sorry, Ruby."

Tucking her arm through Emma's, she turned toward what was assumed to be Blue's room. "Victor said she may need a pacemaker in the future. In the meantime, they are going to try a medication to see if that helps the arrhythmia and if not, they will cross that bridge then."

Just before they crossed the threshold into the room, Emma turned, making eye contact with Killian and mouthed, "Victor?" Making him wonder just how long Ruby had been trying to reach Emma on the phone.

Victor halted outside the hospital room, "I thought you and Robin had something going today?"

"We pulled out. Fine by me though, as I'm happy I was there for Emma."

Victor smirked, "Yes, it was apparent by that mark on her neck how happy you were to be needed."

"Bloody hell, Whale, are we in grammar school still?" He peeked in the door of Blue's room to check on the girls and saw them standing close together next the bed. "Is Emma's Blue really going to be fine?"

Victor peered around him to see in the room. "Barring any complications, she should be fine, but will be in here a few days." He checked his watch, "If you'll excuse me, I have rounds."

"Thanks, Victor. Catch you later."

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She looks so still," Emma whispered to Ruby as they stood next to Blue's bed waiting for her to open her eyes.

Ruby squeezed her hand, "She does, but you know it won't last. She'll wake up and begin giving orders just like always.

"I know." She looked around the room, noticing that Blue was hooked up to an IV pole that was steadily sending something to her body as well as a machine that displayed the steady beep beep of
her heart. "So, Victor? How did that come about?"

Ruby smiled down at her, "I'll tell you about Victor if you tell me about that mark on your neck."

She changed the subject as the guilt was almost overwhelming what had started out as one of the best days of her life. "I'm sorry I took so long to answer the phone and you had to be here alone, Ruby," she subconsciously rubbed the spot that just a short time ago Killian had been lavishing with attention.

"Emma," Ruby began, "we love you but you aren't expected to be the savior of us all. You are allowed to have a life, you know." She looked toward the door, "And if spending time with a certain hunky man who nibbles on your neck, well more power to you, I say," she finished just as Blue opened her eyes.

Killian stepped into the room and watched Emma fingering the mark he had left behind just a few hours ago. He probably should apologize for leaving it but if truth be known and circumstances were different, he currently would be busy leaving marks in quite a few other places not as easily seen. However, that train of thought did nothing for his body's state of discomfort.

When she turned and walked his way, he opened his arms, folding them around her lithe frame as she leaned against his chest. "What can I do for you, Swan?" He wished he could take away her pain but would settle if she just shared her burden, even a small amount.

She looked up at him, a pensive expression on her face while her teeth worried her bottom lip. "I wouldn't say no to a grilled cheese and onion rings."

Kissing her on the cheek, he smiled, thinking of a good place to procure those not far away. "I know just the place." After obtaining Ruby's order, he was on his way to Granny's to get Emma the best grilled cheese in Boston.

Not long after Killian left, Dr. Whale came in to check on Blue and Emma studied Ruby's reaction to him. She practically drooled over the poor man, and as he examined the patient, she never moved far away. However, to be fair, it wasn't all one-sided as he did his share of yearning, too, with lingering looks, gentle touches, and flashes of his dimples. As soon as he gave them an update and left the room, Emma looked at Ruby, amazement all over her face.

Trying to ignore her, Ruby pretended to study her nails, but finally tossed her long hair over her shoulder and cracked a smile, "What?"

Giving an exaggerated eye roll, Emma snorted, "Seriously? That's all you're going to say?"

"I like him," She giggled, her smile wide and wolfish, showing lots of teeth. "In fact, I invited him to the Halloween Party."

Emma's brows went up, "Oh?" The fact that Ruby had invited someone she just met to the House was interesting indeed.

Caving under Emma's inquisition, Ruby shared the whole story about how, when he had treated Blue, in the beginning, they had recognized each other from the Lucky Strike. And then he asked if she knew Emma and the next thing she knew they had exchanged numbers and he had taken her for coffee. "And now that I have addressed your questions, it's your turn." She leaned forward moving aside Emma's collar. "Spill the details, my friend."

Emma opened her mouth two or three times, but nothing came out. She wasn't quite the 'kiss and tell' kind of girl that Ruby was but she guessed Ruby deserved some information. "It was..." she got out,
only to be saved by the opening of the door.

With his hands full, Killian turned to back into the room when he heard Ruby asking Emma to spill the details, and couldn't help his curiosity at what she might say. When she hesitated, he decided she might need saving and continued on into the room, "Granny's to Go, anyone?"

Emma gave him a smile of gratitude, and while it could have been for the meal, he decided to take it as a 'thanks for saving me' smile. Passing out their food, he ended up telling the story about how he had discovered Granny's, but once dinner was over, he knew it was time for him to take his leave.

"Emma, love," he held out his hand, "walk me out?"

Goodbyes were made and they walked quietly down the hallway toward the elevator, where he moved her into a quiet alcove, pulled her into his arms and covered her lips. Kissing her reminded him of what had been happening with them earlier in the day, making him want all over again. Groaning, he felt his body tightening and before things got too uncomfortable, he disengaged and pushed the elevator button.

Emma gave him a sympathetic look. "I'm sorry, I didn't mean to..." She whispered quietly.

He kissed her hand and quipped, "It's not like it's been the first time a part of my anatomy has been blue because of you, Swan."

"Just so you know," she smiled shyly, "you're not the only one who's uncomfortable."

A pained expression crossed his face, "Bloody hell Emma. Don't leave me with the vision of you pleasuring yourself, unless..."

She jammed her hands in her back pockets, shrugged a shoulder and gave him a flirty smile, "Unless?"

His look was seductive as the elevator doors opened and he stepped in. "Mutual facetime?" He winked just as the doors shut.

**Late October**

Killian and Robin arrived at the Home together, but in separate cars and stood back to admire the decorations that some of the residents had spread around the lawn. "Looks really good, I'd say," Robin commented as they walked up the steps and rang the button. "Why are we here early again?"

Killian shrugged a shoulder as he finished buttoning the red vest and stuck one arm into the sleeve of the long, black, leather duster he had chosen. "This bugger's heavy," he moaned as he slipped it on the other arm. "But I do look rather dashing, don't you think?"

Robin smirked, "I'm not sure that's the word I would use but if it makes you happy, I'll not argue at this time." He adjusted his cape and reseated the quiver he had tossed over his shoulder. "Now I, on the other hand..." he started to say before the door opened, leaving both men looking daft as they stood there in shock.

Killian struggled to close his mouth and think of something to say but as nothing could have prepared him for what he was witnessing, he found himself speechless. Glancing at Robin showed that he was experiencing the same feelings and after a few minutes of silence Sister Blue took pity on them and waved them inside with what appeared to be a wand.

"Boys," she exclaimed, her eyes twinkling with mirth, "what's the problem? Never met a blue fairy?"
Recovering first, Killian swallowed audibly, "I can't say I have, but you look quite fetching if I may say so. Much better than that hospital gown you were sporting when last our paths crossed."

She blushed, "No wonder Emma adores you. You do have a way with words."

The same silly grin that always crossed his face when Emma's name was mentioned made an appearance, "She said that? She adores me?" He stood up a little taller and puffed out his chest. "Forgive me manners," he turned up the accent, "allow me to introduce my good friend Robin Locksley, but tonight he is Robin Hood."

"Enchante, Sister, I've heard so much about you and your wonderful work here with the children. Where would you like us to start?"

Killian rolled his eyes at the way his friend had gone from grousing to simpering fool in the presence of a female.

Blue met his gaze and winked before turning around, "Follow me, boys, we have some work to do."

Emma had class the night of the Halloween party, and so she was riding with Ruby who had brought the yellow bug all the way to Cambridge to pick her up along with Elsa. Unpacking the items that she had picked up from the costume shop she shook out the long dress with its voluminous skirt and low-cut bodice, snickering at what she imagined Killian's expression to be when he saw her. Something told her he was going to be gobsmacked and if a little luck was on their side they would end up back here, finishing what they had started a few weeks ago. Her patience had grown thin.

On the off chance, her wish came true, she had purchased new lingerie from the Victoria's Secret catalog she found lying around the TA's office and planned to wear it under her dress. Cream satin panties and a strapless bra with tiny pink ribbons holding the center of the cups and the sides of her panties together. One tug was all that would be required before they fell at her feet, a surprise she expected Killian to enjoy.

Showered, lotioned and silky smooth, she slipped on the new garments, admiring the way they looked against her skin. A petticoat and then the long dress was pulled over her head, leaving only the bodice left to close. Pulling the strings, she tightened the top but left a decent amount of cleavage showing, thinking an evening of foreplay would push their willpower to new levels, but one spark to the fuse and a veritable powder keg of emotion would likely combust.

Killian sat at a table surrounded by several females, all underage, all vying for his attention, and his patience for fending off nubile adolescents with friendly banter had just about reached its end. If Emma didn't show up shortly, he was planning to go hide in a powder room he had discovered down a hallway, away from the festivities, and best of all, away from feeling like a prize being dangled on the end of a line.

"Where is she?" he thought again, just as the woman front and center on his mind, dropped her hands down on the table in front of him.

"What are you boys playing?" She asked in a sultry voice, her bodice drooping to reveal treasures inside that he planned to explore very soon.

Emma had arrived at the party and immediately started looking for her man. She was dying to see what he had chosen to wear to depict Captain Hook, but if she knew him, sexy would take
precedence over silly as Hook was so often represented in the Disney movies. When she spotted him sauntering toward a table, she had to grab on to the wall to catch her breath.

"I am so dead," she sighed as she cataloged his outfit from head to foot. Large collar black shirt, unbuttoned down to the middle of his torso, covered by a double breasted red brocade vest, topping black leather breeches that hugged in all the appropriate places and all topped by a black leather duster that swirled around his calves as he walked. And if that weren't enough, he had added rings, chains and if, she wasn't mistaken, outlined his eyes with black eyeliner, bringing out their blue and adding to his mysterious air.

As she watched him sit, she shook her head because just like the first day he had modeled for her class, he was quickly surrounded by females, all vying for his attention in one form or another. A look of annoyance crossed his face several times, and his eyes constantly scanned the crowd, looking for her no doubt, but seeing the patience with which he responded to each person made her love him more. "There," she thought, "I finally admitted it," and giggled with relief for allowing the thought to fully form in her head. "I love him, and tonight I'm not only going to show him but also tell him."

Determined to claim her man, she made her way over to where he was sitting and leaned over the table, allowing her bodice to droop, knowing that her new satin was on display, as were the parts spilling out over the top. As soon as he had heard her voice and looked up at her, Killian's mouth dropped open and the most delicious look covered his face.

When he looked up into his Swan's eyes and saw her standing there, wearing a low-cut dress meant to tempt even the strongest man and sporting a sly smile that said she understood just what he was thinking, his brain ceased to function as all its blood flew south. Licking his lips, allowing a little time for recovery, he smiled up at her, "Swan, I've been waiting for you."

"I see you've had company while you've been waiting, though." She looked toward the girls seated next to him, "Violet, Grace, give us a minute?"

He noticed the sour look they shot her way before standing up, but not without taking the opportunity to rub against him once more, making him grit his teeth as they walked away. "Nicely done, love. Care to come and sit? I'd come to you but am afraid I'd embarrass myself."

She smirked at him as she moved around the table, sitting with her back to it, and close to the V of his legs where he sat straddling the bench. Her nearness was doing things to his body that might not be appropriate in this type of setting and he promised himself that after a few more impure thoughts, he would be nice the rest of the night. Leaning closer, he kissed her neck just under her left ear, smiling to himself when he caught her shudder and heard her barely-there moan.

She leaned into him even more and turned to him offering her lips. He could no more resist them then a thirsty man could resist water, and captured them in a thoroughly satisfying but all too short kiss. Deciding that if he continued playing with fire, he most certainly would get burned and embarrass himself, and quite possibly Emma, he forced himself to turn his attention to the party. "So, Swan, tell me about your friends."

When he released her lips and sat back trying to get himself under control, Emma licked her lips slowly, savoring his taste while working on her breathing and slowing down her pulse. When he had asked about the party goers, she was relieved one of them could be strong, because any more hot kisses and she wasn't sure she'd be able to stop.

Looking around the room, she smiled at the costumes that people were wearing, and spotting her best friends, took Killian's hand and pointed, "Little Red Riding Hood is, of course, Ruby, and the very pregnant woman over there," she pointed to where Ashley, who was rubbing her stomach slowly,
was sitting next to Marion, "is Ashley, and she is married to Sean."

When she finally found the Sisters, who were manning the table where all the food was laid out, she explained how Blue mothered everyone. And Sisters Green and Astrid were considered the big sisters who often shared their secrets. "It wasn't the same as growing up with a mother and father but we were a family," she finished quietly.

He moved closer to her on the bench, "How did you come to be here, Swan?"

Leaning her head on his shoulder, she opened up to him about her beginnings and told him about being left when she was just hours old. "You know, I used to wonder what it was about me that made them not want me but as I got older, I realized I was luckier than a lot of other children in the world. I had Ruby and Ashley and Blue, Green and Astrid. And now," she hesitated and smiled at him, through slightly misty eyes.

"You have me," he finished for her.

Cupping his cheek, she leaned in for a kiss. "And I have you," she repeated.

They stared at each other, getting lost in each other's eyes, wishing they were alone, but knowing it would be at least a few more hours. Killian cleared his throat, "When is your friend's baby due?" He asked as he watched Ashley stand up and move off down a hallway in a waddling motion.

Emma smiled at her friend's way of walking, "Oh, she's not due for another month, around Thanksgiving, I believe, but she's milking the pregnant belly thing."

When Ashley disappeared from sight, Emma resumed her perusal of the room and noticed that Sean was locked in some game with Robin and a new little boy to the house, Roland. Look at Robin, she pointed at them across the room. "He looks like he's having a good time."

"Aye, that he does, but that doesn't surprise me," Killian smiled at Robin's enthusiasm for the game, "he will be a wonderful father someday."

Watching a tender smile cross his face, she had to know, "Do you want children someday, Killian?"

Killian watched Emma's expressions change as she talked about her friends and family growing up in this House. He had known for a while that he was in love with her, but knowing what a remarkable woman she was after such a daunting beginning, he loved her even more. He was hopeful that he would be able to share that revelation with her before long.

When she asked him if he wanted children, her question surprised him, as he wasn't aware that he had been so transparent. "Aye, Swan, I do, very much. And you? Do you want children?"

She didn't look away but didn't answer for so long a part of him prepared for the worst, but as soon as that shy smile appeared, he relaxed his body waiting for her response. "I used to never let myself think about that possibility because what do I know about being a mother? But," she smiled at him, rubbing her hand along his thigh, "lately I've been thinking maybe."

Her answer sent his heart soaring, for he knew without any question that her feelings for him were a part of why she was thinking of a future and a family. Without thinking, which happened quite often when he was around her, he acted, cupping her face and kissing her, pouring everything he was feeling into that kiss. Gently releasing her lips, he stood up, pulling her with him and into his arms. "You're dangerous. Shall we mingle?"
After leaving Killian with Robin, Roland, and Sean, Emma found Ruby fussing over Ashley. "Ashley? Are you feeling alright?"

"I'm just tired, Em, that's all." She took their hands and moved to a small sofa off in a corner and sank down, sighing loudly and rubbing the bottom of her distended stomach. Noticing both Ruby and Emma looking on with concern, she shushed them, "It's just Braxton Hicks, which are very common. Now enough about me," she squeezed Emma's hand, "you like him, don't you?"

Looking over where he was still playing games with Robin and a few others, she smiled. "I more than like him. I love him," she shared with her two friends.

"Oh, Emma, that's wonderful," they said simultaneously before Ruby continued, "and he loves you." She said it with such finality that Emma believed it to be true.

"I hope so." She looked at Ruby, "Where's Victor tonight? I thought he was coming?"

Ruby made a face, "He was planning on it but an emergency came up and he was called into the hospital. But if I'm going to be with a doctor, I'd better get used to it." Ashley and Emma made sympathetic noises as Elsa and Marion walked over to see what they had missed.

Conversation flowed easily, and eventually Blue, Green, and Astrid had joined the circle of women. Elsa and Marion were the only two who hadn't been around when they were children, and like other times, they started telling stories of when they had been young. The stories were not all about one girl, nor were they about the same girl, but moved around, each having her turn for a rather embarrassing event. Knowing the stories by heart, Emma listened with half an ear, and feeling eyes on her, looked into the heated stare of her man. Feeling a blush rise, she sent him a quick smile and turned back to the conversation at hand.

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Killian looked around the room at all the people and wondered how much longer before he would get to that alone time that Emma had been promising him. Since that day at the beach when he had gotten a tiny taste of how she would feel in his arms, he had been counting the minutes until all of his dreams could come true and he would have her in his arms, in his bed, clothing definitely not an option.

He had been watching her all evening, moving from group to group, so comfortable with all these people and in this setting that he had never been prouder that she was his as he was at this very minute. She wasn't pretentious or fake, but 100% real and he wanted nothing more than to show her how he was feeling. And with their luck, there always seemed to be someone or something that was in the way.

As she walked by him, he grabbed her elbow to get her attention and then tugged her down a side hallway into a powder room, off limits to guests. Once inside he shut and locked the door, pulling her in front of him to face the mirror that reflected back at them; a bar wench and the pirate who had been needing to do some plundering all evening long. Dropping his hook attachment into the sink with a clank, he moved her hair aside, rubbing his cheek against the short, soft hairs that rested just below her ear.

"You have tempted me all evening, wench," he breathed into her ear, eliciting a shiver and a tightening of her body.

She let her head drop back on his shoulder, turning her lips against his jaw. "And you don't think I haven't been tempted, seeing you strut around in those tight leather pants all evening that covered
"your," she flicked her eyes downward in the mirror, "rather delectable assets?" she reproached him.

He kissed his way down to her collarbone until his lips came into contact with the gathered neckline covering woman that he hadn't seen, hadn't held in his hands or kissed with his lips. Too long, he thought. It's been too long.

Running his lips back up toward her ear, and then back down again, he tasted every inch with his lips and tongue, reaching around with his fingers to gently tug the strings holding the sides of her dress together.

"Killian," she breathed out, "please, touch me."

"I thought you would never ask," he murmured, his hands loosening the ties completely, causing the bodice to gap open, revealing her perfect, mouthwatering body. She dropped her arms, letting the top to slide off, allowing him a view that was quite unexpected. His very own Victoria's Secret model come to life. All cream satin and bows, with no straps and held up by woman, his woman. One tug and it was just like opening a gift on Christmas Day, as the wrapping was nice but what was beneath was even nicer.

All pearly white and pink, soft and sweet and smelling like heaven waiting to journey with him to the stars. He reverently ran his hands up, around and over, lingering to measure the weight of each, knowing they didn't have all night but hoping they had long enough.

She didn't say anything, just stood there quietly as he touched and explored, using his hands and fingers to massage where soft, and pinch and lightly tweak where hard. "You are so beautiful, Swan. Do you know how often I've lain in my solitary bed at night staring at the ceiling, dreaming of you, of this?"

She turned in his arms, twining hers around his neck, "And I of you, Killian. Is this real? Are you real?"

He didn't say anything, as this was one time when actions were much more important than words. Staring into her eyes, dark with emotion and her lips so close, all conscious control vanished and he sank into her mouth just as he wished to sink into her body.

Bloody hell, she tasted sweet, and she felt so good in his arms, his control was quickly growing thin. Wanting to be horizontal, he did a swift inventory of their surroundings: a tiny vanity, a tile floor, not large enough, and nary a chair in sight, leaving the wall their only option. He could deal with gravity, but leaving this room without either being sated was not an option he wanted to explore.

"Emma, this is not how I envisioned our first time together," he sighed into her mouth, "but I don't think I can wait."

She moaned in agreement, "Hurry, please hurry," she begged as he scooped her up, pinning her against the door.

He leaned in to kiss her neck, gently suckling, moving lower to explore her exposed bits, eliciting moans from her, as her rib cage heaved and she threaded her fingers in his hair, pulling him closer. Pushing up miles of skirt, he slid his hand up her silky thigh, seeking stretchy lace and filmy silk covering tender lady parts, he couldn't wait to touch, taste and get inside. Deep inside. Now, he thought as the need inside of him took control, demanding escape now.

"A little help with the laces," he begged, separating them just enough for her to reach her hands down, pulling them loose so his trousers immediately bagged around his knees.
Her thighs trembled. He slid his fingers under the elastic toward her center, her heat reaching out to touch his skin, giving him a touch of paradise-

Rap, rap, rap. "Emma? Killian? You in there?"

Rap, rap, rap, rap, louder this time accompanied by a rattling of the locked door. "Emma, I'm sorry sweetie, but Ashley's water broke. We need you," they heard Ruby call.

"Bloody hell," Killian stepped back allowing Emma to slide down until she was standing on her own feet once again. He tightened his pants over his aching flesh and pressed his hand against the door to keep from sending his fist through the wall.

Emma's shuffling movements brought him back to the present as she put her bodice to rights and looked up at him with eyes blown wide and lips swollen from their passionate encounter. "I'm sorry. I'm so sorry."

He pulled her in for a tight hug, "Never apologize for having friends who love you, Swan. Our time will come. Go on, I need a minute."

She splashed cool water on her face, before turning to unlock the door, pulling it open and slipping through, shutting it softly behind her.

Making sure he was decent, and happy for a long coat, he picked up his hook, jammed it in his pocket and left the room, thinking that there was no way she was going home alone tonight.

Chapter End Notes

I'm sorry, not. I will tell you though that beginning with Chapter 7, I am going to have 2 sections for the story. This story will remain a T rating and then the new one will be over that line into the M rating world. You can choose which you prefer. As always, thank you for reading and let me know what you thought of the chapter.
Chapter 7

Chapter Summary

Friends gather at the hospital awaiting the birth of Ashley's child.

Chapter Notes

The AO3 version of The Promise will stay a T to T+, however the Tumblr and FF versions are changing to M. If you wish to read the M version, please copy/paste this into your browser.

https://www.fanfiction.net/s/12607361/1/The-Promise


This is the T+ rated version of this chapter. M versions can be found on FF and Tumblr.

Chapter 7

In the waiting room at the hospital, she paced. She paced because if she didn't keep moving her traitorous mind took her right back to the powder room and what would have happened had they not been interrupted yet again. She couldn't get out of her mind how the two of them had looked in the dim light of the room, standing in front of him, her bodice draped around her waist and his hands exploring her curves. The desire to crawl on his lap and revisit what they had started was a palpable feeling that wasn't getting any better. Blowing air out to relieve a little tension, she kept pacing.

After several trips, back and forth, her eyes were once again drawn to her man who was slouched on the sofa, one arm draped across the back, legs spread wide displaying the tight fit of the leather pants that she had chosen for his rendition of Captain Hook. Wishing she could give herself a high five for that decision, she gave him a tiny smile and kept moving, afraid that if she stopped, she might kneel in front of him and see if those leather ties came loose as easily with her teeth as they did with her fingers. Wowza, she thought as a shiver worked its way through her body.

"Emma," Ruby looped their arms and led her out into the hallway, "you're making me tired. Can't you sit down?"

Looking up at her friend's concerned face, she relaxed and leaned back against the wall. "Sorry, Rubes. It's just when I stop..." But what to say? She couldn't very well say that when she wasn't moving her only thought was jumping on her hot boyfriend and having her way with him. "I'm just anxious about Ashley." She finally decided a change of subject was easier at this point in time. Killian, she would deal with later.

Ruby leaned against the wall beside her and gave her a look that said she knew what was going on.
"I am too but I'm sure she will be fine and we'll have a new baby soon."

"I hope so," she admitted quietly. "I really want to be here but," she held up a handful of her skirt, "I'd really like to get out of these clothes."

Ruby snickered, "Come on, Em. Out of those clothes and onto a certain man sitting in there showing off the goods in the leather pants."

Emma started laughing as part of her could not believe what had come out of her friend's mouth, but the other side knew Ruby and knew she shouldn't be surprised. "Damn, Ruby, you and Ashley have awful timing." Not willing to discuss anything further, she pulled her back into the waiting room where Robin was in conversation with Elsa, and the Sisters were sitting in high back chairs falling asleep.

Killian, on the other hand, was sitting in exactly the same position and one look at him and, damn, Ruby was so on target when she described those pants. They did show off the goods, and her brief encounter back at the Home had only heightened her need for more. She had every intention of being good but now that her heart had been freely given, even though she had not shared that with him, her tart side needed to come out to play. She wasn't sure how much longer she could resist what he was offering, whether he knew it or not.

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Killian sat watching Emma pace within the small confines of the waiting room, every turn bringing the swish of her full skirts across his leather-clad legs. His fingers itched to grab hold of that fabric and hitch it up to rediscover her warm, satin smooth skin as he'd been busy doing before once again a crisis called a halt. While he was still wrecked from the experience, his Swan had proved that she was a force to be reckoned with by putting her needs aside while quickly taking charge of those around her.

By the time he had put himself to rights and exited the powder room, she had ascertained what needed to be done and made plans. Groups had been dispatched in various directions within a matter of minutes. Ruby had driven off with Ashley and Sean, Emma had taken the Sisters, and he and Robin had been tasked with getting Elsa to the soon-to-be new parents' apartment to pick up Ashley's suitcase. During the trip, they had been receiving updates on Ashley's condition and, wanting to bring the new mum her things, they had forgone stopping to change. Which explained why Captain Hook, a bar wench, Robin Hood, Little Red Riding Hood, three colorful Fairies and a Queen from Frozen sat waiting for Cinderella's child to make an appearance. Bloody hell, who would ever believe him?

Not the way he had planned for his evening to go, that was for sure, but he was quickly coming to understand that being with Emma meant accepting that even though she had no blood family, there were people in her life who meant a great deal and were treated as such. He'd had to admit several times lately that while her family's timing had created some issues with his lower regions, he was firmly resolved to soak up as much knowledge about her as possible. He was truly discovering that Emma Swan was just as amazing on the inside as she was on the outside.

Growing up as a ward of the state, she could have very easily become a bitter individual who cared for no one, and yet she was one who cared for many. Not only did she care deeply about the friends that she had grown up around, but her new friends too. She had a strong love for the adults who had provided her guidance as a child and a desire to give back to children who were in the same situation as she had been. And somehow, fate had decided to bless him by dropping her in his path, because she cared about him too. It was evident in every touch, every word and every kiss that they shared, and if he hadn't already fallen, seeing her in action tonight would have pushed him straight to love.
"Killian?" Her soft voice pulled him from his thoughts, "Do you want to take Robin and go home? They said it might be a few hours yet."

It took him a moment to process what she said, but once he did, he didn't think, "Not bloody likely," he bellowed before the shocked look on her face quieted him, and taking action, he stood up and took her hand to lead her down the hall.

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When Killian raised his voice in response to her question, she truly had felt surprise. It had taken his taking her hand to direct them from the room for her to realize that his look hadn't been one of relief, but one of hurt. The possibility that she could hurt him had never entered her mind, but now that she had she felt equal parts of sadness and empowerment.

She loved him, and if she could hurt him was it possible that her feelings were reciprocated? As he moved across the room toward the hallway, she looked over her shoulder catching Ruby's eye, sending her a signal that she hoped was read clearly.

Blue watched them leave the room, "Think everything is alright?" She turned to Ruby who was sitting next to her.

"Well..." Ruby gave her a smile as if she knew something that no one else did, "I have a feeling when they return all will be well." She looked off in the direction they had disappeared and her gaze met Robin's, whose eyes told her he concurred. "Wouldn't you agree?"

He snickered, "Something tells me when they return, the situation will be temporarily relieved. I wouldn't worry about them, Sister Blue." Needing to stretch his legs, he turned to Elsa, "Care to take a walk and see what we can find to drink?"

Blue seemed to accept Robin's explanation for she buried her face against the back of the chair and once again closed her eyes. Ruby had other ideas in mind for the wait, sending a quick text to Victor to see if he was available to come for a visit.

"Killian," Emma called his name as he led her down the hallway, looking in rooms for a private place for them to talk.

"Emma, just hold on a minute, alright?" He had tried three doors already and was getting frustrated. Two of the doors were locked and the third one had a window which decreased privacy. Twisting the knob of a door hidden in a small alcove, he was surprised when the handle turned easily, allowing them to enter.

Walking into the room, he looked around realizing they had found the broom closet, and while it wasn't *The Four Seasons* or *The Savoy*, it did have a chair, a little light and the most important feature, it was empty.

Turning to Emma, the light allowed him to barely make out her features as she stood there in front of him. Holding her elbows lightly, he took a deep breath, "Alright, Swan, please talk to me." He needed to know why she was suddenly ready for him to leave without her, something he was most certainly not interested in doing.

Emma looked into his eyes and her heart felt like it literally melted in her chest. His expression was telling her more about his feelings for her than words and the thought of sending him home flew from her mind. A quick look around the small space answered a few questions, and with a flick of her wrist the door was locked tight, so they couldn't get out and, best of all, no one could get in.
Wrapping her arms around his neck, close enough to feel his breath wafting across her lips, she kissed him lightly. "I'm sorry, Killian. I just realized that I just can't any longer." She started propelling him backward to the chair before, with a little shove, she pushed him onto it.

He looked up at her with a quizzical expression, "You can't what, Emma?"

She hitched her long skirt up, exposing her bare legs and straddled his thighs, and raised her hands to cup his jaw, "Wait, Pirate. Any chance you remember where we were just a few hours ago?"

He gave her a look that said are you serious, and immediately brought his hands up and tugged the strings holding her bodice together so once again when she dropped her arms, the material fell showing off her cream satin brassiere. "Please don't tease a man, love." Without waiting for an answer, he easily popped the fasteners and tossed the satin aside, filling his hands with soft warm woman before exploring her curves with his lips.

When he placed his hands on her thighs, pushing the hem up even higher, the muscles in them jumped in response. Her answer was a low groan as his lips skimmed across her chest, raising goosebumps with every suck, nip, and lick.

Killian lifted his head from her chest and choking off any words she might say used his lips to explore hers with tenderness and gentleness. Not too fast nor too slow, just a tenderness that she had never experienced with any other man but him. Helpless to resist, she poured every ounce of love she had come to feel for this man into her kiss.

That they were in a broom closet on the Labor and Delivery floor at Massachusetts General ceased to matter, as wherever she was with Killian felt as special as a five-star hotel. Her eyelids fluttered as her body shuddered with surrender and she arched offering herself wholly to his wandering lips and hands.

Wishing she could touch more skin, she opened a few buttons of his already low-cut shirt, giving her room to run her fingers through the light covering of fur on his chest. The rumbling sounds of appreciation encouraged her to reach for the laces on his leathers. Loosening them was easy, but as he was sitting, she settled for caressing with her hands for the moment, while continuing to explore his chest with her lips.

His entire body was alive and jumping with joy and while it was clamoring for release, he wasn't finished with his explorations, but their current position limited what he could touch, lick, kiss or suck. With that thought in mind, he gently extracted her from her position on his lap and switched their positions sitting her on the chair. She gave him a pout that he couldn't resist kissing as he knelt in front of her.

"Killian, that can't be comfortable on your knees." She ran her hands over his shoulders and down his back, pushing his pants down over his taunt behind. "But I do like this," she whispered as she squeezed the new territory she had just uncovered.

He kissed the tip of her nose, "I have a feeling you're going to really like this then."

As he pulled her forward on the chair, causing her to lean against the back to stay balanced, a shiver worked its way along her skin. He was seducing her with his tenderness and exciting her with his touch and she never wanted him to stop. "Show me," she whispered, her voice breathy.

He gave her a cheeky grin as he pushed her skirt up higher, sliding his hands along her silky, smooth thighs, slowly inching toward her girly parts that were standing up and paying attention. He reached under to pull one of her side bows loose, freeing her to his wandering hands and the hot, tingly glow
that was never far when he was around took on a life of its own.

As she relaxed, opening up to him, he gave her a gorgeous smile before all the uncovered parts pulled him down and he put those talented lips to work in ways that she had not anticipated. The way he used his tongue and lips to spread lazy wet kisses sent heat spreading throughout her body, drawing her closer and closer until his mouth set her off then and there. The feeling he wrenched from her left her breathless and sent jerking little sobs of pleasure from her throat.

As her spasms eased to a delicious glow, she opened her eyes to see him gazing at her with what could be none other than unadulterated love. "Thank you," he breathed out.

"Thank you?" She asked quizzically before smirking. "Shouldn't I be thanking you?"

"No," he said as he continued touching her lightly, mindful that she might be feeling sensitive, "thank you for being you." He cupped her face, leaning forward kissing her gently. "I love you, Emma Swan. You are it for me. I just wanted you to know that."

Tears sprang to her eyes as she kissed him again, pouring everything that she was feeling into the kiss. "I love you too, Killian Jones. Thank you for finding me."

"I wouldn't be anywhere else." He bent down kissing her again, melting her with his skillful licking, lashing tongue, delving fingers and talented lips. His tender ferocity unraveled her but she felt the emotion behind it. Like he was pleading for something but wasn't sure how to ask for it.

She was helpless to withhold anything from him as he had her completely, irrevocably under his skin. She had no choice but to offer him everything - her love, her body and if he wanted, her entire life.

Time moved along slowly as if they were encased in a bubble or in a dreamlike state that had no beginning or no end. It moved like the sea, sometimes floating along in smooth waters before being tossed into the rapids or churned along in a mass of chaotic foam or floating in a pool of delicious froth. Finally, when she was boneless, he tugged until her naked thighs flanked his where he sat on the floor.

Killian's body was screaming at him to find relief and find it now, and with her eyes burning into his there was no reason to ask any questions.

She leaned forward running her hands along his bare chest and stomach. She loved the heat of him, all that firm smooth skin over those sleek muscles. The tendons in his neck stood out showing the strain of holding back. Tired of waiting, Emma laid her lips on his and felt him connect their bodies just as their souls always had been and always would be. He was her mate and she was his.

They moved as one, reaching for the peak until the wave broke, rolling over both of them, leaving them tender and new. Clinging to each other, they rode together until their breath returned and their pulses slowed.

Laying her head on his shoulder, she nuzzled his neck. "That was delicious but," she sighed, "maybe we should join the others."

He hummed in agreement, "Think we missed the baby's arrival?" He helped her up realizing his knees were hurting from the hard floor, but to have Emma, he would do it all over again.

"Ruby would have sent me a text. We're good." Her grin was shy as she refastened her clothing.

Once their clothing was straightened, Killian pulled her back into his arms and kissed her tenderly.
"Shall we?" Holding hands, they left the room, relaxed and stress free and after a quick stop by the facilities made their way back to the waiting room and their friends.

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They arrived to find the Sisters asleep in their own individual chairs, Elsa asleep with her head on Robin's shoulder and Ruby speaking quietly to Victor. The big difference was they were all now dressed in scrubs.

Ruby looked up at them, a Cheshire cat grin on her face. "You two look relaxed." She picked up scrubs and handed each a pair. "You can change in there." She pointed to a door Emma hadn't noticed before.

"Thanks, Ruby. Any word on Ashley?"

"Just that she's progressing and we wait." The twinkle in Ruby's eye telling Emma that she had an idea of what they had spent the last hour doing.

Killian watched Emma as she turned to go change, not really wanting to let her out of his sight, but not sure if she would be comfortable if he said anything. Giving her a wink, he watched her disappear into the changing room.

Victor smirked at him, "Good look there, Killian."

"I do look rather dashing, don't I?" Killian tossed back at his friend, wondering how much longer Emma would take. As sappy as it might sound, he really wanted to hold her in his arms, preferably somewhere alone, but he would take what he could get.

Victor's pager sounded and with a glance at the screen, he kissed Ruby goodbye and disappeared out the door.

After he was gone, Ruby turned back and stood watching him closely, as if she had something to say to him but wasn't sure she should. "Is there something I can help you with?" He finally decided to ask her.

She looked over his shoulder, before leaning close. "Do. Not. Hurt. Her," she punctuated each word with a jab to his shoulder with a long red fingernail.

It hurt like hell and he really wanted to tell her what she could do with that finger, but something told him Ruby was testing him, making sure that he deserved Emma. Gritting his teeth to keep from saying something he might regret, he waited until she settled, and told her quietly, "No need to worry, Ruby. I'd go to the end of the world for her."

She studied him a little longer before giving him a satisfied smile. "I'm glad. She deserves to be happy."

He opened his mouth to respond when Ruby glanced over his shoulder, and he assumed the object of his affection had returned. He turned to see her in a pair of pink scrubs, her dress draped over her arm, and her face shiny clean, looking more radiant than anyone should in the middle of the night. Draping his heavy jacket over a chair he took his scrubs to change, leaving Emma alone with her friend.

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As soon as Killian walked away, Emma busied herself folding the dress and laid it on one of the
sofas before turning back to her friend. "What did you say to him?" she challenged the brunette who had folded herself down onto one of the empty chairs.

Ruby checked the nails of one hand as she answered, "Not much, really. I just told him not to hurt you."

Deciding to sit before she fell, Emma settled onto the sofa where Killian had sat sprawled on, getting her so worked up, but now she felt good. Mmm, really good, if she were honest with herself. She had almost decided to ignore Ruby, but curiosity got the best of her so she asked what Killian's answer had been. When Ruby told her, her heart melted a little more for the dark headed, blue-eyed man that had just finished ravishing her quite completely.

"He's a really good guy, Rubes." Unable to keep her eyes opened any longer, she leaned her head back against the sofa and allowed them to drift shut.

When Killian stepped out of the changing room, the first thing he noticed was his Swan, curled up asleep on the sofa. The second thing was how quiet everything had become, and a quick glance confirmed that not only had Emma fallen asleep, but everyone else had too. The last thing he noticed was just how loud the clock sounded in the otherwise quiet space.

It was after 2:00 a.m. and they had been here for over four hours. With a little luck, the baby would make an arrival soon and then he and Emma could get a little time to bask in the afterglow of their lovemaking. Now, though, he planned on holding her in his arms.

Dropping his pirate clothing in the chair with his jacket, he stood in front of the sofa taking a moment to just study her. She looked utterly beautiful in repose and he had to close his hands into fists to forcibly prevent himself from pulling her close for a kiss, or two. Needing to touch, he picked up a wayward piece of hair and as he moved it behind her shoulder, he couldn't help rubbing it between his fingers to feel its softness.

He picked her up and sat down with her in his lap, adjusting her so her head was on his shoulder and her legs stretched along the sofa. She murmured what he thought was his name and nuzzled his neck before settling back down into slumber. Leaning his head against hers, he closed his eyes and thought about all the experiences he wanted to share with her until, eventually, he too succumbed to sleep.

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Emma opened her eyes, not to Killian's blue ones, but to Sean's lighter ones spreading the news that the baby had finally arrived. Baby Alexandra had been born at 3:40 a.m., weighing 5 pounds and was 17 1/2" long. Because she was born at 36 weeks, she was slightly jaundiced and had been quickly put in an islet and taken to the neonatal unit for observation.

Emma sat up in Killian's arms, trying to wake up. "And Ashley, Sean, how is she?"

He gave her a tired smile. "She was marvelous but as soon as they took the baby away, she told me to follow her and immediately fell asleep. I think her adrenaline ran out."

Emma stood up and hugged him. "Congratulations, daddy. I'm really happy for you three."

Ruby, who had moved closer, hugged him next. "Can we peek in on Ash? We have her suitcase."

Sean squeezed their hands in gratitude. "That would be terrific." He turned to leave, but turned back as if he had just remembered, "Let me show you baby Alex." He pulled up her picture on his phone and showed them a tiny infant, wrapped in a blanket with a little pink hat on her head. "Tell Ash I'm
"going to check on our daughter and will be back soon."

Logically, Emma knew it was after 4:00 a.m. and Ashley was probably asleep, but with Ruby by her side they had taken her suitcase and walked to her room. When they pushed opened the door, the room was in half light and Ashley lay on her side facing the window.

Ruby took the suitcase and set it in the closet while Emma checked on their friend, pulling her blanket up a little higher. Ashley slowly opened her eyes, "Emma, did you see her?"

"Hi, hon, we saw the picture that Sean showed us. She's so pretty."

She rolled over in the bed not saying anything but repeatedly pleating, then unfolding the top blanket. After she had repeated the process over and over, she opened and closed her mouth a few times, unable to get the words to come out until finally, the tears started running down her face and her lower lip trembled.

Ruby frowned at Emma, who shrugged her shoulders, "Ashley, what's wrong? Alexandra is going to be fine. You shouldn't worry."

She sniffed, "I know, but I feel like I failed her somehow." The tears were running down her cheeks faster than she could sniff them up.

Feeling her own eyes getting misty, Emma handed a tissue to Ashley, taking one for herself. She didn't know how to make her friend feel better but knew she needed to say something. "Ashley, you nurtured Alexandra in your body for 36 weeks, and while she was born a little early, they are only keeping her in the neonatal unit for observation. I'm sure tomorrow she'll be here in your arms and all the bad memories will be a thing of the past."

"Listen to Emma, Ashley," Ruby added from the other side of the bed. "Is there anything we can get you before we go?"

"We just want to make sure you're feeling alright," Emma followed up Ruby's question.

Ashley looked up at them, a little smile playing along her lips, "I'm feeling fine for someone who just had a bowling ball pass through her hoo ha," she snickered.

Ruby looked at Emma, back at Ashley and then back up at Emma with a very surprised look, "Did she just say hoo ha?"

No longer able to keep a straight face, Emma laughed out loud, "She did say hoo ha," which brought another round of giggles. "Are we twelve again ladies? I don't think we've called it that since we were about that age.

Their laughter finally fading, they noticed Ashley had fallen asleep again. "She always did fall asleep faster than we did." lamented Emma. "You always had something on your mind."

They started walking back to the waiting room, and Ruby felt she could complain, "Hey wait, that's no fair."

The discussion was a familiar one they often had about who talked the most when the lights went out. They had gotten so used to blaming each other, there would probably never be an agreement, for chances were they were all equally guilty. Sharing a room with your two best friends, was a bit like having a nightly slumber party. After all what more could a girl want?

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Killian knew the moment Emma had walked back into the waiting room without even seeing or hearing her voice. He wouldn't be able to explain how if someone asked him, but he felt a connection to her as if a current connected their hearts. When she was near, his came alive, as did the air around him. A strange phenomenon sure, but something that could explain how his parents always seemed to be aware of each other.

Turning his head to check on her, he saw she was surrounded by the Sisters, all asking questions about Ashley. He really wanted to talk to her about what had been decided regarding transportation but was afraid he would have to get in line. "Bloody hell," he muttered picking up the direction of the conversation.

Robin lifted a brow, "What?"

"Just listen," Killian advised, "and when they leave, can you give me a minute with Emma?"

"Emma," Blue was saying, "we're all tired and thought we would have Ruby drive us home, and Killian and Robin can drop you and Elsa at your apartment."

She met his eyes over Blue's head, "Uh, ok, we should go, I guess."

Killian watched Ruby and Elsa help the Sisters gather their things, and start to leave. Thankfully, Robin jumped in to help too, so they didn't turn around to see why neither he nor Emma had followed them to the elevator.

She stood waiting as he walked toward her with tiny smile on her face as if she knew what he was going to say before he even opened his mouth. Before she had an opportunity to get anything out, he took her hands in his. "I didn't want to presume anything, but if you wish for Robin and me to drop you and Elsa at home, I would understand. After all, it is almost 5:00 a.m. and we have been awake all night."

Her smile grew and dropping his hands, she wrapped her arms around his neck. "I was wondering, if maybe," she hesitated for just a second as if nervous, "you would like to grab a toothbrush and a change of clothes?" not fully committing herself, but just tossing the idea out there.

"Bloody hell, love. Do you think there's any chance I'm going to say no?" He held her tighter, thinking scrubs certainly didn't provide much to disguise his body's reaction to her nearness.

"I hope not," she confessed.

"Oh no, Swan. Our encounter earlier was a mere pittance of the plundering I have in mind for you."

She giggled at his comment, "I hope so."

"Shall we?" He helped her gather their belongings and led her toward the elevators.

As they walked to the elevator, Emma had to admit she was nervous. This was the first time she had brought a man to her apartment, but more important than that this would be the first time that she was spending the entire night with a man. Emma Swan didn't do sleepovers.

When they stepped into the elevator, Killian gave her a shy smile that made her heart do a couple of flips in her chest. So much had happened between them in the last few hours and she hadn't even had a chance to process any of it, nor to relive any of their time in the broom closet. Problem was that every time she thought about it, her pulse immediately skyrocketed and she felt flushed, which
brought about questions. In fact, that she hadn't been subjected to the Ruby inquisition was a miracle.

"Cold, Swan?" Killian broke into her thoughts as he wrapped her cape around her shoulders.

She had been standing in the circle of his arms, so cold wasn't an adjective that she would use to describe how she was feeling. He wrapped her in her cape and then pulled her close for an open mouth kiss as the elevator continued to descend. Nope, not cold at all she thought as his kisses took her right past warm and straight to a veritable inferno.

The ping announced they had arrived at the parking garage, and gradually breaking apart they made their way to the car.

Robin and Elsa had just arrived, and after stowing their costumes in the trunk, Killian opened the front door for Elsa and the back for Emma. As soon as Elsa was seated, he closed the door and after a quick conversation with Robin, crawled into the backseat, pulling her close to his side. As they pulled out of the parking garage, Robin turned on the radio and an old Aerosmith song started to play and as she listened to the words, she thought that's exactly how she felt.

"I don't want to miss one smile
I don't want to miss one kiss
I just want to be with you
Right here with you, just like this
I just want to hold you close
Feel your heart so close to mine
And just stay here in this moment
For all the rest of time

Don't want to close my eyes
I don't want to fall asleep
'Cause I'd miss you baby
And I don't want to miss a thing
'Cause even when I dream of you
The sweetest dream will never do
I'd still miss you baby
And I don't want to miss a thing"

Emma's head was on Killian's shoulder and when the song ended, she leaned up to whisper in his ear, "That song says exactly what I'm feeling. 'I don't want to miss a thing."

He closed the circle of his arms around her and kissed her lips because he couldn't resist. "I know, Emma. I love you." Mindful of the company in this front seat, his kiss was swift but full of promises.

cs~cs~cs

Killian kept his eye on Emma as they walked up the stairs to her apartment. He had noticed while enroute from his apartment that the closer they were to hers, the quieter she had become. He sensed nerves rather than fear as her flirtatious smiles had become shy and her easy touches hesitant.

She unlocked her door and as she entered, tossed him a look over her shoulder that he was helpless to interpret. Once inside, he shut the door, leaning back against it with his arms crossed and waited. She moved around the space as if she were comfortable with it, turning on some lights, turning off others, closing the shades and adjusting the temperature to ward off the night's chill.

Becoming uncomfortable with the silence, Killian took a deep breath, "You alright there, Swan?"
She didn't say anything, immediately causing him a bit of concern, but finally stopping her constant movement, she looked up at him with confusion on her face and waved her hand back and forth between them. "I don't know how to do this."

There were so many things that "this" could be that he wasn't any closer to discovery than before he had asked. "You're going to have to give me more than that."

She stood across the room from him, staring at her feet for a few seconds before he saw her take a deep breath and move in his direction. Placing her hands on his folded arms, she stood on her tiptoes and gave him a tender kiss. "This, as in having a man sleep over."

He hadn't been expecting that and with a lift of his brow inquired, "You're saying I'm your first?"

She smiled shyly and murmured, "I wish," before she hesitated, leaning her head against his chest. "You are the first male that I've asked to stay over," she finished.

He wasn't sure what he had done right in his life that fate had allowed this amazing woman to love him but knew he didn't want to bugger it up. "I can't say that you are my first, Swan, but I can say you are the first who matters." His voice dropped a notch, "And, Emma, I'm so honored to be yours." Cupping her face with both hands, he brought her lips close to his. "Now, let me show you how grateful I am."

Once his lips started moving over hers, all thought fled from her head except that they were wearing too many clothes and which way to her bedroom. She opened her mouth wider, giving him better access to use those talented lips and tongue in showing her his gratitude. Just as with all other times their lips collided, her heart rate skyrocketed and her hands itched to touch. "You have too many clothes on," she moaned into his mouth.

Killian took step forward, forcing her to step back. "We need to remedy that." Gripping the collar of his shirt, he pulled it over his head and tossed it toward the sofa, not much caring if it hit or not. "Now you."

Emma took a deep breath as she slowly lifted the hem of the scrub shirt, baring her stomach, and reveling in the way his eyes were darkening with each inch she uncovered. Almost as if they were attached to the hem by a string, as soon as her satin bra came into view, his hands reached up to smooth over the cups, gently tracing the stitches on the fabric before running his fingers along the ribbons and popping the hooks. When his hands moved hers aside and the top disappeared posthaste, she laughed at his impatience, before wandering hands and lips turned her laughter into a groan.

As their kisses became headier and their hands bolder, she snagged the tie holding his pants up and, with a tiny tug, loosened not only the tie but the pants too, which dropped to the ground. Both her scrubs and satin panties disappeared and, with little effort, he lifted her and as she locked her legs around his waist, he carried her into the bedroom where they fell on the bed in a tangle of arms and legs, one set of lips never losing contact with the other.

With a giggle, she rolled them over, straddling him, and pinned his hands on either side of his head. "I've got you."

"Aye, Swan, you do. What do you plan to do with me?" He gave her a smile that would have melted her panties had she been wearing any.

"Well," she groaned as she let go of his hands and ran them down his body, hooking her fingers in his boxers and tossing them aside. "I plan to explore your body just as thoroughly as you did mine a little earlier." Bending, she latched onto an earlobe, sucking gently before moving to his neck, then
his collarbone and below.

Leaving no part untouched, Emma learned Killian's body through sight, smell, touch, and taste until he could no longer stay still, showing her that his patience was almost gone. He sat up, meeting her lips and using his tongue and teeth showed her exactly what motion he needed.

When he could stand it no longer, he took control from her and rolled them onto their sides, gripping her thigh and lifting it high. The cool air against her sensitive parts was at war with the fire within her, and the fire was burning for more. A minor adjustment of his hips was all it took before they were joined as one.

"I'm never going to get enough of you," he panted as he started to move, setting a frantic pace. Each thrust sent a lightning bolt of sensation through her.

As his thrusts came faster and faster, she gripped him tighter, as though if she let go the magic would end. But she was so close, and she wanted to make it last as long as possible, so she continued to hold on. As their pace grew more frantic, she climbed higher and higher, forgetting everything and everyone except this man and the pleasure he was giving her. As she reached her high, her world fell away, sending shock waves spiraling over her body like ripples on the ocean.

She still tingled when she felt his body tighten and he moaned as his release went on and on. The bulging chords in his throat and the ripple of the muscles in his back enthralled her, and she thanked whatever fates had allowed this amazing man to be hers. Blinking rapidly, she worked on getting her breathing under control until she felt him finally beginning to relax.

Killian gazed lovingly at her and, with a tiny frown, wiped away a single tear that had escaped. "Tears, Swan? Everything alright?"

She kissed his thumb. "Tears of happiness, Killian. I love you."

"Good. Now let me hold you." Adjusting them on the bed, spooning up against her back, he wrapped her in his embrace, their cocoon warm and secure.

Emma gave her hips a little wiggle and grinned when she felt him groan. "Rocks my world and then wants to snuggle. How did I get so lucky?"

She could feel his grin against the side of her neck. "I'm the lucky one. Sleep, Swan."

As Emma drifted off to sleep, safe and secure in Killian's arms, she couldn't imagine it being any other way.

Thanks for reading. I hope it was worth the wait. Stay tuned for Chapter 8 next Wednesday.

Chapter End Notes

I hope it was worth the wait. Let me know what you think and come back next Wednesday for Chapter 8.
Chapter 8

Chapter Summary

The holidays approach bringing some romantic moments.

Chapter Notes

Enjoy

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Chapter 8

Middle November 2015

Emma stood on a small stool, arms straight out to the sides, parallel to the floor, while Johanna and Astrid flitted around her. She felt kind of like a scarecrow with the way she was holding her arms, except the birds were landing and had sharp claws. In reality, she was being fitted in her new dress that Johanna was making for her to wear to the Holiday ball. Having a dress made for a special occasion had been a topic of conversation growing up between her, Ruby, and Ashley, but until now something to wish for, not expect.

As girls who grew up in a home run by the state, they hadn't had many opportunities to date. Add that to the fact that the home was in a part of town that had seen better days meant their choices were slim. And then after the Neal debacle, she had developed a fear of being treated poorly by males in the area and had raised her standards even higher. What, or rather whom she had grown up wanting was the one thing she never thought she could have and yet, somehow, he was hers. How, she asked herself every day, had she gotten so lucky? So lucky, in fact, that she often wondered when she would wake up to find it had all been a dream.

"You can lower your arms," Johanna muttered around the straight pins in her mouth as she smoothed her hands along the waist and straightened out the hem. "You're going to wear a corset with this, right?"

"Yes," Emma mumbled, "although I don't know why. It is not comfortable."

"That's true," agreed Ruby, "but Killian will have a really good time removing it." She laughed at the perturbed look on Emma's face. "I know a cat who swallowed the cream behavior when I see it."

Emma stuck her tongue out at Ruby as she watched Johanna titter around the hem and Astrid's face turn red.

"It's cat who swallowed the canary," Johanna corrected Ruby's idiomatic usage.

Ruby laughed, "Oh, I know," she pretended to study her nails, "I think my point was made."
Johanna looked over at Astrid for an explanation, and not wanting to discuss Ruby's twisted sense of humor, Emma let out the breath she was holding when Astrid turned the conversation back to her dress.

"What shoes are you wearing?" Johanna asked as she lifted the hem allowing it to float softly down. Emma winked at Ruby, "My glass slippers."

"Oh, that will be..." Then she realized what was said and looked up, her eyes twinkling.

"The black pumps," Emma conceded. Astrid set the shoes in front of her and, stepping off the stool into them, she waited for the hem to be pinned.

Johanna sat back and looked over the dress before slowly walking around her. "Ok, that's it. I will have it ready for a final fitting when you are here for Thanksgiving. Will that work?"

Assuring her that would be perfect since the dance would be the first Saturday in December, she had Astrid unzip her before leaving to put on her jeans and a sweater. Zipping her boots, she went to find Ruby. "Is Ashley meeting us?" She asked when she noticed Ruby slipping her phone into the pocket of her jacket.

"She is," she beamed. "Sean just came home and is watching the baby so she will meet us at Copley Square."

After they said goodbye to Johanna and Astrid, she followed Ruby out of the house toward the T. "Copley's a big place, Rubes."

Ruby smirked, "She's meeting us at Victoria's Secret. I haven't seen Victor in a week and I thought maybe I'd get him a surprise."

"Oh, you." Emma grinned at her as they hurried through the gate, "Always thinking."

cs~cs~cs

Taking a break from his last paper for the semester, one on 3D imaging techniques, Killian opened the closet to investigate the Rhett Butler outfit that Emma had chosen for him to wear to the Ball. Pulling out several hangers, he saw that the first one had a long light brown quilted jacket which felt soft and wasn't as heavy as the leather duster he had worn at Halloween. The second had black trousers and a vest and the third hanger held a shirt with an oversize collar, voluminous sleeves, and ruffled cuffs. Wrapped around the hanger were a large buckle, black leather belt and a patterned cravat that he had no intention of wearing. Emma liked his chest and he fully intended to allow it to breathe.

Once he had assured himself that everything was as it should be, he hung the clothes back on the hangers, put them back in the closet and, settling back on the bed, picked up his laptop. He had just typed a few lines when his phone pinged and he picked it up to check the messages.

Liam: You busy? If not, call me.

Killian read the message and tossed his phone aside. Did he want to talk to Liam? On one hand, yes. He missed his brother, but not the man who inhabited his brother's body these days. He missed the brother that he had grown up idolizing and followed around and wanted to be like. The last time they had spoken hadn't exactly been contentious but bordered on uncomfortable because Liam refused to allow him to talk about Emma.
Feeling like he was in a bit of a bind, as he wasn't in the mood to work on his paper, Robin wasn't home for him to annoy, Emma was busy, and his younger brother guilt was yelling at him, he picked up his phone and hit Liam's name.

"Hiya, little brother," Liam boomed.

"Liam," Killian responded hearing reserve in his tone. "How was London?"

Liam went on to tell him about the trip to England he'd taken with Nemo during November and how it essentially was uneventful. They had taken care of everything they needed to handle and visited a few friends, finishing in time to fly to Austria for a little skiing.

"So how have you been, Killian?" Liam asked as he finished sharing his trip information.

Killian wasn't sure if his brother really cared about the most important thing in his life so he started out sharing superficial information about school and friends. From there he moved on to talking about the Halloween party that he and Emma had gone to at the Home, and how they had ended up spending most of the night in the hospital waiting for a friend of Emma's to give birth.

"So, you're still seeing this Emma?" Liam's voice came out clipped causing Killian's antennae to tingle.

"Aye," he admitted. "I love her, Liam, and would like the two of you to meet."

Liam didn't say anything for so long, Killian was wondering if they had been disconnected. Eventually, he heard his brother sigh, before answering noncommittally, "We'll see. What are you doing for your Christmas break? You should have several weeks off, right?"

Killian shoved his disappointment down. "I believe we have off about a month, why? Can you come up for Christmas?"

"Oh no, Killian. I'd like you to go skiing with me. We can spend Christmas at the home in London and New Years in Switzerland. Wine, women and skiing."

Obviously, Liam didn't hear or care about his feelings for Emma because if he had he wouldn't be tossing out ideas to separate them for long periods of time. Thinking perhaps he should change the direction of the conversation, he asked about Nemo. "Why don't you take Nemo with you?"

Liam chuckled, "I think Nemo has met someone. He was acting differently right before we left for England, on the phone quite often while we were gone, and since we've been home he's never around. When I tossed out the idea of skiing, he said he had plans but I should go ahead."

"Maybe he's working on some kind of deal," Killian offered absently.

"No," Liam, brushed him off, "it's a woman. I'm just curious as to what type of woman can put that big of a smile on his face. She must be a tiger..."

"Stop right there, brother," demanded Killian, laughing. "That's not a thought track I wish to take. Listen, I need to go, as I have a paper to finish."

"I can't change your mind about skiing?" Liam asked again.

"No, brother. I'll be with Emma and we'll be spending time with the kids at the home."

"What's this Emma's last name again?" Liam asked him sharply.
Not giving it much thought, Killian muttered, "Swan. Her name is Emma Swan." Hearing the door open and hoping it was Robin with dinner, he finished the conversation and hung up.

Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving was held at the Home and was everything Emma had always dreamed it could be. She had all of her close friends nearby and with Killian in her life, she had inherited his friends and family too. While his brother and their friend, Nemo, weren't around, she had gotten to meet Robin's father, Marco, and the stories he had told about Killian and Robin had shown her another side of the man she loved. One of a caring and empathetic friend.

Once the Thanksgiving meal was over, and order had been restored, everyone had scattered throughout the house. Graham had led the way to the TV room where several were watching American Football and Emma could hear them yelling at the television, and each other, periodically.

Killian had taken Marco with him and they were supervising a group of the kids playing video games, and Robin was sitting across the room, watching it all. Having seen his dessert plate, she figured he was probably letting his stomach settle from one too many pieces of pie.

Ashley's baby, Alexandra, had just woken from her nap and most of the women had surrounded her and were peppering the new mother with questions. As the conversation moved from one topic to another, Emma let herself dream that perhaps one day a holiday such as this could be held at her house. It didn't take too much imagination for a picture to form in her mind of Killian as her husband and a child or two of their own, but before it could develop further, she was jostled back to the present by Elsa standing to leave their circle.

"Robin looks like he could use some company," she whispered and moved away from the group. Catching Killian's eye across the room, she grinned when he winked and blew her a kiss. It's perfect, she thought, as she turned back to the conversation in front of her.

Robin relaxed after enjoying his second, or was it his third piece of pie and watched the activity around him. Since that fateful day when he had found Emma's drawing of Killian and it had led him to Elsa, they had become friends. They behaved like parents who were overseeing their children's relationship and because both were unattached, often ended up acting as a date for the other when needed. Once they both realized there would never be any romantic feelings between them, their friendship had flourished, as it completely removed any pressure to be someone other than themselves.

Robin had been enjoying watching his father interact with all the children who lived in the Home, especially Roland, who had become special to him. It was apparent by his father's behavior that he was having a good time and Robin wasn't sure he had ever seen him smile so much.

He was pleased that his papa had flown to Boston for a few days. He just wished Killian's arsehole of a brother had made the effort to fly up for the holiday. While Killian hadn't said much, he knew it bothered him that his family hadn't wanted to meet his Emma. If he had felt about a girl the way Killian felt about Emma, he was convinced his father would move heaven and earth to make her part of the family.

Currently, the only female in his life happened to be his very good friend Elsa who after extricating herself from the group surrounding the baby was heading his way. "Had enough baby talk?" he smiled at the way she wrinkled her nose at his question.

She relaxed onto the sofa and leaned her head against the back before answering, "I love babies as much as the next person, but when they started discussing diaper habits I decided my stomach
couldn't handle that just yet."

They sat there in companionable silence until Marco burst out, "You did it, my boy! You beat me!" to Roland who was standing next to him wearing a huge grin.

"Did you see that?" He called to Robin. "This boy is a fearsome competitor."

Robin smiled indulgently, "I saw that, Pops. Going for a rematch?"

"But of course," Marco's smile took in everyone, "shall we my boy?" He posed the question to Roland, who had his game controller ready to go, finger over the button. Roland flashed a grin Robin and Elsa's direction and pressed start, causing Marco to have to scurry to catch up.

Robin chuckled at his father's concentration on the game. "He has no clue what he's doing," he confessed to her out of the side of his mouth.

"Ahh, be nice. He looks like he's having a good time," Elsa shushed him.

"He is," Robin hummed. "And the best part is he won't care if he loses."

"That is a plus." Elsa laughed, turning back to watch the game.

Thinking maybe she had relaxed enough for him to bring up the Faces Through Time Holiday Ball, he turned toward her and laid his arm along the seat. "Have you given any thought to whom we should represent?"

She looked at him out of the corner of her eye, "I have a few ideas. You?"

He smirked, "I do have a few ideas."

"Why is it that I'm not sure I like your tone of voice?"

He laughed at her, holding his hands up in surrender. "No reason. But maybe we should come up with a way to agree, if that is, we disagree."

Elsa frowned at him, "What did you have in mind? Rock, paper, scissors?"

"Oh, that's perfect. I'm glad you suggested it," he smirked at her. "I believe I'd like more pie. Care for anything?" When she declined he walked away whistling.

**Early December - Faces Through Time Holiday Ball**

Walking into Albert Hall, Emma felt she had truly become the beautiful swan she had envisioned for herself, so long ago. And tonight, it seemed she had all the components needed to make her feel the evening would be truly magical. She was attending her very first ball with a magical theme that allowed imaginations to run wild. And her new red satin ball gown with a fitted bodice and long sleeves fit perfectly. She couldn't help adjusting the full circular skirt, letting it float around her as well as admire the sweetheart neckline that narrowed to a basque, or V waist. And, best of all, she was on the arm of a man who looked at her in ways that one minute made her heart melt into a puddle of goo and the very next minute made it flip over from excitement.

The hall had been decorated in a manner that only enhanced the aura that surrounded the magical night. The students studying art and design had managed to convert a plain rectangular room into a place that transformed graduate students and professors into figures that appeared to have stepped from pages of a novel or from the screen of a movie. Spanning time, worlds, and genres, characters
were brought to life and for one night and were united in celebration.

The romantic glow in the room was created by a multitude of miniature white lights that glittered across the ceiling and were draped on various objects throughout the room, each depicting a diverse time or place. There were streetlights from England, statues from Rome and Italy, castles from Camelot and the enchanted forest, trees, arches and gates, all serving to make one feel as if they were entering in and out of the pages of a book. Which she did, she thought, so they had certainly succeeded.

Rimming the room were round tables seating ten or twelve, covered with gold cloths and centerpieces that, once again, depicted different themes. The center of the room was reserved for dancing with a small orchestra providing the music, and the food buffet and bar lined the back corner. More glamour in one place than she had ever imagined there would be.

The Ball was being presided over by one of Killian's Professor's, Maurice French, who was dressed for the evening as King Midas. Happy that the line snaked parallel to the festivities, Emma watched everyone who had arrived earlier appeared to float around the room. She could see individuals dressed as Marc Antony and Cleopatra, Isolde and Tristan, Romeo and Juliet, Anne and Captain Wentworth and the list went on. So far, she hadn't seen anyone else dressed as they were, which she hoped continued.

Killian smiled down at her as the line moved slowly, "You cut quite the figure in that outfit, Swan. Did I tell you that?"

She grinned up at him, "You're not so bad yourself, sir. Think you're going to maintain that southern accent all evening?"

"Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn if I do or don't," he smirked at her.

"You're going to use that line every opportunity you get tonight, aren't you?"

"Aye." He nuzzled her ear and whispered, "And also, 'you should be kissed by someone who knows how,'" before bestowing a feather-light kiss on her cheek.

A shiver ran up her spine in response to his hot breath against her ear, highlighting that ever-present awareness that existed when he was near. "I could probably handle that," she smiled up at him as they moved closer to where Professor French was announcing everyone.

He turned a heated gaze on her, changing that shiver into warmth, creating a tingling in her nether regions. "Are you sure you could handle it?"

The sexy timbre of his voice combined with the smolder in his eyes served to cause second thoughts about the way she wanted to spend the evening. "Watch it, sir, or I might just find a room to have my wicked way with you."

"A man can always hope," he winked as he handed their card to the professor.

"Welcome," Professor French nodded his head at them before looking at the card as they moved on to shake hands with other faculty members and he announced, "Rhett Butler and Scarlett O'Hara."

Wondering if Robin and Elsa were already here, she leaned close to ask, "Killian, who are Robin and Elsa dressing as tonight, since they aren't dating?"

"He grinned down at her, "Oh just wait. They make quite the dynamic duo." He shook his head, "How he got her to agree, I'll never understand."
As she walked with Killian toward their table, his cryptic comment piqued her curiosity but nothing could have prepared her for what, or rather, who, was waiting for her.

"What in the world did he do to you?" She gasped as she got a good look at Elsa.

"I lost at rock, paper, scissors," Elsa confessed, "which meant Batman," she pointed at Robin sitting next to her, "got to choose our costumes." She stood and showed off her 'Burt Ward' costume of a green body suit, topped with a red vest and a yellow R in the right pocket area held together with yellow ties and a black belt. Around her neck, she had a yellow satin cape and the look was completed by dark green gloves and a black mask.

Covering her mouth with her hand, Emma worked to contain the laughter, "I'm not quite sure I've ever seen this version of Robin before. But Elsa," she took a deep breath, "your hair! What did you do?"

Elsa patted her head, a sheepish smile on her face, "Oh, don't worry, it's temporary. I just put it in a bun and sprayed it with black hair color."

Emma relaxed and shook her head at the partner in crime who was standing right behind his Robin. "And your turn," she pointed her finger at Batman.

While Emma had been examining her friend's costume, Killian had walked behind her studying the look on Robin's face. By the twinkle in his eye, he suspected that somehow Robin had rigged the game, but decided to let him have his fun for now. As soon as his girl pointed and said, "Your turn," and 'Batman' stood out behind the chair with his hands on his hips and his chest puffed out, Killian couldn't stop the laughter.

He heard Emma ask, "Since when does Batman wear a grey bodysuit, black briefs, cape, mask and a chunky yellow belt?"

Robin pointed at himself, "I'll have you know," he started in a clipped tone, "this is an exact replica of Adam West's Batman."

Emma looked over at Killian and raised a brow, "How does he know Adam West and Burt Ward?"

Shrugging a shoulder, he tattled on his friend, "What can I say, he discovered TVLand."

Pulling a chair out, Killian seated Emma and then he and Robin went for drinks. As they got out of sight of the women, he stopped Robin to ask, "So how did you rig rock, paper, scissors?"

"I'm offended. I would never cheat, but she played like a typical girl and started with scissors so going with statistics I bet rock for the win. Good thing too, as had I lost, I would have had to dress as Thelma or Louise. Can you see me in a dress?" He walked off and with no choice, Killian followed.

As they made their way back to where the women were sitting, Killian only had eyes for Emma. She had opted to keep her beautiful blonde hair instead of Scarlett's dark locks and the way the lights spun her hair to gold and made her eyes sparkle as she sat talking to Elsa, filled him with a sense of peace, which always seemed to happen when she was near.

Setting their drinks on the table, he held his hand out to her, "Dance with me?"

A small pucker appeared between her eyes, as she looked at the dancers, "I don't know how to do what they're doing."

"Well, love. It's simple really." He pulled her to her feet. "Pick a partner who knows what he's
"And you do?"

He placed her left hand on his shoulder, and clasped her right hand in his left, and, pulling her close, led her through the steps of the waltz that he hadn't danced in many years. The memory of when that last dance had been almost broken free but something slammed the door on it, and the memory disappeared. Not wanting to mar the evening, he let his thoughts loose on the first time his mother had tried to teach him to dance a proper waltz, as she considered it only fitting. He'd had two left feet at the time, but as he grew the ladies seemed to appreciate his prowess on the dance floor. Now he was happy, for it was a dance his mum had loved and experiencing it with Emma made it feel brand new. What more could he want?

After dancing the waltz and holding Emma in his arms, but not really holding her in his arms, he knew what he wanted - a bloody slow song so he could bring their bodies into contact. However, once the music changed and he had the opportunity to hold her tightly, the full skirt on her dress behaved as a wall, preventing the closeness that he desired. "You look beautiful, Swan, but that dress puts too much cloth between our hips," he whispered to her in an exasperated voice.

She lifted her head from where it was tucked against his shoulder and nipped at his chin. "Guess you'll just have to use your imagination." As he turned them around and her dress floated around their legs, she confessed, "I do feel like a princess in this dress, though."

"And you are, Swan." He kissed her on the nose, before finishing, "My princess."

As the music ended and they announced that the buffet was open, they made their way back to the table, arriving just as his friend, Arthur and his wife, Guinevere. Opening his mouth to introduce them to Emma, he was surprised when she and Guinevere greeted each other like long lost friends. When he lifted a brow in question and Arthur shrugged his shoulders indicating his surprise, his curiosity got the best of him. "Wait, you two know each other?" He looked back and forth between the women.

Emma grinned up at him, "Guin is Ashley's doctor. I met her at the baby shower in April. Small world, isn't it?"

Killian frowned trying to recall a snippet of a conversation he'd had with Arthur at The Rabbit Hole many months ago. Could the party that Guin had been attending that night been the same one? So many almost connections had occurred between them, until, he glanced over where Robin and Elsa were standing up, presumably to get some food, the dynamic duo had struck. "Bam," he snickered, as they followed along.

The rest of the evening was spent dancing, drinking and talking with friends. The annual holiday ball was the one time of the year when the line between the faculty and those students who were in the graduate programs blurred and everyone usually partied hard.

"Killian," he felt a tap on his shoulder and turned to Robin who was pointing to the dance floor.

Since the orchestral music had given way to a DJ and the music playing was a Michael Jackson song, he wasn't sure what he was going to see, but Professor French break dancing in the middle of the floor was certainly not it. "I hope his pants are stretchy."

"I hope he doesn't break a bone," Robin added, shaking his head at French's antics. "Arthur, did you see French out there," he asked their classmate as he appeared by their side.
As if distracted, Arthur gave him a half smile, "Sorry, Guin just received an emergency call. Can I bum a ride with one of you lugs so she can take the car?"

"That shouldn't be a problem," Killian answered, "I can take Elsa home and Robin can take you."

"Thanks, I'm going to walk my wife out and then we can leave whenever you're ready." He took Guin's hand and after she said her goodbyes to Emma and Elsa followed her out of the room.

After he left, Killian looked back out on the dance floor and laughed as Professor French took a bow, and then holding his back hobbled off the floor to collapse into a chair nearby. Then, as the music transitioned into the next song, the DJ announced it would be the last one for the evening and the lights were turned down even lower and the smooth music of Josh Groban's *When You Say You Love Me* filled the room. No words were needed as he turned to Emma, and taking his hand, she followed him onto the dance floor.

As his arms wrapped around her and the words washed over her, Emma felt every word of the song in every cell of her body. They spoke to her, describing exactly how she felt when Killian spoke her name. Having him in her life was so wonderful she felt that she was living a really good dream. one that was so awesome that you feared waking because life can't be that good. Having someone in your life and a part of your heart was not something that happened to little Lost Girls who were dropped off by their parents when only hours old. But by some miracle, it had happened to her. Her soul had met its mate and when he spoke her heart nearly stopped beating. Losing herself in Killian's arms, she felt her eyes start to tear as she listened to the words.

"*You're the one I've always thought of*
*I don't know how but I feel sheltered in your love*
*You're where I belong*
*And when you're with me if I close my eyes*
*There are times I swear I can fly,*

"You make me feel like that, Swan. Did you know that?" Killian murmured against the side of her head.

She kissed his neck, right in the notch of it, where he had left the shirt unbuttoned, exposing his chest hair. "Fly? As in Peter Pan and Tinkerbell who never grew up?"

"No, love," his voice softened and his pitch lowered, "as in you make me so happy it's hard to keep my feet on the ground."

"Smooth," she whispered, just as the next verse started.

*And this journey that we're on*
*How far we've come and I*
*Celebrate every moment*
*When you say you love me*
*That's all you have to say*
*I'll always feel this way*

"These words are powerful, aren't they?" She sniffed as the song continued.

"Aye, love. Many messages can be conveyed with a song, as often the words from the song give you the label for your emotions." He hummed along with the chorus.

*When you say you love me*
Taking her face in his strong hands, his gaze burned into hers in the dim lights of the room. They were the only two people locked inside their love, hearing no others, and the emotion of the song was almost another being around them, threatening to overwhelm them with its intensity.

Killian kissed her tears away one eye at a time and then sang the ending of the song just for her.

*When you say you love me*  
*Do you know how I love you?*

Her lips stole the last word of the song from him as she couldn't hold back the need to kiss him. Their kiss was a culmination of the journey they had been traveling together for only a few months, but Emma knew they both felt like they had been waiting for the other for their entire lives. When their souls aligned, the stars shone bright.

It was late when Killian pulled into a parking spot and turned off the car. As he rounded the hood to open the passenger side doors, the back one popped open and Elsa stepped out. "Thanks for the ride. This costume is making me nuts. Night!" And she took off up the stairs.

Opening Emma's door, he helped her with her voluminous skirts and then pulled her to her feet. The passion that had been simmering between them, just beneath the surface since their kiss on the dance floor, continued to grow and every touch was like a flame licking at the kindling, yearning, stretching, straining toward each other. Tempting fate, because he could no more resist her lips than a moth resists a light, he captured them and as they mated, his body strove to push every coherent thought from his head. Wrenching his lips from hers, he picked her up and strode toward the stairs taking them two at a time.

"Killian," Emma wrapped her arms around his neck to keep from falling, "I'm perfectly capable of walking."

His smile was hot enough to leave scorch marks. "Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn," were the last words he uttered before slamming the door to her apartment and showing her exactly what had been on his mind all evening long.

*Emma and Killian's first Christmas together were written as separate chapters and fit right here. If you would like to read those in order, exit here and read Christmas Eve and then Day and then come back to Jan 1*

**Early morning - January 1, 2016**

The New Year had arrived, and after celebrating with a little loving, Emma lay spooned in her bed with Killian wrapped around her, wondering what the next year could bring that could be an improvement over the last five months. She was also wondering what was going on inside his mind. He had been loving and attentive with her, but she had almost felt as if he were coming in and out of their conversations. Half of the time he was with her, and half the time he was elsewhere. She readjusted in the bed, backing up more firmly against him, and his response was a quick tightening around her waist as he buried his face in her hair.

"Are you ready to go again?" His sexy voice purred in her ear and she couldn't hold back her grin.

"I'm just getting more comfortable." She wiggled again against his now straining flesh. "From where
I'm lying it seems you're the one who is geared up for round two, or would this be round three?"

He took the sensitive flesh of her earlobe between his teeth, giving just enough of a tug to sting. "Be
careful what you wish for, you little minx," he whispered against her hair.

Torn between allowing him to distract her from asking questions and putting a halt to the distractions,
she lay still while his hand wandered as far as it could reach. He must have felt her indecision, as his
touch immediately went from seduction to comfort. "What is it, love? Tired of me already?"

"Never Killian, it's just that..." she wasn't sure how to describe his behavior and she certainly didn't
want to make him angry.

"You want to know why I've had my head up my arse the past few days, don't you?"

She giggled at his expression, "Well if you put it that way, then yes." She started to turn over to face
him, but he tightened his hold on her waist until she relaxed again. "Talk to me, Killian."

He rubbed his chin on her shoulder several times before starting to speak, "My parents were killed
twelve years ago today, Emma. Have I ever told you that?"

"Oh Killian," Emma cried, "I'm so sorry. You don't have to talk about it."

"Surprisingly, I want to tell you, if you want to hear."

"I do," she whispered, hoping not to break the spell.

"I guess I should start the story the summer after my first year at University. Robin and I were more
interested in the social aspect of University and we both ended up on academic probation. The
summer before my second year my parents threatened me with the Royal Navy if I didn't improve
my grades and behave, and so when the school term rolled around we were ready."

Emma grinned at the thought of a young Killian being scolded by his parents. "You didn't like the
idea of following your brother into the Royal Navy."

A laugh burst forth before he could even stop it, "Killian Jones bows to no one and they wouldn't
allow me to join as a Captain."

"Ah, that's too bad." She petted his arm. "I believe you would be an amazing Captain." When he
agreed, she giggled. "Modest, too. Go on."

"Second year started, and much to my parent's pleasure I turned my marks around. I pulled high
ones, earning some academic awards and all was well. My third year started and the same thing.
Good marks, worked hard, your typical engineering geek."

"I would have thought you were cute."

"Of course, I was," he agreed. "Then it was time for the holidays," his voice got lower and she knew
the story was going to be sad. "I finished exams and went home and, surprisingly, Liam was home
on leave and had brought his wife."

"I detect something in your voice when you mention Liam and the wife."

"Aye, love, there is," he took a deep breath, "but that might be a story for another time."

"Ok," she acquiesced, knowing that he would tell her in his own time.
He continued his story, but his words came out slower as if they were being pulled from a bank of memories too painful to remember, "Mum had outdone herself that Christmas. Trees in several rooms, gifts under them all, holiday music and the smell of cinnamon in the air. As a family, we attended an annual holiday ball that was all about seeing and being seen, and as it was an unspoken rule that mother attend, we saw extended family. Most, I didn't really know, which is sad."

When he stopped his story, as if trying to formulate what he would say next, she thought about how smooth he had been when they had attended the Faces Ball a few weeks ago. Was he as smooth at that ball as a young man of twenty, or was he gangly and unsure of himself? "Did you wear a tux?" she couldn't resist asking.

"Aye, Swan, of course. I was rather dashing too." He chuckled at her snort to his comment.

"And I bet you wooed all the pretty ladies," she couldn't help but inquire.

"Swan, is there something you wish to know?" he asked in his seductive voice. "You know there's only one pretty lady I'm interested in seducing, right?" Moving a lock of hair, he laid a gentle kiss, in that area just below her earlobe that always sent shivers down her body.

"I know, now behave."

Taking another breath, he went on with his story, "In addition to the ball, we went to see The Nutcracker, caroling, and the candlelight service at our local parish for Christmas Eve. The next day, we unwrapped gifts and then dinner was a mixture of traditional Christmas dishes, along with some favorites. We even decorated sugar cookies, something that probably sounds ridiculous for adults to be doing but," she felt him shrug his shoulder, "it made Mum happy."

Her murmured "I bet," was said quietly, letting him know she was listening and didn't want the flow of conversation to stop.

"After Christmas, Liam and Lily left and mum tried to talk me into going on holiday skiing with her and my father. But I decided I didn't want to be stuck on some mountain, as nice as it might be, for New Year's Eve with my parents, and so begged off." His voice trailed off into nothingness.

"Killian," she began, but he tightened his hold on her and finished the story.

"They left the next day, driving to Galtür in Switzerland, and based on the few correspondences I had with them they had a wonderful time. But for some unknown reason, on New Year's Day, they checked out early, and on their way down the mountain were hit broadside by a man who was just going home after having been out celebrating all night. It was hours before they were found and they were gone."

Emma's heart ached for the young man who had lost his parents all those years ago. Her heart also ached for the man who still felt guilty for something that wasn't his fault. "You blame yourself, don't you?"

Killian's voice was choked with emotion when he answered, "If I would have gone with them, perhaps they would still be alive."

"Or perhaps you would also be gone." She took a deep breath, tightening her hold on his hand. "Killian, fate is a funny thing. I do believe we have some power over our fate, but not necessarily keeping ourselves from death. It seems to be a situation where, when one door is closed, other doors were opened? Would you be the same person, or in the same place if things had been different?"

He thought about what she had said and he could unequivocally say the answer was no. He would
be a different person, and chances were Emma wouldn't be a part of his life. He couldn't help but think that his life would be empty without her, as she filled all those voids. He couldn't imagine his life without her in it, and he didn't want to, he thought, as he tightened his arms around her.

Was it a coincidence that the words she had just used in describing his past were essentially the same words that he had been using to explain what had brought her into his life? The parallels between the way his parents met and had fallen in love and the way he and Emma had met and fallen in love were there. That their paths had crossed was something for which he would be eternally grateful and a future with her was his greatest wish come true.

"After they were gone, I was not someone you would have cared to know. In fact, I became a person, I didn't care to know, but then, even though my brother was going through something with his marriage that he still refuses to talk about, he pulled me back from too much rum and too much hate, at least enough to allow me to finish my degree."

Rolling over, Emma cupped his face with her small hand and whispered, "I believe your mom would be proud of the man you've become. I know I am."

The kiss they exchanged was sweet and tender and an expression of the deep love that was between them. He hugged her tighter, feeling so close and in tune with her after their conversation, freer, having shared his grief over his parents' death. It had been cathartic and forced him to remember that his last memories of his times with his parents were not all sad. The last Christmas he had spent with his parents had been one of memories meant to treasure. Memories he had shoved so far into his subconscious that they had been all but forgotten.

He rubbed his nose against hers. "Thank you for helping me remember those happy times."

"I like helping you remember happy times," she sighed against his collarbone as she grazed her lips across his skin.

Wrapping his arms around her, he rolled them so that she was on her back. "How about helping me make happy times? Up for that too?"

She squirmed in his arms as he attacked her with his lips. "I see *you* are." Her giggling was so infectious it filled him with joy, but the proximity of her bare body rubbing against his soon changed the course of their actions with the needs taking precedence. and covering her lips with his, the rest of the conversation was all nonverbal.

**********If you would like to read the story in order, break here and read the Christmas Eve and Christmas Day (which are Christmas 2015) chapters and then come back and continue with January**********

**Mid-January 2016**

It was cold and snowy on the front step, but inside her apartment where it was warm, it was also lonely, or at least it had seemed that way a few moments ago. For the past month, Killian had been there with her, filling her days with laughter and her nights with love, and now he was off to a meeting. Objectively, she knew she would be fine and would be seeing him in a day or two but subjectively, she needed to wallow, as Ruby called it, just a little longer.

Watching the snow accumulate on the front lawn, she had gotten used to the quiet when a car pulled into a space close to the front and parked. The car had a single driver, female, she thought, who was talking on the phone and gesturing wildly with one hand. Emma watched her shake her head, turn off the phone and get out while pulling on a warm overcoat. Reaching in, she popped the trunk and
pulled out two suitcases, locked the car and headed toward where she was sitting. "Hi, can I help you?" Emma asked hesitantly, as she hadn't heard of anyone new moving in.

The woman smiled, almost hesitantly, as if she were unsure of what she was about to do. She held out her hand, "I'm Regina Mills. Is this Sarah Fisher's house?"

Shaking her hand, Emma answered, "Hi Regina. I'm Emma Swan and yes, Sarah owns the place. Are you moving in?"

"For the next few months, yes I am."

Emma led her into the warm house, leaving her with Sarah, and climbed the stairs to her own apartment. Opening the door, she was once again hit by the silence but with a click of a switch, she turned on her iPod, allowing the music to drown out her thoughts.

Deciding she really needed to put together lesson plans and plan her TA hours, she grabbed her laptop and worked efficiently for a few hours. Hearing her phone ring, she located it across the room, but not in time to grab the call. Her thumb hovered over the button to return the call when a text arrived. What the hell, she thought, as she read it once more.

**Blue:** Call as soon as you can. It's about Neal.

Chapter End Notes

Let me know what you thought. Stay tuned for Chapter 9 next Wednesday.
Christmas Eve

Chapter Summary

Christmas Eve is a bit of fluff that takes place after that Holiday Ball and before Jan 1 in Chapter 8.

This Christmas story takes place in the middle of Chapter 8. After the Holiday Ball and before Jan 1. The song Killian sings is Believe and can be heard here.

A Promise Christmas
Christmas Eve

Emma's Apartment
Boston MA
Christmas Eve, Early Morning

Emma Swan was not a morning person and for 363 days of the year, she stayed in bed until she absolutely had to be up. But for the other two days, her excitement had her out of bed early so as not to miss any of the festivities that had been a tradition in her life in, oh, forever. And those traditions had started because Sisters Blue, Green and Astrid wanted to give children who lived in the Home a Christmas Eve and Christmas Day they would remember forever. And Emma did. In fact, she loved it so much that this year she was planning to share it with the man she loved, Killian.

Emma hummed a Christmas song under her breath as she bustled around the kitchen making breakfast for the sexy man she had left in her bed. She hadn't filled him in on how, exactly, they would be spending the next two days, but her hope was that he would be so enamored with her Christmas Eve breakfast, he would blindly follow.

She had just flipped the pancakes she was going to use to make him a pancake snowman when a male body pressed against her. "Good morning, love. I rolled over and you were gone." He nuzzled her neck. "I missed you."

His gravelly morning voice sent tingles throughout, almost causing her to forget what day it was, but the twinkling lights from their tree served to bring her back to the present. Turning in his arms, she slid her hands up his bare chest to circle his neck. "It's Christmas Eve," she murmured against his lips. He tasted of toothpaste and something that was unique to Killian.

Humming low in his throat, he backed against the table, pulling her close. "Merry Christmas, Swan. I have several ideas on how we can spend the day." His hand wandered inside her robe as his lips played with hers.

"We have only been lovers a short time and he already knew how to play her body as well as he did that old Gibson of his," she thought as she took a step back. "I knew I should have worked faster making your breakfast," she mumbled, tightening the belt to her robe. "You're distracting."

He gave her a grin, twisting his lips sexily. "But apparently not distracting enough if you're standing over there."
"Well," she busied herself making a pancake snowman, using chocolate chips for his eyes, nose and mouth, "I was hoping to use breakfast to bribe you..." Holding the plate out toward him, she gave him a gentle smile. "Today is...special for kids from the Home," she finished quietly. "I was hoping you would spend the day with us so you could see how all my Christmases have been spent."

"Really?" The look on her face was so hopeful he had to steal another kiss or two before answering, "Really." Letting her go, he picked his plate back up. "These look like works of art-

"-I'm not sure they'll taste that way, but...", shrugging her shoulder, she proceeded to put together her pancake snowman and they sat down to eat.

Killian watched as she relaxed and started eating her pancakes instead of just pushing the chocolate around in the syrup. "What's next on our Christmas Eve agenda?"

Her eyes lit up in a way that never failed to cause his heart to turn over as she finished chewing on a piece of bacon and swallowed. "Next we unwrap gifts!"

He tilted his head. "Gifts? On Christmas Eve? We can't open them in the morning?"

"Oh no...no," she grinned taking their plates and rinsing them off. "We won't be here."

"Spit it out, Swan. What did you have in mind?" He watched her busy herself cleaning the counters.

"We're going to spend the night at the Home so we can be there to watch the kids unwrap gifts in the morning," she confessed.

He squinted as if trying to read her mind. "There's more, isn't there?"

"Just a little," she told him, holding her fingers an inch apart. Sauntering closer, she took his hand and led him over to the tree and pulled him next to her. "Trust me?"

He studied the ceiling as if pretending to think before putting her out of her misery with a grin. "Of course, I trust you, Swan. But if I do all of this for you," leaning forward, he caged her hips in, and slowly moved closer to her until she had no choice but to lean back, allowing him to follow her down, "what will you do for me?" His lips hovered above hers.

"Anything you want," she promised with a smile.

"Anything?" he challenged her.

This time she didn't say anything but pulled his head down, capturing his lips. "Anything," she promised when she came up for air.

"Good," he gave her a lascivious smile, "remember that. Now which gift would you like first?"

Killian watched Emma unwrap her gifts. Gone was the patient, methodical artist who spent hours perfecting detail on her drawings, and in her place was an exuberant woman who tore at the
wrapping paper like a child. Just like every other child, she blew through the packages that held clothing and barely gave attention to her new paintbrush set. It wasn't until she opened the package holding a swan keyring, made of gold, that she slowed down long enough to read the inscription written on the back.

*You will forever be my always.*
*Love, Killian*
12/25/16

"Oh, Killian," she murmured crawling close to give him a kiss. "Thank you. It's beautiful."

He cupped her cheek. "Just like you, Swan. And the key..."

"Is to your heart?" she smirked.

He grinned at her. "To my apartment. My heart has been yours for longer than you know."

She dimpled at him. "And if I use my key and catch Robin in his skivvies?"

His answer was to pluck the key from her and toss it over his shoulder. "I'll show you." He wrapped his arms around her and proceeded to make a very thorough case for her eyes to always be focused on him.

~~~CS~~~

Emma loved it when Killian behaved all possessive, as his kisses were really hot and when he growled deep in his chest, he sent tingles to regions she didn't know she had. He rolled over, pinning her to the floor while his lips traveled down her neck, but she couldn't completely relax into the kiss as something sharp kept digging into her back. "Mmff." She pushed him away and rolled over to see she had been lying on another gift. "Where did this come from?"

Killian gave her a sheepish smile. "You distracted me. Open it."

*He looks nervous,* she thought, as she lifted the lid off the long slim box to see a silver charm bracelet nestled inside with seven charms hanging from the silver links. *Killian,* she breathed out his name on a sigh, "I've always wanted one of these."

"It was Ruby's suggestion," he told her quietly.

"A paintbrush, for obvious reasons." She smiled at him. "Bowling pin?"

He covered his heart. "You were so close that night, but yet so far away."

"True, and that explains the boat; yet another of our missed meetings."

"Aye," he fingered the tiny hook, "and for your first crush. And this broom here…it brings back special memories."

"A broom?" She couldn't come up with a time they might have cleaned something, and then she felt her cheeks get warm as she remembered the events that had led to the broom. "That was a special place, wasn't it?"

"Very." His smile caused her heart to do a little flip and she was glad when he moved onto the next charm so she could catch her breath. "Dance slippers for the ball, and a tree for our first Christmas."

"Put it on me?" She held her wrist up for him to fasten it on and watching it sparkle in the lights from
the tree made her happy. "Now your turn."

One by one she handed his gifts to him and just as she had been quick and exuberant with her gift unwrapping, he was slow and methodical, slowly peeling apart each piece of tape and caressing each crease as if he had all day. Several times she had to clinch her fists to keep from jumping in and helping him.

"Are you sure you don't need some help? You're moving quite slowly." She was nearly bouncing with excitement.

He stopped and sent a smile her direction that was 100% meant to scorch her panties. "You've never complained about my unwrapping before, love. Why start now?"

Closing her eyes, Emma just shook her head. This man, she thought exasperatedly, is doing this on purpose. Two can play this game Mr. Jones. "True. By all means, carry on."

By some small miracle, he had unwrapped his Hook socks, some boxers with Christmas balls all over them that said, "Fragile. Christmas Balls stored here." Some guitar picks she had designed especially for him, a picture of them at the Ball, and he was currently unwrapping his last gift. Opening the box, he brandished the key to her apartment she had given him and by the look on his face, he knew how important of a decision it had been. "Are you sure, Swan?" He asked gently, holding the key aloft.

Emma nodded her head. "Completely," she whispered.

"Then thank you," he whispered back in a reverent tone in his voice she hadn't heard before. "And now," he stood up pulling her with him, "I'm going to unwrap the best gift of all…you."

Emma put her hand on his chest, stopping him just inches before he reached her mouth. "That will have to wait. We have to shower and get to the Home for the cookie decorating contest."

"How much time are we talking here, Swan?"

She glanced over his shoulder at the clock. "We need to leave in less than an hour."

Killian picked her up, tossing her over his shoulder. "If we shower together we can save time," he laughed as he palmed her behind on the way down the hall.

**Group Home – Cookie Decorating**
**Boston, MA**
**Late Morning**

By the time they arrived at the Home, the males and females were divided and gathered around two separate tables, ready to create. Emma sent Killian off to help Robin with the boys and she was on her way to hang up their jackets when she was waylaid by a nosy friend.

Ruby stopped her mid-stride. "Neck check for Emma Swan," she laughed, flicking Emma's hair off her neck.

Emma rolled her eyes. "What are you doing?" she laughed at her friend's antics, but already feeling her face flame. Pushing past, she hung their coats on hooks, hoping her burning cheeks would subside before she finished.

"Come on, Em," Ruby sing-songed, "I was just checking for marks on your neck since you were so late getting here today."
Emma lifted her hair. "Look away, my friend. You'll not find a mark there."

"There?" Ruby's eyes sparkled. "So, you did get a little Christmas Eve nook-"

Emma's hand shot out to cover Ruby's mouth. "Shh. Why is how I spent my morning so interesting to you? Unless..." Emma pushed Ruby's dark hair back, spotting a red mark just behind her left ear. "Well, well..."

"Emma, Ruby," Ashley called, "hurry. It's time to decorate."

"Hold on, Ashley," Emma waved her other friend down the hall, "did you see that mark," she pointed toward Ruby's neck. "I'm pretty sure that our Rubes and her Doctor finally...did the deed."

Ruby winked and sassed right back, "Maybe!" but her eyes were sparkling with happiness.

Emma smiled at Ashley as they linked arms with Ruby and began walking back the way they came. "How long have they been dating?"

"Couple months, I think," Ashley winked.

"Must be a record for waiting," Emma deadpanned.

"Hey, you two," Ruby hip bumped them, "I'm right here."

"We're proud of you, Rubes," they told her as they made their way to the dining room where the competition would take place.

~~~CS~~~

Killian watched Emma enter the room with her friends, all of them giggling like they had just heard a good joke. "What do you think they're laughing about?" he asked Robin, who was lining up the bowls with various colors of frosting on the table.

Robin shrugged. "No clue. Hey, pass me that hot pink over there."

"The what?" Killian snickered.

"Hot pink," repeated Robin as he pointed in the direction of the needed bowl. "At least that's what Violet said it was when she brought it to me," he grinned.

Shaking his head, Killian reached for the appropriate bowl as he watched Emma. It looked as if she were showing off her charms to the other women as they were all crowded around her. She looked up, catching him staring and winked before refocusing on her bracelet. "Look at them now, Robin. What do you think they're talking about?"

"How do I know?" Robin laughed. "You're the one with the girlfriend. My guess is they're discussing our big...egos," he smirked, "and who leaves the toilet seat up."

"Robin," Roland pulled on his pants' leg, "what's an ego?"

"Walked right into that, didn't you," Killian whispered just as Blue asked for quiet.

Once the rules were given, it was chaotic as all the young boys started talking at once and Robin and Victor were arguing over some design. Killian wasn't sure where to start, and after picking up his cookie and setting it back down a dozen times, took a step back from the table to regroup. There were crumbs and icing splatters all over the table already, and yet when he looked over at the girls'
There was only a soft hum coming from their table and they were carefully passing the bowls and tools from person to person. Emma was in the center of the group, leaning over the table working diligently on her project. With the room's lights shining on her hair, it sparkled, and periodically he would catch a glance as she smiled at someone. His Swan was gorgeous, and she took his breath away every time he saw her.

"Quit drooling, Jones," he heard from one side.

"Killian, do you need my help?" Roland asked from the other.

Smiling down at Roland, he tapped him on the nose with his finger. "No, little lad. I think I've got this one." Picking up his cookie and a bowl of white frosting, he got busy.

~~~CS~~~

Hours later, once the tables were cleaned off and all that was left were the creations, Emma walked slowly around the table admiring what they had created. This year the design centered around Santa and Mrs. Claus and their toy shop.

"The competition is totally rigged," Killian murmured in her ear, pulling her back against his chest.

She smiled and tilted her head up to nip his chin. "Rigged? How do you figure?"

"Well, you are an artist."

"Oh, so you think because I'm an artist, that's why we won?" She turned around in his arms to peer over at the other table. "I think it's just that we worked together."

Killian's lips twitched. "Aye, love, that could be it. It was quite frightening at my table."

Taking Killian's hand, they walked the few steps to reach the other table. There wasn't a theme to their decorating, but each person had done his own thing. There were lopsided Christmas trees, colorful balls, a heart, an arrow, assorted cookies that she had no idea what they were, and in the center a swan; majestic and proud surrounded by blue water.

"Is that yours?" She pointed to the swan.

"Aye, love. I saw you standing across the room, surrounded by your friends, at home with what you were doing and I couldn't resist."

"Oh, Killian. I love you."

"And I love you, Emma. Merry Christmas." He kissed her then and, as she closed her eyes, she felt herself getting lost in the sensation of his lips and body pressing against hers.

"Emma, Killian," Elsa interrupted their moment, "it's time to go."

"Your friends have horrible timing," Killian whispered.

Emma hummed in agreement, and peeked around Killian's shoulder to where Elsa was pretending she was checking the time. "Will it be skating or sledding?" she asked as she reluctantly stepped out of his arms.

"Skating." Elsa retorted just as Grace and Violet entered the room.
"Killian" they called in unison, "we have your coat, Come on." They each grabbed a hand and tugged him along even as his eyes pleaded with Emma to rescue him.

"Think you should save your boyfriend?" Elsa asked as the girls and their reluctant adult left the room.

"Nah. He'll be fine." Linking her arm with Elsa's they went looking for the others.

Frog Pond
Boston, MA
Early Afternoon

Once they arrived at Frog Pond, much to the dismay of Grace and Violet, the older kids were sent off to skate while the adults were paired with smaller children. Killian found himself paired with Wyatt, a precocious boy of eight who, with his constant barrage of questions, was threatening to get on his last nerve. He propped his skate up on the bench next to Robin and bent over under the auspices of retying his laces. "You sure I can't talk you into trading," he muttered out of the corner of his mouth.

"There's no bloody way, mate," Robin retorted. "Wear him out, why don't you?"

Contemplating that response, he watched Wyatt bounce around as he watched the other skaters fly past them. "Are you ready, Wyatt?"

"I'm ready. I'm ready. I'm ready. Let's go. Let's go Let's go," he shouted, each sentence a little louder than the one before it.

"About as exhausting as listening to Anna," Killian muttered as he led the way toward the entrance to the rink.

"I heard that, Jones," Elsa cried as she skated past with a dark-headed little lass.

Taking Wyatt's hand, they stepped into the rink, and giving himself a few minutes to reacquaint himself with the feel of the ice, he pushed off. Taking it slowly, they circled the rink, each time around a little faster than the one before. Killian had to admit that it really was like riding a bike and, while he wouldn't be doing any flips in the air, his confidence grew the longer he skated.

Wyatt tugged his hand loose. "Let me do it. Let me do it. Let me do it."

"Are you sure?" Wyatt nodded his head. "Okay then, take off. I'll follow."

~~~CS~~~

"Maddy," Emma smiled at the shy little girl who was her skating partner, "where are Ruby and Alli?"

"There," she mumbled, pointing to where Ruby was helping Alli, Maddy's twin, lace her skates.

Carrying her skates, as well as those for her new friend, Emma made her way over to where Ruby was sitting. Maddy sat, and after she had removed her boots, Emma helped slip the skates onto her feet and tie them. "There. Have you ever skated before?"

"No, they haven't," Victor answered for her, "I thought I'd get them skate trainers."

Emma found that piece of news interesting but didn't say anything as she helped Maddy stand up. It took her several minutes before she was able to stand but as soon as she did, Victor took each of the
girls by the hand, leading them away. "Exactly how does Victor know them?" she asked Ruby curiously, as she had never seen him so attentive to children before.

Ruby smiled as she watched the trio walk away. "Victor saved their lives," she whispered reverently. "From what I can gather their mother was one of the first heart patients he operated on. Years later, she came back to see him but this time she was pregnant, with twins. I don't know the specifics, but the girls were born with Down's Syndrome, and both needed surgeries to repair holes in their hearts. The surgeries didn't cost the mother anything and the girls are thriving."

"Wow, I never would have imagined Victor going out of his way for someone like that," Emma murmured softly.

"Oh, he likes people to think he's some detached doctor," Ruby shared, "but deep down he feels things strongly. I think the mother passed away several years ago and the girls live with the grandmother, who is in the hospital..."

"And he batted his baby blues at Blue so the girls wouldn't be alone on Christmas?" Emma guessed. Ruby gave her a secretive smile and shrugged her shoulder. "I'm not sure what he said to her, but she's treated him differently since. He's a softy."

"Men can be so complex," Emma responded absently, thinking of the differences between Killian and his brother. Seeing Victor and the girls making their way back, she decided it was time to exchange her warm boots for the cold skates. "I hate this part," she grumbled, unzipping the first one. "You always were a wimp," Ruby retorted.

Sticking her tongue out at her friend, Emma finished one skate and started on the other foot. Not having worn them for a while, it took a little longer to get the laces to cooperate, and as she finished, she looked up just as Killian skated by and sent her a help me look. She knew he was partnered with Wyatt, but that look said more was going on than dealing with a chatty little boy. "Ruby, did you just see that?"

She pointed one long, red nail in the direction Killian had gone. "It depends. If you're talking about that 'help me' look that your honey just shot you, then yes, I saw it."

"Any ideas what it means?" They continued staring at the skaters as they flew past.

"No idea, but go rescue him. Victor and I will take the girls."

Taking advantage of the offer, Emma smiled her thanks and took off. As soon as she stepped on the ice, she immediately felt her shoulders start to relax, and with every shooshing sound the blades made on the ice, another care floated away. Out with the worry about grades, assignments, projects, deadlines, students - anything except the happiness and joy she was experiencing on this Christmas Eve.

Coming up behind Killian, she slipped her hand into his, and the quick double-take confirmed her suspicion that something was going on. "I came to rescue, but I'm not exactly sure what I'm rescuing you from."

Killian sent her a grateful, but shy smile, reaching up to scratch behind his ear. "Well, Swan...it seems that a young lass might have a, how do you say, a crush on me."

Emma rolled her eyes, sending him a quick smile. "I'm sure there are many lasses, as you say, who have a crush on you. Just tell them you're taken."
He gave her a look as if to say, "are you daft?" before continuing to explain his problem. "Well, I tried, but I didn't wish to hurt to young lady. I thought perhaps you could talk to her."

They skated in silence for a few minutes, with Emma trying to decide how best to respond. Finally, she settled on, "I'll see what I can do."

The smile he gave her would have melted her heart, had it not already been to the point that it melted whenever he was near. He pulled her off to the side of all the skaters and into his arms. "I knew I could count on you," he whispered, leaning in to steal a quick kiss. "Hot chocolate or a race?"

She dimpled. "Race...and then hot chocolate. Mark, get set, go," she tossed out with a giggle and was off before he had time to realize her game. She enjoyed the chase but the perks of being caught by Killian were better.

Christmas Eve Service  
Boston, MA  
Early Evening

By the time everyone arrived back at the Home after ice skating, it was a mad rush to get everyone ready to leave again. The Sisters, having already gone to the church, had left Emma and her friends in charge of the children, and they were tasked with getting everyone ready and to the church for the 6:00pm service. Not an easy feat when the kids were hyped up on sugar from too many cookies and the anticipation of Santa's arrival, and the adults' feet were dragging from exhaustion, but somehow, they managed it. It had been Killian who had come to Emma's rescue and saved her from losing her patience with Wyatt, who was doing his level best to push all of her buttons. He had saved her, just as she had saved him earlier in the day. Balance, she thought, he balances me.

Arriving at the church, there were a lot of breathless gasps at how beautifully the church was decorated. There were numerous Christmas trees, all trimmed in various colors, many shades of garland strung all over, poinsettias and candles everywhere. When suddenly a hush came over the crowd and the organ music started, she could already feel the goosebumps start to make their appearance. She slipped her hand into Killian's, and as they stood to sing, she couldn't help but feel thankful for everything that the year had brought her. Somehow, being here and sharing everything that had made her Christmas special when she was growing up, solidified their relationship. She was assured that he was the man that had been created just for her, and her glass wasn't just half full, but filled to the brim and spilling over.

As she listened to the message of the season, one of hope and love and new beginnings, she had to wonder what the new year held for them. In the past she might have worried, but glancing at the man sitting next to her, a peace came over her and she knew that no matter what came their way, their love would see them through.

As the speaker was finishing, Emma noticed Killian starting to fidget in his seat, almost as if he were nervous about something. When he squeezed her hand and then made his way out of the pew, she assumed he was going to the men's room, and so when he disappeared behind the stage, her eyebrows went up in question. Elsa was no help, and when she glanced at Robin, he just gave her a cheeky smile as he led Roland out of their seats, also. She leaned forward and tapped Ruby on the shoulder. "What's going on?"

Ruby shrugged just as a spotlight illuminated the stage and Killian stepped into it with his guitar slung over his shoulder, strumming the first notes of a song.

"Come they told me," he sang.
And from the back of the church a voice and a drum echoed, "Pa rum pum pum pum,"
And then Killian answered, "Our new born King to see."
Followed by the voice and the drum, "Pa rum pum pum pum."
And as the song continued, Killian would sing one line and Robin and Roland would perform the drum part, walking slowly toward the front where Killian stood.
Emma hadn't realized she had sighed until she heard, Elsa whisper, "And there go the panties, folks."
Emma bit her lip to keep from laughing out loud at Elsa's bawdy comment. "Shh, we're in church!"
Her friend's look basically said, if the shoe fits, and so she tried to focus on Roland and how adorable he was as he played the drum so solemnly. But when Killian's smooth voice rang out, her eyes automatically locked in on him, and darn if he didn't know it. As he sang the last line, he sang it to her.
"Then He smiled at me,"
And they all finished in unison, "Pa rum pum pum pum, Me and my drum."
As the music faded and the spotlight went out, leaving only candlelight, Emma stood with the rest of the congregation for a last prayer, and then it was time to leave. Killian, Robin and Roland were waiting as she slid out of the pew and into the aisle. "How long have you been planning that?"
He took her hand pulling her close. "A few weeks." His shy smile suggested there might be more to the story...but perhaps not.
"Emma," Roland wrapped his arms around her leg, "wasn't I good? Huh? Huh?"
"Very good, Roland." She ruffled his curls. "Ready to go eat?"
He dimpled, his dark eyes shining. "Granny's?"
Her wink said it all.

Group Home
Boston, MA
Evening
As soon as dinner was over and they all made it back to the Home, Sister Blue took over, and with very few words or shenanigans, all the children were in their pajamas and tucked into their beds. Emma met Ruby in the hallway after they had read bedtime stories to Maddy and Alli, and after realizing all the other children were asleep, looked over at Ruby with a shocked expression. "How does she do it?"
"I don't know," moaned Ruby, "I'm exhausted."
"There's got to be some magic involved," Emma scoffed, linking arms with Ruby and leading them toward the front room where the adults were going to enjoy some eggnog and music.
"Agreed. Eggnog?" Ruby asked as they walked by the side table where Blue had set up a tray and glasses.
Emma hummed, "Just a little. Don't let Blue know, but it was never my favorite."
Taking her glass, Emma settled on the sofa next to Killian, who seemed to be lost in thought, staring at the tree. As the lights blinked off and on, the auburn highlights in his hair and beard sparkled, bringing her attention back to his almost brooding gaze. "Killian? Are you okay?" she asked him hesitantly, worried that something was worrying him.

~~~CS~~~

The twinkling of the lights on the tree took him back to Christmases past, causing a melancholy to tap at the edges of his mind. He had just clinched his jaw when he heard Emma's sweet voice inquiring about his well-being.

"Killian? Are you okay?"

The tree lights blinked off and on, their colors mixing with the gold of her hair, creating a halo around his very own angel. Killian picked up her hand, kissing her fingers. "Aye, love. I'm fine, but better now for seeing you."

"Are you sure?"

She studied his face carefully, and not wanting to worry her, he leaned forward, giving her a simple kiss. "Positive. Now," he glanced back at the tree and the empty stockings hanging on the mantle, "I'm assuming gifts and stockings happen sometime soon?"

Emma gave him a big smile. "But, of course. In twenty to thirty minutes Blue will be giving orders just like a drill sergeant, bringing with her gifts and items for all the stockings. With all of us working together, the stockings and gifts will be completed and then she'll start strongly encouraging us all to go to bed."

Killian frowned and shook his head a little. "Bed at ten?" He leaned forward, lowering his voice an octave and whispered in her ear, "I'm sure we can find ways to entertain ourselves, if we..."

"Okay, everyone. The children are asleep. Let's go," called Blue as she wheeled out several large suitcases, filled with stocking stuffers, and started pointing the adults in the directions where all the gifts were hidden.

Killian hadn't seen Emma this animated before, but she was a sight to behold with the way she ran from one hiding place to the next. Each time she reappeared, she was holding an armful of gifts that she unceremoniously dumped on a chair before disappearing again. And every time Emma appeared and used the carry and dump method, Ruby scolded and would methodically move all the gifts under the tree. He had never seen a more chaotic mess work like a well-oiled machine as did the alumni of Sister Blue's ship. Hers was a tight one, but he had no doubt she would always be there for her girls, no matter what the circumstance.

And just like Emma said, once the gifts were piled under the tree and the stockings were stuffed, Blue started making noises about bed, because the children would be up with first light. Robin and Elsa disappeared and Blue, Ruby and Victor followed shortly after.

Emma looked up at him from her position against his shoulder. "We probably should go up too. Blue's right...the children do get up early."

Killian turned to her and cupped her face. "I have something for you first."

"Oh?" She raised her brows and leaned closer, asking, "Is it something I'll like?" against his lips.

"Maybe." He gave her a tender kiss and went to get his guitar. Pulling an ottoman close to her,
Killian strummed the opening bars of the Josh Groban's song *Believe*.

*Children sleeping, snow is softly falling*  
*DREAMS ARE CALLING LIKE BELLS IN THE DISTANCE*  
*WE WERE DREAMERS NOT SO LONG AGO*  
*BUT ONE BY ONE WE ALL HAD TO GROW UP*

As he sang that last line, his thoughts drifted to how it felt when he lost his parents and how instead of growing up, his reaction had been to run. But eventually, he had run to Boston...and to her. Emma.

*WHEN IT SEEMS THE MAGIC'S SLIPPED AWAY*  
*WE FIND IT ALL AGAIN ON CHRISTMAS DAY*

He watched a tear trickle from the corner of her eye and cursed the fact that he didn't have an extra hand to pull her close and kiss it away, but then...she smiled. *Yes, my love. You helped bring magic back into my life.*

*BELIEVE IN WHAT IN WHAT YOUR HEART IS SAYING*

*I love you, Emma.*

*I know, Killian. And I love you.*

*HEAR THE MELODY THAT'S PLAYING*

*I'm singing just for you.*

*I love when you do.*

*There's no time to waste*  
*There's so much to celebrate*  
*BELIEVE IN WHAT YOU FEEL INSIDE*  
*AND GIVE YOUR DREAMS THE WINGS TO FLY*

*I'll be there with you, love.*

*You are my dream, Killian.*

*I want to make yours come true.*

*You already do.*

*You have everything you need*  
*If you just believe*

*Trains move quickly to their journey's end*  
*OUR JOURNEY WILL NEVER END*  

*No?*

*NO. OUR JOURNEY WILL GO ON AND ON.*

*DESTINATIONS ARE WHERE WE BEGIN AGAIN*
Trusting starlight to get where they need to be

My destination brought me to you

I had been waiting...I will always be waiting

When it seems that we have lost our way
We find ourselves again on Christmas Day

If we lose our way, I'll still be there. Find me. Feel me.

I promise. I promise.

The song continued, and with every line he sang, Killian sent messages to Emma that she received and answered back. The magic of their love mixed with the magic of Christmas and as the last line of the song faded, Killian moved aside his guitar to catch his true love in his arms. When their lips met in front of the tree, he could almost feel the magic whirling around them, making the lights twinkle brighter and the air smell sweeter.

Thank you for reading. I hope you enjoyed the fluff. Part 2, Christmas Day will be posted 12/26.
Chapter Summary

See how Emma, Killian and their friends spent their first Christmas together. Remember this chapter takes place in the middle of Chapter 8 between the Faces Through Time Holiday Ball and Early January.

I hope everyone's Christmas was everything they'd hoped and you are ready for another dose of fluff.

The Promise
Christmas Day

Group Home, Boy's Room
Boston, MA
Christmas Morning

Killian rolled over, pulling Emma close, burying his face in her fragrant hair but...something told him that wasn't right. "What the hell did Sister Blue put in that eggnog?" he thought as someone's hand landed on his shoulder.

"Killian," shake, shake, "why are you hugging Robin?"

His brain screaming, what?! Killian opened his eyes to stare directly into those of his best mate, Robin.

"Why, Killian, whatever will Emma say?" Robin cracked with a smile.

Killian quickly moved his arm, sitting up in the too narrow bed, demanding, "Robin why are you in my bed?"

"I believe it is you…who are in mine?" Robin's grin got bigger.

Killian frowned and looked across the room at the bed he was originally given. Wyatt was sprawled across it, the same racket emanating from his mouth that had sent Killian running in the first place. Covering his eyes with his hand, he fell back onto the bed with a groan as how he ended up in the wrong bed came back like a wave.

"What the bloody devil is that noise," Killian muttered, opening his eyes to see the tiny frame of Wyatt spread out in his bed, snoring so loudly he couldn't hear his own thoughts.

Realizing he wasn't going to get any more sleep, at least in the immediate future, he pulled on a pair of pajama bottoms and padded down the hall to the front room. When he passed by the bedroom where Emma was sleeping with Ruby and Elsa, he pressed his ear to the door and listened. "What are you listening for, you big git," he mumbled when all was silent, but as he continued walking he couldn't help but wish she were there beside him. "Her company would be nice," he sighed wistfully.

How was it that he had always been able to sleep anywhere and through anything, yet apparently,
he was the only one awake. As he made the long journey down the hallway, he could almost feel the 
anticipation of the children sleeping behind each door. Now, it was all quiet, but as soon as the first 
child awoke, the noise would be like no other he had ever experienced. Which reminded him that he 
needed to get some sleep. Problem was, the one thing that was guaranteed to send him quickly 
into la la land, was not part of the equation, therefore he’d have to settle for second best...rum. After 
opening and closing several cabinets in the kitchen and coming up empty, he opted instead for what 
he assumed was leftover eggnog. With glass and a handful of cookies, he made his way into the 
room with the tree.

The tree was standing in the corner, dark, which was in stark contrast to the many lights that lit it up 
earlier in the evening. Using his elbow, Killian flipped the switch and the tree immediately was 
brought to life. Beautiful, he thought, but not as beautiful as the figure it illuminated on the sofa.

A princess.

A sleeping princess.

But more importantly, his sleeping princess.

Loath to wake her just yet, he sat down, stretching his legs out in front of him and leaned back, 
taking a deep breath. The blinking of the lights hypnotized him, creating an almost dreamlike bubble 
that included him and, as luck would have it, his sleeping princess. He had been alive for over thirty 
Christmases and this Christmas would forever be held as one of his very best. Learning more about 
the woman who had captured his heart and who, with every little smile, was seeping deeper into his 
soul than he ever thought was possible.

Unable to stay away from her any longer, he drained his glass and made his way to her side. 
Kneeling in front of her, he slowly lifted his right hand, lightly trailing his finger along her nose, then 
along her full bottom lip. Her lips twitched into a semblance of a smile, and that invisible force that 
existed between them slowly drew him down until his lips hovered over hers. And then there was no 
stopping as he allowed their mouths to meet.

It didn’t take long for her lips to open, and his mission quickly became getting as close as possible. 
Stretching out on the sofa in front of her, he pulled her closer, using his lips, teeth, tongue and hands 
to communicate in a language only meant for lovers. Her hands in his hair pulled his closer, then 
pushed him away so she could run them up his chest to his nape, pulling him closer yet again.

His body aflame in want, he slipped his hand under her t-shirt, encountering soft, warm woman. 
Squeezing...kneading...soothing up and down her back until his fingers reached the elastic of her 
bottoms, and with each movement down, they slipped a little farther inside until he was caressing the 
upper swell of her behind.

Needing to be closer still, he angled her top leg over his hip, allowing his fingers easier access to her 
heat which welcomed him home. She moaned, deep in her throat, her body moving against his 
hand, hers wrapped around his back holding him tightly, their tongues mimicking the action of his 
hand, faster and faster until...she pulled her head back with a gasp.

"Killian?" she exclaimed, her eyes wide with surprise.

"Aye, love, come here." He leaned back into her for another kiss, settling for her cheek, moving to 
suck on her earlobe when she buried her head against his chest.

She groaned again and this time he could hear the regret in her voice. Righting her clothing, he held 
her until her breathing was under control. "I'm sorry," she mumbled against his skin. "I feel like a
teenager whose parents might come around the corner at any moment."

Behind his feelings of regret, he felt contrite that he had allowed things to get out of hand, as he wouldn't ever wish her to feel uncomfortable. "It's alright, Swan. I'm the one who should be apologizing." He settled them into a more comfortable position on the sofa, with her head on his shoulder before asking, "What brings you out here in the middle of the night?"

"I couldn't sleep." He felt her shrug her shoulder. "I missed your arms around me."

Tightening his hold just a little, Killian rubbed his chin against the top of her head. "Me too, love. I'm here now. Shall we sleep?"

"Tell me a story, please?" she whispered. "I love how the words roll off your tongue."

He laughed and thought about telling her a story of his youth but at this time of year...

"Once upon a time, there was a beautiful Princess who admired Captain Hook from afar, but her family didn't think he was good enough for their fair-headed Princess," he began.

And once the story was complete he had walked her back to her room and, with a kiss goodnight, had shut the door behind her.

"Sorry 'bout that, mate," he gave Robin a sheepish smile, "but that racket," he nodded toward his bed where Wyatt was still sound asleep, "woke me and I helped myself to a few glasses of Blue's eggnog."

"How many is a few?" Robin asked curiously.

Killian shrugged. "Two, maybe three. But I remember being dizzy when I came back into the room."

"Well, that explains it." Robin gave him a sympathetic look. "On my way to bed last night I saw Blue dumping more Brandy into the container of left over eggnog. Cheer up, it could be worse."

Killian gave Robin a dirty look as he climbed out of the bed. "I suppose," he grunted just as the racket from Wyatt quieted and he sat up smiling and rubbing the sleep from his eyes.

Roland danced around in the middle of the room. "Hurry. Santa was here."

Robin looked over at Killian, a little frown between his brows. "And how do you know that, little man?"

Giving him a sheepish smile, Roland dimpled. "I peeked. Hurry."

**Group Home, Front Room**

**Boston, MA**

**Christmas Morning**

Emma had tossed and turned for an hour after Killian had sent her back to bed before ending up where she had started. Right back on the sofa that still smelled like him, and the smell, combined with the twinkling lights, had finally allowed her to drift off to sleep. She dreamed of Killian and mistletoe and gifts and Killian some more, only waking when she heard the shuffle of little feet, and opened an eye to spot Roland gawking at the filled stockings. After he disappeared down the hall, she pushed up, refolded the blanket she had used to keep warm and sat back waiting for the onslaught of bodies.
When that didn't immediately happen, her eyes were drawn away from the hallway and back to the tree, locking in on the colorful bulbs hanging side by side.

...Emma whispered, "It's a tradition here at the Home. Everyone gets their own Christmas bulb with their name on written on it, and we make a big deal out of hanging them on the tree."

Pulling her close, Killian whispered in her ear, "That's a lovely tradition, Swan. I quite enjoyed hanging the ornaments on our tree."

"Me too, Killian," she sighed, leaning a little closer to his warm body. They watched as the ornaments were hung on the tree one by one, all in a systematic fashion until it was time for the new friends to have their own. Blue picked up a box and gently lifted a bulb with Victor's name on it, handing it to him. As he hung it on the tree close to Ruby's, Emma leaned close. "Your own ornament means that you have been accepted into our family."

Next Blue gave ornaments to Killian's friends...there was Robin...and Graham...and Kristoff.

And, lastly, she stopped in front of Killian, handing him a blue ornament almost the same color as his eyes, his name written in calligraphy. He hung it on a branch, where it not only was close to Emma's, but where it actually touched, signifying to her that they were a unit.

And now, weeks later, whenever she caught sight of her white ornament hanging next to Killian's blue one, it made her feel giddy. He made her feel giddy, she thought as she heard his voice coming down the hall, accompanied by the voices of several children, all of them talking at once.

"Okay, children." Blue clapped her hands to try to bring a little order to the room. "Everyone have a seat and we'll get started."

Killian wound his way through all the little bodies until he was able to squeeze onto the sofa next to her. "Is it always this early?" he groused, glancing at the clock to see that it was just after 6:00 on Christmas morning.

"Oh, sometimes it's earlier," Emma answered. "We got lucky this year."

"And if I need a nap when they're all done?" he inquired, that cocked brow of his drawing her attention.

"Oh, there is no napping on Christmas Day," Emma consoled him, "but maybe we can get to bed early." She giggled when she heard his quick intake of air.

He lowered his voice an octave, whispering for her ears only, "Don't make promises you don't intend to keep, Swan."

She opened her mouth to answer, but before she could assure him she wasn't, Blue requested help passing out the gifts. "I'll be right back. Save my seat?"

"Of course, love. I'll be here waiting."

He really says the most romantic things, she thought as she stood up to help with the presents. Once all the gifts were handed out, they were opened one at a time, as each child had their turn in the spotlight. Periodically, Emma would glance over at Killian, and when he wasn't looking back at her he was watching the children, captivated by their behavior.

Unable to stay away any longer, she made her way back to his side, resting her hand on his thigh as he watched Wyatt unwrap a Lego set. "Killian, look at this!" Wyatt held the prized possession aloft.
Emma watched Killian as he made an innocuous comment, but when he looked up at her and his eyes were sparkling, she had to laugh. "Do you wish I would have gotten you Legos?"

He grinned but didn’t say anything as he was too busy studying the box Wyatt had given him. Shaking her head, Emma waited for the unwrapping to finish before making her way to a storage closet. Finding the large bin she was looking for, she pushed it out of the closet and beckoned Killian to come see. "For you." She popped off the lid to reveal thousands of Legos, all shapes and sizes.

As she had expected, his eyes lit up. "Bloody hell," he murmured almost reverently.

Giving her a quick hug, he picked up the bin, called Robin, and disappeared with all the boys who had gotten Lego kits into another room. "We'll not see them 'til it's time to eat, will we?" Elsa asked as she came by with a large trash bag.

"Probably not," Emma sighed. "Probably a good thing we do cookie decorating and not Lego building, isn't it?" Grabbing another trash bag, she followed Elsa into the pile of wrapping paper that had been ripped and tossed around like confetti. Working together, the trash was collected. The children had separated themselves into groups playing with their new toys and Emma found herself in the kitchen helping with breakfast. The smell of frying bacon, eggs, biscuits and cinnamon rolls filled the air.

She peeked inside the oven to check on the biscuits. "It was weird not having Ashley here this morning, wasn't it?"

"I know," Ruby agreed from where she was scrambling eggs. "She said they would be here for dinner, though. They're going to Sean's father's for brunch."

"Wait. What?" Emma asked. "I didn't think Sean and his father got along."

Ruby shrugged and made air quotes, "They're trying for Alex."

"Family is important," Emma agreed, wondering if a part of Killian's mind was thinking about his brother and wishing he were here. Making a mental note to ask him about it later, she turned back to the conversation at hand.

**Group Home, Front Room**

**Boston, MA**

**Christmas Late Morning**

Killian placed the last block and sat back to admire his work. It had taken him the better part of the morning and he had long lost all his helpers, but he had done it. He had built Emma...a memory lane, of sorts. Would she be able to identify his Lego renderings?

He stretched and stood up, noticing that, unlike the rest of the males, Robin was still sitting in the room playing on his phone. "You didn't get tired and leave like the rest?"

Robin shook his head, giving him a solemn look. "I thought you might want to talk about what you're trying not to think about."

Shite, thought Killian. *Leave it to my best mate to know what's going on my head without anything being said.* "What are you talking about?" Killian blurted, more sharply than was deserved.

"I've known you a long time, old man," Robin scolded him. "I know when you're involved in something methodical like that," he pointed at the structures at Killian's feet, "you're trying to either solve a problem or trying to run from one." His voice softened, "Have you told Emma?" Killian gave
a quick shake of his head and dropped his eyes. "Why not, you big git?"

Killian didn't respond, because he couldn't without giving himself away, and today...it wasn't the right time.

"That girl loves you," Robin broke into his thoughts, "tell her."

"I will," he promised Robin, "when the time is right."

Exiting whatever game he had been playing, Robin took a few steps his direction, stopping next to Widner Library. "I would give anything to have what you have with Emma. Don't wait too long."

Killian took a deep breath, wondering how to bring up such a serious subject, but deciding that here, in the Home, probably wasn't the right place. "Soon."

"Good. Now, if you'll excuse me," he grinned as Emma wandered into the room, "I'm going to go call my pop, as it seems you're in good hands. Catch you later." He left whistling OneRepublic's *Secrets.*

"What was that all about?" Emma asked as she watched Robin leave the room.

He could hear the buzz of conversation from the other room, and not willing to start something that he might not be able to finish, *Don't lie to yourself, it's more you aren't ready to discuss it yet,* his subconscious clarified, he instead took her hand and pulled her into the room. "He was just giving me a tough time about this." He waved his hand over the array of buildings he had designed that were now spread at their feet.

"Oh, Killian," Emma said his name almost reverently, "this is..." She dropped down onto her knees and he could see her eyes moving from building to building. Taking measure of what she was seeing, going from one to the next and then backing up and looking at them all over again. Finally, she looked up at him, her eyes pooling with tears, "It's us, isn't it? It's our journey."

"Aye, love. It's our journey. He dropped down beside her and took her hand in his. "There's The Burren where, when I stepped out on the stage and heard your laugh for the first time, I knew that my life was about to change."

"Mine did too, Killian. Your voice as you sang *Hello*...it was if you were singing only to me."

"I was," he kissed her fingertips, "and then when I was actually close enough to look into your eyes, I was lost and found all at the same time."

She kissed him gently and then pointed toward the next few structures, the Lucky Strike, the Weeks Footbridge and the Caspersen Student Center. "All important parts of our journey, but at the time I think my friends were getting frustrated with me."

Killian laughed. "Oh, there's no thinking my friends were frustrated with me. I know they were."

"And the site of our first dance," she pointed out.

"And our first kiss." He kissed her again. One by one they took turns naming each building and mentioning the special occasion that had occurred there, until Emma pointed at the last building.

"Killian," Emma gave him a puzzled look, "why is there another replica of my house?"

He waggled his eyebrows at her. "Well, for what I have in mind it will be a momentous occasion."
She didn't say anything to him, and when she stood up and walked to the door, he was afraid she might leave, but then he heard the lock click into place and his breath caught. "Well, well, Ms. Swan..." He stood up and sauntered toward her, pinning her against the door.

"Well," she wrapped her arms around his neck, her lips a breath away from his, "I thought we'd start here and see where it goes."

He was surprised by her statement, but not one to look a gift horse in the mouth, planned on taking advantage of the opportunity. "Come here," he whispered, sealing their lips and ensuring that any further conversation in the immediate future would only be that of the nonverbal variety.

**Group Home, Kitchen**  
**Boston, MA**  
**Christmas Afternoon**

Being in the kitchen while Blue, Green, Astrid and Johanna cooked their holiday meals had always been one of Emma's favorite things to do. She didn't enjoy being there because she was interested in cooking, as she could barely scramble eggs, but the camaraderie that she felt when they were all there at once was something that she just...liked. It made her feel as if she were a part of something...she wasn't sure what, exactly, but she knew that at no other time during the year was the feeling the same.

This year, she had been tasked with making mashed potatoes and she didn't know how...but she had failed. They were lumpy one minute and then when she would add milk, they would be too runny.

Ruby, on the other hand, had been given the task of putting together a relish tray with celery, carrots, cherry tomatoes and dip. Emma watched her try to arrange the carrots into an orderly pile, but every time she put the top carrot on, the rest would all tumble down. By the looks of things, she was getting just as frustrated with her task as she, herself, was getting with the potatoes.

Ashley had arrived late and she was given the best task of all, and that was combining the ingredients to make chocolate chip cookies. Just watching her friend mix the ingredients was making her mouth water for the dough, which had always been her favorite. Unable to resist, she snuck closer to the bowl, dipping her spoon in and coming away with not just a small teaspoon amount but a huge heaping spoonful. "Mmm," she hummed in appreciation the minute the sugary substance hit her taste buds.

"Emma," Ashley giggled, "go away. You're just as bad as you were as a kid."

Ruby snuck around the other side and scooped just as much out onto her spoon as Emma. "Mmm," she hummed, her mouth full.

Dipping her spoon back in for more, Emma grinned at Ashley, sending her a look that said *dare you* and, just like always, Ashley caved, helping herself to several bites.

They had each just dipped their spoons in for more when they realized the room was too quiet. Emma peered over Ashley's shoulder to see all of the older women staring at them, hands on their hips and a rather dour looks on their faces. "Busted," she whispered before all three broke into a fit of giggles.

"I swear," admonished Blue, "it's just like when you were growing up. You ate all the dough and there were never enough cookies to go around. No matter how many times I said -"

"-Don't eat raw cookie dough. It will make you sick," the girls chorused.
"I've never been sick. Have you?" Emma looked to Ruby.

"Not me."

"Me either," chimed in Ashley.

Shaking her head, Blue turned away for a bit, and thinking they had gotten away lightly, spoons were dipped back into the bowl, except this time they were scooted out of the way as four more spoons joined.

Elsa walked in with Anna just as they all were enjoying another lick. "Oh, yum. Cookie dough. I love cookie dough. Can anyone join?" Anna spilled in rush.

Ruby nodded her head and handed them each a spoon. "I'm glad dinner's not for some time yet. I'm full."

"When will everyone be back from sledding, Blue?"

She looked at the clock. "Half-hour?" She shrugged her shoulder. "And that's if your young men can tell time." Taking a last lick of her spoon, she pointed it at Ashley. "Why don't you save that for later and mix up another batch to bake?" And then dropped her spoon in the sink as if it were the most natural thing in the world for them all to share chocolate chip cookie dough.

The girls looked at each other, all with expressions that said what did we just miss before deciding it didn't matter. After taking one more lick, Emma went to get a container to store the mixture and Ashley gathered supplies to start on the next batch.

"Em," Ruby called, staring down into the mess she had been working on prior to the cookie dough break, "I'll take the potatoes, you take the veggies."

Elsa held the pie she was carrying aloft, and after being sent to set it with the desserts, she and Anna were tasked with setting the tables.

Looking around her at the easy way everyone moved around each other in the kitchen, Emma decided some day she wanted all of this in her very own home.

**Group Home, Dining Room**
**Boston, MA**
**Christmas Early Evening**

Sitting around the table, Emma still found it interesting how this group of people had come to be. They were all adults and not from the same generations, nor were they from the same walks of life, but their lives were intertwined in many ways and they had come together to celebrate this most special day. And Blue played her part well. She was the matriarch of the group, and as such was gathering information from each of the guests, as if she were a spy collecting data for a mission.

She moved from person to person, with nary a pattern as far as Emma could tell, seamlessly going from listening to Graham talk superficially about a case to asking Victor how he liked working at Mass General as well as how he got into cardiology. As she listened to Victor spin a tale for Blue's benefit, Emma winked at Ruby, who looked a tad uncomfortable with Blue's line of questioning. Assuming Ruby was worried Blue might ask what Victor's intentions were, she could totally understand Ruby's nervousness, but Emma didn't think Blue would go there...yet. However, the fact that Ruby was smitten was a given.

As the questions continued, Emma realized that they seemed to be becoming more personal and
knowing Blue was working her way to Killian, she worried what might be asked. His eyes, however, were still sparkling with mirth as he watched his friend's struggle to remain calm, which alleviated her fears for the time being. Hearing Blue start in with a question for Robin brought her attention back to the conversation.

"Robin, I thought your father would be joining us today. We had such a lovely talk when he was here at Thanksgiving."

As Robin explained that his father had planned on arriving earlier in the day for the holiday, but a problem at his jewelry store had caused him to miss his flight, Killian draped his arm along the back of her chair and stretched his legs out.

"Oh, that poor man," Blue exclaimed. "Families should be together for the holidays." She wiped her mouth, tucking her napkin under her plate before turning her attention to Killian. "And your brother, Killian. Why is he not celebrating here with us?"

Killian's hand tightened on her shoulder, his only outward sign of discomfort, because when he answered he made it sound as if it were perfectly normal for them not to spend Christmas together.

"Liam had some business to attend to in Europe, Blue. I hope he'll visit soon."

He finished just as Marion came around the corner and whispered into Blue's ear. Blue pushed her chair back and stood up abruptly. "If you will excuse me for a moment, there's a matter I need to take care of. Please continue without me." And then she was gone.

Emma looked at Ruby and then at both Green and Astrid, but only received confused looks from all. "I wonder what that's all about," she whispered.

"I'm not sure," Ashley, who was sitting on her other side answered, "but she said continue so..."

And Green took over hostess duties. "Dessert, anyone?"

Plates were stacked on the counters, and pie, cake and cookies were distributed to the adults as well as the children. Blue returned after about fifteen minutes with a somber look on her face, and even though her lips often turned up into a semblance of a smile, it never reached her eyes.

Emma tried to catch Blue's eye, but the older woman was good about playing dumb, and eventually she decided that when Blue was ready to talk, she would. As dessert and coffee were completed, the younger women sent the Sisters off to relax and prepared to clear the table and clean the kitchen.

It was a welcome surprise when Killian took the plate out of her hand. "We've got this, love." He inclined his head toward the other men and children who were similarly taking dishes back and forth to the kitchen.

"You sure?" Emma asked him cautiously. "But you won't know where everything goes or-"

"-we'll be fine, Swan," he cut her off. "Go, relax. Talk to your friends."

Emma studied his face a few more minutes and gave a quick nod before relinquishing the plate she was holding. "If you're sure. But you know where we are if you have any questions."

She hadn't taken five steps before he grabbed her arm, swung her around and pinned her to the wall with both his body and his lips. She had just gotten her wits about her enough to actively participate when he released her mouth, rubbing his nose against hers. "Not that I'm complaining, but what was
that for?"

Killian pointed up, and following his finger, Emma spotted a sprig of Mistletoe attached to the ceiling. "Did you put that there?"

"I can't take the credit for it, sadly. I believe it was Victor, but," he leaned in even closer, "I'm not one to pass up a good opportunity," he finished before his lips covered hers in a very hot, very thorough kiss before sending her off to spend time with the girls.

**Group Home**
**Boston, MA**
**Christmas Evening**

And Scrooge made Christmas Joy last throughout the year by always treating others with kindness and generosity. May that be said of all of us! Merry Christmas!" Killian closed the book, and taking the pile he had read to the boys back to bookcase, said goodnight.

"One more book," pleaded Wyatt.

"You've had four," Killian ruffled his hair and pulled his blanket up before moving to Roland to do the same thing. "You don't want Sister Blue yelling at me, do you?"

Roland's eyes grew large and he shook his head. "She's scary when mad."

"Aye, lads, that's true. But I'll let you in on a little secret, all females are scary when mad."

"I heard that." Emma slid around the half-closed door.

"You shouldn't be spying on man talk, love." He winked at the boys. "You might hear something you won't like." He handed Roland his favorite stuffed monkey.

"Oh?" both brows rose high, "you were planning on saying more about females?"

Killian grinned at her, pulling her into his arms. "I was just going to finish with 'and you should try not to make them mad.'"

"Nice save," she whispered for his ears only, before moving away to say goodnight to each of the boys.

Picking up his duffle bag with his change of clothes, he followed Emma out into the hall and shut the door behind him. Putting an arm around her as they moved away from the boys' bedroom door, he sighed with contentment. "Thank you for including me, Emma. I enjoyed being here with you."

She gave him a little hip bump. "I'm glad. I wanted to share this part of my childhood with you."

"Is it time to go back to your place for a little adult celebration?"

"That sounds wonderful, but while you were reading stories, something else was planned that, hopefully, you won't mind."

He noticed she was worrying her bottom lip, which she was wont to do when she was nervous, and when they arrived in the front room and he was handed his guitar, he was a bit confused. "What's going on, Swan?"

"Graham and Victor are building a fire out in the back while Ruby and Elsa grab s'mores fixings.
They thought a few songs, some chocolate..."

Killian kissed her nose and then her lips. "I know I've asked this before, but if I do this for you..."

"What's in it for you?" She dimpled up at him.

"Aye, love, you've got the idea," he whispered against her lips.

"Hmm," Emma hummed against his lips, before gently sucking on his full bottom lip, "a little of this and we can see where it goes?"

"Atta girl." He captured her lips in a brief kiss. "Lead the way."

~~~CS~~~

Killian pulled the strap of his guitar over his head and started strumming the guitar softly while he tuned it. When Robin joined him, it was as if his best mate had read his mind. A chord was played and in unison they sang The Christmas Song, transitioning easily into I'll be Home for Christmas.

A slow song, a quicker one, then in between, on and on they sang until one brought back too many memories and Killian just played, letting those around him do the singing.

Robin seemed to read his mind yet again as he quickly encouraged the others to sing while he and Robin only had to worry about making the music. The best part of the evening for Killian was just being close to Emma and watching how comfortable she was in this place and with these people. She made him feel things that he never thought possible, and as much as he enjoyed seeing how she spent Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, was ready to have her alone; to get to the only gift that was important...her.

He wasn't sure how long he had allowed his mind to drift, but then a voice pulled him back. Emma sang words to a song he didn't remember ever hearing before, but the timber of her voice sent chills through his system.

Do you remember me?
I sat upon your knee
I wrote to you with childhood fantasies

His Swan had started life alone, a girl lost without a family, and now she wasn't lost any longer, and instead of being selfish and self-centered, she was selfless. Stronger than she knew...and his.

Well, I'm all grown up now
But still need help somehow
I'm not a child but my heart still can dream

He was happy Robin knew the song because he wasn't sure he could get his fingers to move. She mesmerized him and all he wanted was to have her alone.

And love would never end, oh
This is my grown-up Christmas List

As the last line of the song faded, nothing mattered but her. Her eyes never left his as she took the few steps to reach his side and, moving his guitar aside, he pulled her into his arms. No words were said as he tucked her head against his shoulder and just held her, knowing that she was the woman he had dreamed of forever and thanking whatever fates brought her into his life.
He wasn't sure how long he had been holding her in his arms but when he lifted his head, they were alone. "Before we go, love, I have something I'd like to sing for you."

Emma lifted her head. "I'm listening."

~~~CS~~~

Emma watched Killian as he played a few chords on the guitar. There was something about the look on his face as he started to sing that said this song mattered. (The song is Heaven and Earth by Al Jarreau. If you would like to listen while reading you can find it following this link. (watch?v=53_x1590NSe)

I've always believed in dreams
And fantasies somehow come true
When dreaming of you
I've seen a moment's magic shine
Upon the darkest night
And fill it with light
I've heard the wind whisper melody
Of love meant to be
I've searched the heavens for you

It was a song that she had never listened to before, but one whose words reached down inside and touched a part of her soul. The words in the song could have very well been pulled from her head so well did they fit her.

I've searched heaven and earth
Chasing my dreams on the wings
Of everlasting love
I've searched through heaven and earth
Voicing the song my heart sings
Heaven help us find our love, love

His eyes glistened in the firelight, sending her messages that she was willing and anxious to receive. Messages that she never thought she would have, especially with the man that seemed to have been created exactly for her.

I've searched through heaven and earth
Voicing the song my heart sings
Heaven help us we're in love
Forever in love
Forever we're in heaven

As the song faded, his eyes opened and the look in them drew her closer. "That song was important to you, wasn't it?"

A subtle nod of his head was given before he answered with words, "Aye, love. It was one of two that Liam and I found our parents dancing to, time and again," he told her quietly.

Emma smiled softly. "And what did you and Liam do when you caught them dancing?"

He gave her a lopsided grin. "Probably made gagging noises, but...as I got older I realized I wanted what they had. And now I do. I do," he said again. "Now, though...I need more, Emma." He reached for her. "I need you. Come to me."
Into his arms she floated and when their lips met, it was like coming home all over again.

"Ready to go home, Swan?"

"I'm ready, Killian. What did you have in mind?"

He whispered into her ear what he intended to do to her, a secret meant to be shared only between lovers and so romantic, her toes curled. "Merry Christmas, Killian.

"Merry Christmas, Emma.

Taking his hand, they left the home of her childhood for the home where she and Killian were learning what it meant to be in love. And just like the song said, she had searched for him through heaven and earth and being in love with Killian was forever, like being in heaven.

I hope you enjoyed the fluff. Let me know what you thought. And now that Christmas is over, it's time to get back to our story. Chapter 20 preview will be posted on Saturday, Dec 30 and I would like to do a Q/A on the preview. If you have any questions, please let me know. I'll answer them as long as it's not too spoilery.
Chapter 9

Chapter Summary

Emma shares something from her past with Killian and Robin and Killian have a new
professor that knocks Robin for a loop.

Early January 2016

One of the many things Emma loved about the old Victorian she lived in was the round room,
situated at the very top. Sarah had turned it into the perfect quiet space. A place to come if you
wanted to read a good book or if you needed a place to think and didn't want to be found. It was a
space freely used by all the tenants and by an unspoken rule the only place in the house that was
considered 'unplugged'. No phones or computers and conversation was kept to a minimum. Truly a
place of peace.

Feeling the need to connect her thoughts and see if she could come up with a solution to help Blue,
she set her phone on the table, grabbed an extra sweater and ran up the stairs. Since the room wasn't
regularly heated, she cranked up the radiator and flipped the switch for the small gas fireplace.
Pulling on her sweater, she settled in her favorite overstuffed chair and stared out the window at the
grey clouds replaying her phone call with Blue.

"...you remember, Neal, right?"

She wanted to say, "Well, of course, I remember that douchebag," but she didn't, settling instead for
a simple, "Of course."

"I don't know how to say it any other way, but he's dead, Emma. He was caught in the crossfire of a
shooting between rival groups. But there's more."

Emma wasn't sure how she was supposed to feel, as he had been a real jerk to her when she hadn't
reciprocated his feelings, but death? That seemed harsh, even for him. "More, Blue? What do you
mean, by more?"

"He had a son, Emma. He's ten and his name is Henry."

Why is she telling me this, Emma wondered? He's not my kid and after what Neal put me through,
I'm not sure how I would feel about any kid of his.

"Who's the mom, Blue? And more importantly, where's the kid now?"

"Well, that's the problem. You see, he's been here since just after Christmas. We've placed him in
several foster homes but he's run away from all three. Marion says he's created discord between the
other boys in the house and then today, well..."

She let it hang in the air and even though she really didn't want to fall into the trap that Blue had set
up for her (darn that woman), she did it anyway. "Ok, I'll bite. What happened today?"

Blue sighed. "He gave me a letter today, Emma and," she hesitated, Emma knew for emphasis, "it
has your name on it."
"My name?" Emma almost yelled, feeling very taken aback by the turn of events. "Why my name? I haven't seen him since that whole fiasco years ago."

"I don't know what to tell you, Emma. But he refuses to give it to anyone but you. I hate to ask this of you, but I could use your help."

Emma didn't know what to do or say. She already spent a couple evenings at the house with the kids but she also had her last semester of school, the classes she taught, and bowling league and felt she was being pulled in too many directions. Could she handle one more thing? And Killian? What would he think?

"The semester just started, Blue and things are a bit hectic. Can you give me a few days?"

"Ok, but Emma? What should I tell Henry?"

"I don't know. I'll be in touch."

Now here it was, several days since the call had been made and she was no closer to a solution than when she’d hung up the phone. Unable to sit any longer, she pushed out of the chair, moving to the window where she stared out into the fading light. Hearing the door open behind her, she looked in the window and watched the reflection of the newcomer approach.

"Hello, love." He snaked his arms around her waist and buried his cold nose against her neck.

"Killian Jones," she squeaked and jumped away, "you're freezing."

The smile he gave her could only be described as wolfish, as he twirled her in his arms and nuzzled her neck with his cold face again. "You're so warm," he breathed.

The contact sent a chill through her body, but as his hot breath blew across her neck, the chill turned into a shiver of another kind. Rubbing her hands up and down on his arms trying to warm him up, it finally registered that he didn't have a jacket on, just a cream cable knit sweater. "Where's your coat? You are freezing." She led him to her favorite chair and once he was seated grabbed a throw to cover his legs and then settled down next to him.

"This," he pulled her close, kissing her sweetly, "is perfect. And to answer your question, my coat is in your apartment. I used the new key you gifted me for Christmas and put it there, which is how I guessed where you were."

"Not that I'm complaining but why are you out in this weather? I thought you were staying at your apartment the next couple of nights."

"Well," he began as he readjusted them in the chair, this time setting her more securely in his lap rather than then side by side, "this will sound as if I'm daft, but I had a sense that you needed me. Did you, Emma? Did you need me? Is that why you are up in the thinking room?"

She smiled at him, "I always need you, but something from my past has come up."

Nothing was said as he continued to gaze into her eyes as if trying to read all of her secrets. "Tell me."

She settled her head on his shoulder and pulled the throw over them, and with his arms holding her tight was ready to face that frightening time in her life. "I don't know if you've heard Ruby, Ashley or me mention the name Neal, but if you have it probably was not in a good way. I was around fifteen and Neal was a boy who grew up in the same area of town where our Home was located. The
problem was that he ran with a group of boys who were pretty rough. I'll never know why, but for some reason I caught his eye and he decided that I was going to be his girl. From the moment his decision was made, he started following me home from school, which escalated into suggestive comments, and when that failed, he tried to use intimidation techniques. After putting up with his behavior for close to a year, I took action. Deciding I wasn't going to be intimidated, I stood up to him and told him in no uncertain terms to leave me alone. The problem was it made him look bad in front of the other gang members, which meant when he retaliated, it wasn't pretty.

I didn't hear from him or see him for three months or so, and then he set me up to take the fall for some stolen merchandise and I was arrested. Thankfully, Sister Blue stood up for me and I was released and the arrest was cleared from my record and the full story came out. Neal ended up being sent away. I never knew where, but frankly, I didn't care to ask."

Killian frowned at her, "It sounds as if you were a strong lass, even at the young age of sixteen."

"Maybe." She thought about how Neal's behavior toward her had changed her. "I do think that whole experience made me stronger on one hand, but on the other, I decided if I dated it wouldn't be anyone from my high school."

"So," he gave her a teasing smile. "There's no one I need to beat up?"

She pushed herself off his shoulder so she could look in his face. "You would do that for me?"

"Aye, love." He cupped her face, "I'd do anything for you, surely you know that." He kissed her tenderly before tucking her back against his shoulder. "There's more to the Neal story, isn't there?"

"Hmm, there is." She took a breath and let it out slowly before continuing. "Seems Neal had a son and the son has a letter to give to me." Unable to sit still any longer, she pushed herself off the chair and paced back and forth in front of the fire.

Knowing she needed to work through a plan in her mind before her body would relax, Killian let her pace while he folded the throw and put it away. "Why is a letter so scary, Emma?"

She stopped pacing, but didn't stop wringing her hands together. "Because it's from a dead man. That part of my life is in the past. If I read a letter written by him, those wounds just open up again and I have to deal with the pain."

Killian moved to her, pulling her close. "So this Neal is now dead and he's sent you a letter from the grave?" She nodded her head and he continued. "And you are concerned that his words will bring back memories better left in the past?" Again, she nodded her head agreeing with his summation. Taking a step back, he tipped her chin. "Swan, words only hurt us if we allow them to. You're stronger now and you're not alone."

"I'm not?"

"No, Swan, you're not." He kissed her until they were interrupted by the growling of his stomach. "Guess, I'm hungry. Feed me, woman!" They laughed when it growled again.

They adjusted the radiator and turned off the fire before leaving the room. Stopping on the top step, she looked over her shoulder. "You never said what you wanted to eat."

"I'm easy, Swan, you know that."

"How about pancakes? I know we have a mix." She smiled at him as he opened the apartment door, closing it behind them.
"Hurry," Robin chided Killian, who was on the phone, probably texting Emma as usual. "One - you just left her, so what more could you have to say, and two - we're going to be late for class."

Shoving his phone in his jacket pocket, Killian looked up at him with a slight frown on his face. "I wasn't texting, but reading an email. Seems Professor French is having health problems and had to withdraw from teaching this semester."

Robin looked at him in concern. "Blimey, did it say who was taking his place?"

"Aye, it did," Killian answered, pulling his phone back out to read the details. "Seems it's a female, a Regina Mills from New York City."

"Regina," Robin repeated, "why does that name sound familiar?" He shook his head as a memory of seeing her name somewhere before strolled through his mind. "I wonder if she's pretty."

Killian snorted, "Anything's an improvement over Old Man French," he finished just as they arrived at the assigned room and found seats in the middle.

They hadn't been sitting very long when the door opened and the class turned quiet immediately. Robin, who had been searching for a pen in his satchel, looked up to see what all the commotion, or lack thereof, was about. One look at the woman who walked through the door and the pencil in his hand fell to the floor and he knew that he had the deer in headlights look. Hearing Killian's "Bloody hell, mate, shut your mouth," was the only thing that kept him from making a complete arse of himself as she opened her mouth to introduce herself.

She greeted the class and explained that she had been a design specialist with a large firm in New York City. A paper she had written recently on Using Design to Protect the Environment had been published in an engineering magazine and it had caught their professor's eye. Luckily for her when the professor had fallen ill, he had remembered her article and was pleased how it fit into his curriculum. When he had called and asked, she had been ready for a career change and bringing her ideas to a group of final semester graduate students would ultimately serve to make them better at whatever path they chose in the future.

Her style was different from Professor French's, more interactive as she was not one who stood behind the table and explained power points that were already understood. She moved around the room as she lectured, stopping to ask questions, answer questions and discuss specific points she wanted to make. When she passed by where he was sitting and he got a whiff of her perfume, something classic yet exotic, his heart rate sped up so much he felt like a school boy who had his first crush. Already picking up that she used eye contact quite often as one of her teaching strategies, he watched her and every time he felt she was getting ready to make eye contact with someone, he held his breath. He wanted that person she connected with to be him but when she moved over him in favor of someone else, he couldn't entirely quash his disappointment.

Thankful that Killian was an organized note taker, Robin sat back and watched Ms. Mills work the room. She was graceful in the way she moved, but there was so much more. Her presence commanded the attention of everyone around her, almost as if she were a queen who was ruling over her court. She held the class mesmerized, and with the way he was hanging onto her words, he felt like he had been truly gobsmacked. Question was, what was he going to do about it?

As Regina completed her lecture and assigned reading to be done for the next class period, Robin packed his satchel and watched students stop and talk to her. She was gracious but reserved, never entertaining them longer than what was necessary to answer their questions. Curious about the fact
that she had made eye contact with so many, yet had overlooked him, he needed to talk to her. Would she shoot him down if it were just him?

Standing, he joined Killian as he moved toward the door. "Go ahead. I'm going to..." he nodded his head to where she was packing her laptop.

"Good luck, mate," Killian murmured. "Something tells me you're going to need it."

His heart in his throat, Robin walked over to where she was just stowing her computer and notes in a briefcase. "Ms. Mills," his voice cracked, causing heat to climb up his cheeks. Clearing his throat, he tried again, "Allow me to introduce myself, Robin Locksley at your service." When she put her soft hand into his much rougher one, the shock of awareness he felt sent a tingling up his arm. Her eyes grew round before she delicately extricated her hand from his and stepped back, putting the desk between them.

"Mr. Locksley," she acknowledged, not unkindly but not the overenthusiastic greeting he wished for.

Giving her what he considered an endearing smile, he tried to think of something neutral to say to continue the conversation because he wasn't ready to leave yet. "I enjoyed your lecture." Lame Locksley, he thought mentally rolling his eyes.

This time she gave him a half smile, "Thank you," but once again didn't give him any openers to further the conversation.

Deciding his best option at this time would be a retreat and regroup, he inclined his head, "Milady," he began, earning a pencil slim eyebrow raise from her. "We'll speak again soon." He left the room quickly, shutting the door behind him with a click.

As soon as she heard the click of the door, Regina dropped down into the chair behind her and buried her face in her hands. "I am so screwed," she muttered to herself. Her plan had been a new town, a new job and finally a chance to show what she could do when out from under the domineering ways of her mother. Meeting a man whose smile captivated her was not what she had in mind. "Not at all," she said it just loud enough to reaffirm to herself that she meant every word of it. "Not at all."

Once she felt she had gained control of herself, she gathered her belongings and walked sedately back to her office. Used to offices with plush carpeting, the click-clack of her heels on the tile hallways seemed unnaturally loud making her wish she had worn shoes with softer soles. That the hallways were not crowded served to be both a blessing and a curse in that noisy hallways covered up her loud shoes, but they also created an environment bringing her out of her comfort zone. No one would ever guess from her appearance, but while Regina wanted to have a lot of friends, in reality, she had few. Boston was an opportunity for her to change all that.

She had been born in New York City, only daughter of Henry and Cora Mills, and as such much pressure had been put on her, particularly by her mother. The Mills family were old money in New York with a family lineage meant to be revered, and Cora wanted her daughter to marry early and marry well. Wanting her parents' love, she had been a dutiful child and allowed her mother to lead her in directions that she might not have chosen on her own, namely in becoming engaged to marry Daniel, who was the youngest son of a wealthy developer. Not wanting to create dissent, Regina had listened to what others had said and not worried about what she found to be lacking in the relationship. That is, until her father lay dying and whispered that his greatest wish was for her to be happy and to follow her dreams.

After he was gone, she felt his death had unleashed something inside of her setting her free. Her first
act of defiance had been choosing Brown University over Vasser, her mother's alma mater. Cora had been very disappointed in her until after graduation when she had moved back to New York and taken a position with a design firm that met Cora's approval. Her second act of defiance that brought on her mother's ire involved quitting the firm and moving to Cambridge to teach for a semester. She could only imagine her mother's comments if she fell for one of her students.

Which was why she had to be standoffish and not encourage him in any way; why she couldn't think about the way his eyes crinkled when he smiled or the way he seemed to sit up straighter when he thought she was going to look at him. Or, she thought, the way his accent washed over her causing little tingles of awareness about things she had no business being aware of. Creating friendships, gaining experience to add to her resume and finding her sense of self-worth were what she planned to focus on over the next five months and not the deep dimples that adorned the cheeks of Robin Locksley.

Thankfully, the friendship goal had been achieved by reconnecting with Sarah Fischer, whom she had met while at school at Brown. They had lived on the same floor as freshman and while they had never been best friends, had always run in the same circles. Finding that Sarah owned a building that rented to graduate students had been a coup, and that all the other residents were women had been positive, too. Today she was having lunch with Sarah and Elsa in the Caspersen Student Center, which felt like a big step toward finding the Regina of whom she could be proud.

**Late January/Early February 2016**

When Killian had promised to help her handle the Neal situation, she had been happy, really happy. So much so that, as situations came up preventing them from making it to the group home, she hadn't been too upset, assuming they'd go eventually. But now that the day had arrived, and it had been four weeks since Blue's original call, she felt equal parts regret that she had waited so long mixed with needing another excuse to postpone the visit.

Killian, on the other hand, was having way too much fun preparing for their trip. He had disappeared to his apartment early that morning, returning with several boxes and a mischievous grin. As she watched him, he picked up one of the boxes he had brought in earlier and set it on the table. Rubbing his hand over the lid slowly, she watched several emotions cross his face, making her wonder if he were afraid of what was inside - as if the memories the opened lid might unleash were too scary or possibly too painful, until he seemed to come to a decision, pulling off the lid quickly and dropping it on a chair.

Unsure when he'd last been into the box, Killian slowly removed the lid and peered inside at the jumble of cars, car parts, and assorted tools. Pulling out three different sized Dale Earnhardt cars, a white BMW, a convertible Corvette, an Incredible Hulk car and a 1994 Nissan Skyline, he laid them reverently on the table, memories flowing over him. Picking up the Dale Earnhardt cars, one at a time, he turned them over making sure their parts were intact, thinking about sitting with Robin on the floor of their freshman dorm room working on them. Searching the box, he located two of their controllers and plugged them in to charge.

As he walked by Emma toward an outlet, she smiled up at him, however, her smile didn't quite reach her eyes. "You alright, Swan?"

She gave him a look that he wasn't sure how to interpret. "You're having fun preparing for this visit, aren't you?"

He grinned at her question, "Aye, Swan, I am. Care to help?" Holding his hand out, she hesitantly put hers in it allowing him to guide them to the table. The next car he examined was the red car. "This car is something special."
Looking at it, Emma couldn’t see anything that stood out to make it special. The color was faded so that it was barely red anymore and it looked run down. "Looks like it's seen better days."

Killian gave her an offended look as he stroked it like he was stroking a pet. "Don't hurt my feeling Swan. She won many a race for Robin and me when we were first years."

"And how many times did you rev the engine up just a little more?" she couldn't quite help but ask.

"A few, but we won, which was very important among the engineering students." He took the Corvette and plugged it in, hoping it would charge enough before they left. The white BMW was missing a wheel and after searching through the box again, they had no luck finding it, but they were able to connect the Incredible Hulk car to another outlet.

"And what about this one?" Emma picked up the Nissan and held it toward him.

"That," he remembered fondly, "was my first remote control car. Father and I worked on that car all the time trying to make it fly faster."

"Did you succeed?" She asked looking into the box to see what else they might have missed.

Shaking his head, he put the Nissan back in the box. "I blew out the power source by trying to jack it up too much," he told her shrugging a shoulder. "But that was long ago."

"Sounds like good memories."

He pulled her into his arms, resting his chin against her forehead. "Aye, the best. And now, I hope to make new memories with the boys in the Home. Think they'll like that?"

Tilting her head back, she looked at the man whose arms were around her, wondering yet again how he could be real. "That's a wonderful idea, Killian. You are so sweet."

"You think so, Swan?" He lifted a brow waiting for her to answer.

She nodded her head, "I do."

"Well," he started backing her toward the sofa, "we have at least an hour before we can go anywhere. Have any idea how we can spend that time?"

She popped the button on his jeans and flicked the zipper tab with her nail. "Oh, I have an idea," she whispered as she slowly slid it down.

He grasped the sides of her head. "Oh, I do like how you think," he managed to utter before verbal communication ceased to be possible.

Sister Blue walked down the hall to the room where Henry had been staying since his arrival at the Home. Never knowing what she was going to encounter, she opened the door slowly and peeked into the corner where he was lying on his bunk playing on his handheld gaming system. "Henry," she called his name softly.

Henry turned toward the door and quickly sat up. "Is she coming today?"

The look on his face was so hopeful that Blue felt her heart melt a little for this little boy who was all alone in the world. She sat down next to him before answering, "Yes, she's on her way. Are you ready?"
He nodded his head once and he pushed off the bed to dig the letter out of his drawer. "I'm ready."

cs~cs~cs

Since Killian's hands were busy holding the box of cars, Emma wrapped an arm around his back tucking her hand into a pocket. "Ready?" she asked as her other hand hovered over the door preparing to knock.

"Question is, love, are you?"

His gaze was patient, allowing her to move at her pace. "I think so," she muttered as she knocked.

They didn't have to wait long before the door was thrown open and they were met by the curly moppet with deep dimples and big dark eyes, Roland. "Killian," he exclaimed stepping forward to wrap his arms around the legs of the surprised man standing next to her.

With a grin at the exuberant greeting, Killian moved the box to his side. "Hello there, little mate."

Roland gave him a dimpled grin and peered around them, seeing if they were alone. "Robin here?"

Killian sent her an oops look before motioning her into the house and pushing the door shut behind him. "I'm sorry to say he's not, but I'll be sure to let him know you asked."

Roland tilted his head to the side. "Ok. Whatcha got?" He pointed to the box.

"I brought some cars for us to look at. Can you carry the box over there?" He indicated a space across the room.

Watching their exchange, Emma felt a calmness come over her. She could handle anything with him by her side.

"You have this, right?"

She kissed him quickly. "I have this. Now go protect your cars." She laughed at his look of fear as he watched Roland and another boy take the cars out of the box, before giving her a wink and hurrying off.

"Emma," she heard the voice of Blue, the woman who had been a part of her life since the minute she had been abandoned. "I'd like you to meet Henry."

Blue was standing next to a little boy, who was wearing jeans and a plaid flannel shirt, his shaggy brown hair falling over his forehead and down over one eye. He had a serious look on his face as he studied her, one much too serious for a ten-year-old, but considering what he had been through, she assumed it was to be expected. She gave him a tentative smile, expecting one in return and when he broke away from Blue and ran toward her, wrapping his arms around her legs in a hug, she wasn't sure what to do.

She glanced in Blue's direction, but from the look on her face, she was just as surprised by the display of affection as Emma, herself. Gingerly, Emma patted him on his bony shoulder. "Hi, kid. Sorry, we didn't get here earlier."

Releasing her legs, Henry took a step back so he could look up at her. "That's ok. I know grown-ups are busy sometimes. Besides," he shrugged, "Sister Blue told me you would come when you could."

Acknowledging his response, with a tilt of her head, Emma motioned to the sofa, "Shall we sit?" She
led him across the room to the furniture where they sat side by side, each taking the other's measure. Blue, seeing that things were going smoothly, excused herself and left the room, and while she could hear the rumble of conversation from Killian and the boys, they were quiet enough that she was unable to make out their words. Ready or not, she thought. "I understand you have something for me?"

Henry contemplated her for several minutes before reaching into his pocket and pulling out a folded envelope, handing it to her. "My dad wanted you to have this."

Looking down at the letter, Emma could see her name written on it, but still had no idea how or why Henry had been appointed to pass it on to her. Seemed like a large feat for such a small child. "Do you want me to read it now?"

When she asked the question, he turned away from watching the boys across the room try out the cars, under Killian's tutelage, but not before she saw a yearning look in his eyes. "Sure, if you want."

Opening the envelope, she removed several sheets of paper. "This looks pretty long. Do you want to go play with them?" Nodding his head vigorously, he scampered off.

Settling back against the cushions, she opened the letter and read words from the man who had briefly been in and out of her life, a person whose impact had changed some of her views on both people in general as well as herself and apparently, without her knowledge, she had impacted him.

Dear Emma,

I'm not sure where to start, but here goes. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for all the things I said to you and for all the ways that I wronged you. I know it's not an excuse but treating others with kindness or showing empathy was not something I was familiar with. I never knew my father and my mother was a lousy mom when she was around and I basically raised myself. I know, I did a lousy job.

But I digress. I also wanted to thank you for standing up to me in the first place because while I ended up in prison, in a way, you saved me. Never thought you'd hear that you were my savior, did you?

While away I guess you could say, I grew up and found myself. I completed my GED and eventually became a licensed counselor at a Home for Wayward Boys in a small town in Maine.

Henry's mother is gone and has been for a long time, in fact, he doesn't even remember her. It's just been him and me, and while he knew a little about my past, he didn't know the complete story.

I can't get into the reasons why Henry and I were in Boston, but suffice it to say, it wasn't for the reasons you might hear. I was trying to do something right and got in over my head and if you're reading this I paid the ultimate price.

My final wish was for you to know what my thoughts were regarding that time long ago, as well as to hope that in some way you will find it in your heart to be a savior for my boy too.

Neal

Emma folded the letter and put it back into the envelope just as Blue sat down next to her. "You knew, didn't you? Somehow you kept an eye on his life."

Blue inclined her head in agreement. "Yes, I knew," she admitted. "Initially, I wanted to make sure that he would no longer be a problem for you girls, but then something happened," she hesitated just long enough for Emma to realize it might be the same thing Neal had mentioned. "And let's just say
that I reached out and one thing led to another which got us here, but Neal did love his son. So now, Emma," she looked across the room at where the boys were still playing with the remote cars, "what will you do?"

Emma chewed on her bottom lip as she watched Killian interacting with the younger boys. He's a natural, she thought, as he leaned his head back, laughing at something Henry said to him. He probably loved having an excuse to bring out his toys. "Who's responsible for Henry now, Blue?"

"Well," she looked away as her cheeks took on a pinkish hue, "technically, the state, but I have control over where he goes. We came to an understanding, Henry and I, after all the trouble he caused initially," she smiled fondly over at the group of boys, "and things have improved immensely."

"That's good to hear." She sighed, feeling the weight of making a decision that would have an effect on the life of a ten-year-old child. "I'm no savior, Blue. I'm just a person."

"Oh, Emma," Blue sighed, "you're a person alright, but a very special person." She patted Emma's knee in a comforting gesture as she stood up to leave. "Talk to Killian, as this will affect him too, and let me know what you decide."

"I will, thanks." As Blue left the room, Emma's stomach rumbled and knowing there were always cookies in the kitchen, she went to see what she could find.

cs~cs~cs

Finding herself at loose ends, Regina wandered around her little apartment adjusting items that didn't really need adjusting. Sarah had done a good job of setting up the apartment with all the necessities and since her time here was only temporary, she hadn't brought much from home; her clothes, a few pictures, her own pillow and blankets and a few candles.

Moving to the window, she saw it was no longer snowing and thought maybe this would be a good day to explore a little of her new city. So far, she had only spent time walking around Harvard Square and the Copley Mall, but ever since Robin - no - Mr. Locksley, as she needed to think of him, had mentioned the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum after she had referenced its architect, Willard Seers in class, she had been anxious to visit. Question was, did she want to go alone or invite someone along?

Thinking exploring a new city would be more fun with someone who was familiar, she picked up her phone and sent a quick text.

cs~cs~cs

When she had gotten a text from Regina inviting her to a museum, Elsa had to admit that she was surprised. They had met up on campus for lunch a few times, but most of the time Regina seemed reserved and she kept to herself around their house. From the beginning of their acquaintance she had sensed there was more to the visiting professor than met the eye, and each time they were together was proving that to be true. A trip to the Gardner Museum, which happened to be one of her favorite places, wasn't a hardship, especially on a cold wintery day.

Just as she was finished dressing her phone pinged with an incoming text and, worried that the plans might have changed, she picked it up:

Robin: Plans for the day? I'm bored.
Elsa: Going to a museum with a friend.

Robin: Oh?

She could hear the nosiness in that one word.

Elsa: Yes, the new tenant. Remember, I told you about her? Regina Mills.

She knew that she had told him about her. She also knew, from Emma and Killian, that Regina had taken over one of his classes. Wondering what kind of game, he was playing, she waited for his answer.

Robin: Oh, yes. You did mention her. Where are you going, the Gardner Museum by any chance?

Okay, that's just weird, she thought. How does he know we're going to the museum?

Elsa: Yes, that's where we're going. How did you know?

Robin: Lucky guess.

She hoped it wouldn't be too weird for all, but, thinking it would be rude not to invite, she went ahead and asked without checking with Regina first.

Elsa: Want to come?

Robin: While I would love to say yes, the lovely Ms. Mills might not approve.

Thinking there's certainly more to this story than I'm getting, Elsa asked a follow-up question.

Elsa: Not approve? Why?

Now is he going to spill or am I going to get more cryptic answers, she wondered? His response surprised her.

Robin: Ok, you win. I asked her out to the museum this weekend and she turned me down.

Now, that wasn't what she had anticipated him saying but it was time to go downstairs to meet Regina, and so she tossed out a challenge. Whether he followed up, would be the question.

cs~cs~cs

Robin looked down at his phone and read the text for what seemed like the hundredth time.

Elsa: When it's important, it isn't easy. Why don't you meet us there?

Should he? Hadn't Regina made it clear she wasn't interested? Or was she interested but there were other obstacles that were in their way? Had he listened to what she had said or had he only heard 'no' and then stopped hearing the rest of the words? Maybe his timing was bad and he shouldn't have asked after class one day, but no. He couldn't wait and jumped at the opportunity when it was presented. Was that the mistake?

As soon as class was over Robin sat and waited for everyone to leave. She had assigned a project and more students than normal stayed after class to ask questions until, finally, he was the only one left.
As he walked toward her, his pulse sped up and his palms felt sweaty. She was standing behind the table, with her briefcase sitting on the table in front of her, almost as a shield to keep her from getting too close to whoever was talking.

He asked her an innocuous question about the project and once that was over, he decided to just take the chance on the possibility that he had seen a sliver of interest in her dark eyes. "You mentioned the architect who designed the Gardner Museum, Willard Seers, in class today."

"I did." She gave him a small smile.

"Would you," he took a deep breath and smiled at her, "care to accompany me to the celebration for him at the museum in a couple weeks?" When he finally got the words out, he felt breathless and it took several seconds before he felt calm enough to listen for her answer.

She gazed at him, almost with shock on her face, like she was in a situation that she hadn't been in before. He looked closely, and feeling a little dry, licked his lips, which elicited a slight flare of her eyes that he attributed to an awareness. He could see her pulse beating rapidly at the notch in her throat, giving him hope.

She closed her eyes, taking a deep breath, before answering, "I'm not sure that would be a good idea, but..."

And then before she could say any more, another professor, Sarah Fisher, had walked in and Regina had switched her attention away from him. He had excused himself and like a bloody arsehole practically run out the door.

Had he misinterpreted what she was going to say? There had been a but on the end of her sentence. Could she have been about to quantify her answer? Bugger that, he thought, it took Killian a year to find Emma and he never gave up. Maybe I owe it to myself to give it another chance.

"Challenge met," he murmured as he sent a quick text to Elsa and went to get ready to leave.

CS~CS~CS

Regina and Elsa walked quickly to the train station, catching the Green Line to the museum. For a Sunday in early February, the T was fairly busy but seeing sportswear, it seemed that both the Patriots and the Celtics had games that were pulling fans to their stadium and arena respectively. Finding a seat between a noisy Patriots fan and a Dolphins fan having a heated discussion, Regina cut her eyes to Elsa and just shook her head at their exuberance. When several people got off at the next stop and the fans took their talk to the back of the train, it was much easier to have a conversation without feeling like you were yelling.

"Have you been to the museum before?" Elsa asked Regina as the T started up again.

"No," Regina shook her head, "I've always wanted to but for some reason it was never the right time." She smiled, "How about you?"

"I've been several times, now. Emma, you've met her right?" Elsa looked over at Regina for confirmation.

"Yes, we've met in passing. She's Sarah's TA, correct?"

"Yes," confirmed Elsa, "she used to work at the Gardner and still visits quite frequently."

"It sounds wonderful." She looked to see what exit they were approaching and decided this would
be a good opportunity to learn more about Elsa. "You live with your sister, isn't that right?" The few times they had met for lunch on campus they had talked about their parents and Elsa had briefly mentioned a younger sibling but that was about she had said. Having seen and heard the bubbly redhead around, Regina found herself curious to know more.

"I do live with my sister," Elsa confirmed. "She's studying to take the MCAT and then will be applying to medical schools."

"Really?" Regina complimented, "It takes a lot of dedication for someone to want to be a physician. Does she want to go anywhere specific?"

Elsa rolled her eyes. "She has her heart set on Harvard or NYU, I think."

They went on to talk about the fact that Elsa was planning to take the LSAT in July and then hoped to move to NYC to work.

"Do you have a firm in mind?" Regina asked as the train came to their stop.

"Not really," Elsa answered as she followed Regina down some steps. "I'm thinking corporate law or tax law, but we'll see," she trailed off as she heard her phone ping an incoming text. Betting that a certain dimpled gentleman couldn't resist her challenge meant she needed to find out what Regina's objection to him was before he showed up and the nice day turned awkward.

"Something wrong?" Regina interrupted her thoughts.

"No," Elsa frowned slightly, "why do you ask?"

They resumed walking. "You stopped talking and had a frown on your face so I wondered..." She trailed off not knowing what else to say.

*Now or never,* thought Elsa, as she moved them out of the flow of traffic and closer to a building. "I hope you're not mad but..."

Elsa went on to explain her friendship with Emma, Killian, and Robin and how when he had contacted her earlier she had invited him along. "He told me he asked you to the museum this weekend and you turned him down."

Regina ducked her head and leaned back against the building. "That's not quite the whole story. I said I didn't think it was a good idea but before I could say why, Sarah walked in and he left."

Elsa frowned, "So there's more to the story?"

"I'm his instructor," Regina moaned, "and as such, I can't get involved. Not only would it make it difficult to do my job, it would make it rough on him."

"Oops," Elsa worried, "if he shows up today, will that make you uncomfortable?"

Regina thought about spending the day walking around a museum with Robin by her side and how if truth be told, she wanted nothing more, but could she continue to maintain a distance from him? Seeing the concerned look on her new friend's face, she decided that if he showed up, she would handle it for her. "I'm an adult," she smiled facetiously, "most of the time. I can handle it."

They continued walking. "Just don't leave me alone with him, because those dimples!"

Her sigh told Elsa all she needed to know about Regina's burgeoning feelings for Robin.
So it wasn't as bad as you thought it was going to be, was it? I really didn't like him that much but I couldn't make him a douchebag because I felt bad for Henry. Let me know what you thought. And Stay tuned for Chapter 10 on 10/11.
Chapter 10

Chapter Summary

Time moves forward in the lives of Emma, Killian and their friends.

Welcome back. You will find that a lot of development happens in this Chapter and it spans several months. I hope you enjoy.

Chapter 10

Mid-March 2016

Emma should have known that Killian wouldn't have to think twice about including Henry in their lives, as, after all, he understood what it meant to be an orphan. And while he had lost his parents when he was twenty, twice Henry's age, he still remembered how it felt and often anticipated what needed to be said or done before Emma herself.

With some rearranging of their schedules, as well as organization and time management, they were able to spend at least two evenings a week with Henry and one of the weekend days. Most of their time, as was their preference, the three of them were a unit, going to the park, visiting the beach, the aquarium or going to dinner or to the movies. Henry's needs were important and while they were careful to never ignore each other, their relationship continued to grow and strengthen with every passing day.

Blue had been wonderful helping them and Henry slowly opened up, sharing pieces of his life in a town called Storybrooke, Maine. He didn't say much about the last few days of his father's life, and not wanting to push him, but wanting to have answers should he ask, they had quizzed Blue extensively. When she didn't know the answers to their questions and referred them to the detective in charge, they had been surprised but happy to learn it was Killian's friend, Graham.

They learned from Graham that there was an epidemic of elder abuse and it had been under investigation in the Dorchester area of Boston for several months. Unfortunately, the case hadn't gotten very far until Blue happened upon the name of the leader, and that was where Neal had come into the picture. At the time of his arrest, he had been running in the same group as Malcolm Stein, the presumed leader, and the police hoped to use that to their advantage.

It hadn't taken much to convince Neal to help them try and stop Malcolm, and after three months of working long distance with Graham and his partners, Neal had returned to Boston. Having no family, he had reached out to Sister Blue, begging her for help with Henry should anything happen to him. With Henry's safety assured, Neal had left to meet Malcolm in a well-lit public place and had inadvertently walked into a turf war between rival groups, getting caught in the crossfire. As he lay dying of his wounds, his last words were to protect Henry. Unfortunately, the case had taken another six weeks before it was solved, but Henry was safe, as were all the other citizens of Dorchester that Malcolm and his kind had preyed on for almost a year.

With that behind them, Emma and Killian had furthered their efforts in getting Henry to trust them and showing him that he was trusted, also. Wanting him to feel that he could count on them whenever he may need them, they had given him a cell phone, but it came with stipulations. Grades
had to stay high, and it remained with Blue or Marion, the Home social worker during the day. Once homework was completed, he got it for a few hours but then back to the adult for safekeeping before bed. So far it had been successful and had led to a little flexibility on the weekends, especially if they were running late.

The persistent whistle in Emma's ear was getting annoying and disturbing a very sexy dream where she and Killian were in a bath full of bubbles and he was getting quite creative in his ministrations. Unable to ignore it any longer, she pushed her hair aside and reached for her phone to put a stop to the annoying sound. Seeing the numerous texts, all from Henry, woke her up enough to check the time. "Killian," she squeaked, "we overslept! Henry's waiting."

Killian groaned and opened one blue eye, before his arm shot out pulling her under him and burying his face against her neck. "Why, that's not the proper way to wake your man, love," he breathed huskily against her neck. Using his lips to his advantage he began laying butterfly kisses just beneath her ear, a place that always sent shivers through her system.

Emma moaned in appreciation, enjoying the attention her man was bestowing on her. Thinking perhaps Henry could wait, she let the phone fall to the bed and as it bounced, it whistled again causing Killian to stop what he was doing and send a dirty look toward the offending object. "I have got to change that alert," she muttered before reaching for the phone and pushing it toward Killian. "We're late, see?"

Killian took the phone and sat up, pushing his hair from his eyes to peruse the messages, which all had the same theme,

**Henry:** Coming?

A few minutes later.

**Henry:** Where are you?

**Henry:** You on your way?

"Bloody hell, Emma. Doesn't the lad ever sleep?"

"Apparently not," she answered climbing out of bed. "What did you promise him today? The moon?" She pulled on one of Killian's t-shirts before realizing he hadn't answered her question. When she looked his way, he was staring at her, with a look, she had never seen on his face before. "Killian?" She walked closer, "You okay?"

Pulling her down onto his lap, he kissed her tenderly. "Do you ever think about the future?"

Unsure what he was getting at or how far into the future he meant, she gave him a vague response, "Of course I do. I think about next week and next month. Why? Where's this coming from all of a sudden?"

"It's not sudden, but something I've thought of often, especially since Henry's come into our lives. He lost someone, just as I did, and that changes a man. Changes how he thinks about things."

Emma looked closely at him, trying to read him to figure out what was really going on inside his head. "What kinds of things, Killian?"

"Us," he hesitated before continuing, "our future." He brushed his hand across her cheek. "Do you ever think about getting married, having kids?" He asked her shyly.
"Oh, that kind of future," she whispered before shrugging her shoulder, and continuing, "I don't need a piece of paper to know that you love me and that we're committed to each other, Killian, if that's what you're asking."

Their eyes clashed, the heat that always lurked between them increasing in intensity. "What if I..." He got out before her phone whistled once again, signifying the end of their serious conversation. He sighed and leaned his forehead against her shoulder. "Go shower. I'll deal with Henry."

She continued her study of his face for a few more seconds before he kissed her on the cheek, and helped her stand up. "Go, we'll talk later." With one last glance, she pulled clean clothes from the closet and ran to get in the shower.

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When she was gone, Killian sent Henry a quick text telling him they'd be there soon. Then, pulling on sleep pants, he started coffee and turned on his computer to check on the idea he'd tentatively promised for their day's activity. Purchasing tickets for an afternoon cruise to go whale watching, he sent Robin a quick text for a little help.

**Killian:** Taking Emma and Henry whale watching today. Can I use the binoculars?

Thankfully, Robin was pretty anal about answering quickly.

**Robin:** Sure. I'm headed to the Home for Roland's first soccer game.

Robin had formed a connection with Roland and spent as much time with him as Emma and Killian spent with Henry. Unfortunately, he hadn't been able to catch their instructor, but not for lack of trying.

**Killian:** We are swinging by to pick up Henry so can you leave them with him?

**Robin:** No problem. Cheerio.

Exchanging places with Emma, Killian showered and shaved and they were ready to leave.

They stepped out of their apartment at the same time as Elsa, who was wearing jeans, an oversize sweatshirt, a ball cap and had a camera strap slipped over her shoulder. "Where you off to, love?" Killian smirked at her. "Robin convince you to take pictures of the big sporting event?"

She laughed, "Is it that obvious?" She looked down at herself. "I didn't overdo it, did I?"

Emma poked Killian in the stomach. "Ignore him. You look fine. We're actually headed to the Home now. Need a ride?"

Elsa grinned, "I would love a ride. Have room for Regina too?"

Killian cut his eyes to Emma, lifting a brow, "Regina is going?"

"Yes, she is," she answered haughtily as they started down the stairs.

"Matchmaking, Elsa?" Emma asked, her eyes twinkling with laughter.

"Worked with you two, didn't it?"

"True." Emma acknowledged her comment. "When will it be your turn?"
"Let me pass the bar exam in July, then we'll talk," she groaned as she knocked on Regina's door.

"This was an excellent idea, lad," Killian popped his last fry into his mouth and pushed his plate aside. "There's no better burger anywhere." He smiled as he watched Henry stuff french fries into his mouth, smearing ketchup across his cheeks.

Swan, on the other hand, was taking her sweet time eating her grilled cheese and onion rings. She had taken the entire experience to a whole new level, almost seducing him with her moans and sighs. He kept having to look away from her and change the direction of his thoughts, especially after Henry had interrupted their morning playtime. He swallowed hard as she took a bite, moaning in delight, before licking the salt off her bottom lip. Her facial expression reminded him of how she looked when he was pleasuring her. "Swan," he whispered, "please." He wasn't sure what exactly he was begging for but when she looked over her shoulder and he saw the twinkle hiding in her eyes, he knew her sounds were on purpose.

She grinned at him, leaning close to share a kiss, before shoving the piece of fried onion she was holding into his mouth. "Isn't it delicious?" She wiped her mouth and dropped the napkin on her plate, before passing one across the table to Henry. "Here, kid. You left a little ketchup on your face."

He wiped at it ineffectively, before Killian took pity on him. "Shall we use the facilities to clean up?"

"Good idea, Killian," Henry agreed. "I can do it."

He had just stood up to go wash his face when a boy and girl about his age ran up calling his name, "Henry!"

A smile blossomed on Henry's face as he greeted the newcomers, "Hi guys."

"Who are your friends?" Emma asked, curiosity getting the best of her.

"Oh, this is Ava and Nicholas," Henry pointed to the kids, and then pointed to her, "and this Emma, and Killian."

Nicholas looked back and forth between them before turning to Henry, "Are they your new mom and dad?"

"Nicholas, Ava," a man came up behind them, placing a hand on each of their shoulders. "Sorry about them," he addressed Emma and Killian. They ran over here as I was paying."

"No problem, it was nice to meet some of Henry's friends." Killian slipped an arm around Emma's shoulders as the adults introduced themselves and made small talk while the kids ran off with Henry. When he returned with a clean face and his new friends left with their father, Emma and Killian found it interesting that when little Nicholas had referred to them as Henry's new mom and dad, neither had been in much of a hurry to correct them.

Holding Killian and Henry's hands as they boarded the ship that would take them out into the ocean, Emma had to appreciate its beauty. The Jewel of the Sea was a 160-foot Schooner Zodiac that could skim across the water as if she were flying when in full whale watch mode. While it was still early in the season for whales to be seen in the waters off Boston, a young humpback had already been spotted, so for Henry's sake, she had her fingers crossed.
As they walked over the gangplank, Henry couldn't contain his excitement and his hand literally vibrated in hers. When they reached the ship, he couldn't wait any longer and, pulling his hand from hers, ran to the side to peer over into the water.

Killian, keeping her hand in his, took her along with him until they were close enough to be overheard without yelling too loudly, "Henry, mate," he leaned on the side next to him, "your first time on a ship?"

Henry couldn't keep his eyes away from the water and, as he talked to them, kept looking back and forth between the two adults. When he answered it was with a head nod and a smile that was bigger than they had seen before, "It is! It's so cool!"

"Aye, Henry, it is cool. Lucky for you, I know my way around a ship such as this." Killian winked at her before giving Henry an indulgent smile.

"Really?" Henry beamed up at him. "Teach me?"

"I've got an idea," Emma interrupted before they started talking ships, "why don't I sit over here," she pointed to an area where benches were located for the viewers, "and you two can have your pow wow."

Killian took her hand and squeezed her fingers. "You sure, love?" He asked as he pulled her body closer to his.

She looked at Henry's expectant face, "I'm sure," and ruffled his hair before murmuring, "Have fun kid."

Killian wrapped his arm around her waist, pulling her quickly against his body to give her a firm, but sexy kiss. "We'll be back shortly, Swan."

After she left them against the rail and moved toward the benches, she heard Killian say, "Did I tell you my brother used to work on a ship?" Henry's answer was inaudible as they moved in opposite directions and she had a seat.

As she relaxed under the early spring sun, she watched man and boy make their way toward the front of the ship. Killian was even more patient than she had anticipated, which was saying something since he was the most patient person she knew. She could tell by the way Henry was gesturing that he had a lot of questions and Killian stood quietly, his head inclined slightly, listening and answering, always with a smile on his face. So similar was their body language, they could have been related.

A family, she thought, which brought her back to the comment Henry's friend had made. "Is this your new mom and dad?" She hadn't corrected him. Killian hadn't corrected him. Were they beginning to think that way? More importantly, was Henry?

She realized that the time was rapidly approaching to have a serious conversation with Killian. Was that what he had in mind earlier, she wondered? Were they on the same page regarding the future? Her phone pinged, halting any other thoughts. Swiping her finger across the screen, she read,

_Elsa_: We need to help Regina and Robin.

_Emma_: I thought you were doing that by taking her to the game?

_Elsa_: I did too but Regina needs to relax more.
Emma hadn't spent a lot of time with Regina but she knew that Elsa had, and they seemed to get along. She also knew Robin had a thing for Regina, but it hadn't gone anywhere yet. Perhaps an evening with friends.

**Emma:** Pizza night at the Home? I'm sure my boys wouldn't mind.

She couldn't help but smile at the comment because they were, she thought, her boys.

**Elsa:** That works. Perhaps seeing Robin with others around will relax her.

**Emma:** Sounds good. See you then.

Pocketing her phone and noticing the ship was moving, she leaned back on her hands and closed her eyes, relaxing her hair lifted with the breeze from the sea.

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As he answered the lad's questions about the ship, Killian kept glancing toward the stern where Emma sat basking in the sunshine. She looked so beautiful, he thought, with her face tipped up, her cheeks rosy and her blonde hair shining brightly. Was she thinking about him? Was she thinking about his comment about the future? And what about the comment Henry's friend had asked referring to them as his parents? Was that on her mind just as much as it was on his?

"Ahoy there, matey," he heard, turning to see the Captain of the ship advancing on Henry. "Would you care to visit the bridge while we pull out to sea?"

Henry looked at Killian, a bright smile on his face, "Can I?"

"Sure lad, go ahead." He pointed back to where Emma was, "I'll just be back with our girl."

He watched him skip off next to the Captain and turned back out to sea. With graduation only a couple months away, there were plans to make. He knew what he wanted, but did she want the same thing? And with constant interruptions, serious conversations were not the easiest thing to have.

Hearing the motor start, Killian made his way back to Emma, pulling her up for a quick kiss.

She let out a little squeak before relaxing in his arms and kissing him back. "Killian Jones, you about gave me a heart attack."

"Sorry about that, love." He turned her around to lean against the side of the ship so she could look at sea as they motored out. Caging her in, he placed his chin on her shoulder. "The lad is with the Captain," he whispered, feeling her shiver in awareness. Pressing himself tightly against her behind as the crew released the sails and the ship picked up speed, he engaged in a little payback for the sensuous sounds that had she made eating her lunch. When she wiggled her delectable arse and his body immediately responded, he thought perhaps the joke was on him. He heard Henry's giggle, and it had never been more welcome, as it served to pull him back from the edge.

"That was so cool," Henry called over the rushing wind as he struggled to reach them.

Since they were traveling at quite a clip, Killian couldn't help but notice the wind buffeting the lad around and, reaching out, clasped Henry's hand to pull him against the railing and into the circle of his arms.Â It feels right, he thought as they stood there together looking out at sea. Briefly, the description his family flashed through his mind before he shoved it and other heavy thoughts away and enjoyed the moments that were being given to him right now.
After several hours of no whale sightings, the Captain had turned the ship around, heading back toward shore when a loud roar went up on the other side of the boat. Rushing his family to the starboard side, they were blessed with the sighting of a young humpback whale breaching in the distance. Killian put his hand on Henry's shoulder as the boy gazed over the side in fascination. "There you go, lad. He's showing off, just for you."

"It's so awesome," Henry murmured, still mesmerized. When the whale swam out of sight, Henry whirled around, wrapping his arms around Killian's legs. "Thanks, Killian."

"Anytime, lad. Anytime," Killian repeated as he tried to convince himself that the dampness he felt on his face was spray from the sea.

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The pizza was gone and the men had scattered to various places in the house, entertaining the kids. Killian had donated the Xbox game, Guitar Hero, and currently, he, Robin, Henry, and Roland were involved in a game. So far, before adjourning to the kitchen for girl talk, Emma had heard Talk Dirty to Me and Welcome to the Jungle. Who knew where it would go from there?

Emma took the dish Blue had just washed, dried it and handed it to Ashley to put away. "You girls still work well together," Blue told them as she took the towel and wiped out the sink before hanging it on a rack.

"We should," Ruby, who was cleaning off the counter, retorted, "You made us do it enough."

"That's because chores-" Blue started to say

"-make responsible adults," Ruby, Ashley, and Emma chorused.

Elsa, who was making coffee and stacking juice boxes on a tray, laughed and shook her head. "Your comedy routine is entertaining."

Emma laughed at Elsa's remark and noticed how Regina was meticulously placing the cookies on the tray. "Regina," she complimented, "your cookie display could win an award, it's so perfect."

Regina looked up with a startled expression on her face. "Oh, is it too much?" She worried her bottom lip while waiting for an answer.

Glancing at Elsa, Emma raised her brow in question, but Elsa's quick shrug told her she wasn't sure what was going on. Upon further inspection though, Emma could see a slight tremor in Regina's hand when she lifted it to nibble on her nail. Was she nervous? "Not too much, no. But if I know those kids out there, the big ones included, they will be gone in seconds."

Regina looked down at the tray again. "That's okay, my mother always says presentation is everything."

"That's a good motto," Blue was quick to assure her as she picked up the tray with juice boxes. "Come with me and let me show you where these things go."

As soon as they were gone, Elsa walked closer to Emma. "Did you see all the looks Robin and Regina were sending each other when they thought no one was looking?"

"It's sweet and sad at the same time, isn't it? Such longing behind them." They moved closer to the door to see what was going on. Regina had laid out the tray of cookies and was helping Roland look over the display. He pointed to one and after she handed to him, hugged her before running off to
join his friends. When Regina watched him leave, Emma could tell that his affection had shaken her a little.

"Oh, look," Elsa murmured just as Robin walked up to where Regina was standing.

"Think we should rescue them?" Emma asked as they watched Robin reach around Regina, picking up a cookie and taking a bite. As he chewed, Emma could tell that their eyes were clashing and there was a battle warring between them. Regina's hands kept opening and closing and while she could only see their profiles, she knew it wasn't anger that Regina was feeling, but something else.

"She's freaking," Elsa labeled the emotion that Regina was exhibiting. "Let's rescue and regroup."

**Early April 2016**

Emma was busy with the girls, Henry was spending a day with friends, Robin was catching up with homework and Killian was at loose ends. Every time he sat and tried to concentrate on his last project, he felt anxious and caught his legs bouncing up and down, unable to keep them still. He had tried running, but after five miles and then cleaning up, he was right back to where he started. Anxious. Frustrated. And if he were totally honest with himself, scared, as what if Emma wasn't willing to leave Boston. Could he go without her?

The answer to that was simple; no. He'd give up the perfect job to stay by her side if she would have him. He just needed to get his arse in gear and spell it all out. Question was when, and why did he feel guilty asking her to give up everything for him. And now with Henry in their lives, he was another part of that talk. Sighing as if the weight of the world was resting on his shoulders, he put away his project and wandered into the kitchen for a snack.

He was waiting for the popcorn to pop when his phone rang. Hoping Emma might have gotten done early he answered without even checking the ID, "You must have missed me."

"Why would I miss a wanker such as yourself?" Liam spouted.

Feeling like the wanker Liam had just called him, Killian took a deep breath, grabbed his popcorn and sank down onto the sofa. "Sorry, Liam. Thought you were Emma."

"I'm not your Emma," he clipped. "I'm your brother and since graduation is next month I think it's about time to talk about your commitment to Innovative Designs."

Killian's thoughts went to what he knew about the company. He knew that Innovative Designs had been established not long after Dakkar had graduated from Harvard and had quickly grown into a large architectural firm in New York. As the years passed, it continued to grow and by the time Liam had joined the company its clientele had encompassed the entire eastern seaboard.

Liam had convinced Killian and Robin to join with plans for expanding into the western part of the United States. Robin would be involved in finding the perfect locations, Liam would design the buildings and Killian's job would be assuring that the building melded into the environment as seamlessly as possible. The plus would be working with his family creating buildings to be proud of, the negative was location. Liam was right, Killian did need to talk about the future, but he needed to discuss it with his girl before he discussed it with his brother.

"I realize graduation is next month, Liam. I just need to talk to Emma first." His body demanding movement, he set the popcorn bowl down and picked his pacing spot on the floor and walked while he waited for his brother's sure-to-be disappointed answer.

And when it came it didn't surprise him. "I fail to see what Emma has to do with your position here
with this company."

"Liam," Killian began, his tone weary of the struggle, "I know what needs to be done, but Emma is my future. Give me a little more time."

Liam was quiet for a long time and Killian had just about given up receiving an answer he could live with, until he heard Liam suck in some air, "Fine," Liam gave in, "but the way I see it is your responsibility is to do what is best for you. Just know that I will do what needs to be done, brother. You can be assured of that."

"I'll deal with it. Just let me be. Tell me, though, are you and Nemo coming for graduation?"

Liam's voice softened which gave Killian hope that the brother he knew when he was growing up was still in there and one day would be back for good. "Aye, Killian. Dakkar and I will be there to see you graduate. We are, after all, quite proud of you."

"Wonderful," Killian nearly shouted, "you can finally meet everyone."

"We won't be there long. Just don't overbook us."

Not having the heart to get into it any further, Killian ended up giving a noncommittal answer and hung up the phone. Something was up with Liam, he just didn't know what. He did know, though, that as much as he loved his brother, he wasn't going to be bullied. What happened in his future was just as much up to Emma as it was to him and Liam needed to understand that. Tossing his phone aside, he dug into his bowl of popcorn and picked up the T.V. remote thinking mindless chatter was just what was in order.

**Late April 2016**

While waiting for Killian to get dressed, Emma sat on the sofa in his apartment and thought about the conversation she'd had with Regina a few days ago. The fact that she and Robin obviously cared for each other, yet were unable or unwilling to do anything about it was painful to watch. She didn't know what she would feel if she were in that position. To know someone was out there who cared, but being together was impossible. Could she do that? She didn't think so, thinking that perhaps not remembering at all would almost be preferable. After all, what you can't remember, can't hurt you, right?

Those words had served her well most of her life as she never really missed parents but rather the idea of having them. In a way, she felt fortunate that she hadn't known what it felt like to have something and then lose it; that would have been even more difficult. Was that how Henry felt? Thankfully, he had Killian who could understand those feelings. But what about Robin and Regina? She was happy and wanted that for all her friends.

When the front door opened, her thoughts quickly moved from the past and Regina to the present and Robin. He looked lackluster and, if she weren't mistaken, his shirt was wrong side out. And there was something off with his smile too, as it didn't reach his eyes. They were hollow, appearing a little lost.

"Robin," she asked hesitantly, "Is everything okay?"

He grimaced, "I'm sorry, Emma. I'm just a bit out of sorts."

"Because you want something and are tired of waiting?" She gently prodded.

"Sure, that's part of it," he gave her a half smile, "but there's more to it."
"There's more?" One delicate brow lifted. "Exams are in less than a month which takes away that obstacle. What else is there?"

"True," he nodded his head, "but that's only part of the problem." Hesitating, as if unsure how much to say, he cut his eyes toward the shower, making Emma wonder if the issues had anything to do with Killian. Seemingly to make up his mind, he continued, "Once the class is complete, there's what comes next and those complications."

Emma felt a little like she was trying to put together a puzzle without all the pieces and wasn't sure where to go with the conversation. "Agreed. Then we have to get jobs."

He met her gaze, "That's right, Emma." He took a deep breath, and again cut his eyes down the hallway, just as the shower turned off. "What if our jobs are in two different places? What if we want two different things? What then?"

Emma watched a variety of emotions move across Robin's face, and wanted to help. "Maybe you need to talk to her. If it's right there's nothing you can't overcome." Great, Emma, just great, she thought, here you are giving advice that you won't even follow on your own.

"Easier said than done when we aren't a couple," his tone lowered, before continuing, "and I'm not sure we ever will be."

"Robin, don't give up hope," Emma told him quietly. "Believing in even the possibility of love is a powerful thing. Hold on to that hope. It kept Killian and me going for that year until he found me."

"Thanks." His smile held affection. "I hope Killian knows he's a lucky man." Running his hand through his hair making it stand up in several directions, he gave Killian a cheeky smile as he walked into the room. "Why, aren't you quite dishy?" he quipped, and then laughed at his roommate when his ears turned red.

"Stuff it." Killian retorted before taking Emma's hand and pulled her to her feet, into his arms, "Ready, love?"

"I'm ready." She peered around at Robin. "Do you want to go with us?"

"Where are you going again?"

"To the Jolly Roger, that new jazz bar in Harvard Square."

"No, thanks." He shrugged his shoulder. "I think I'm going to finish my project for Regina's class."

Killian gave him a look of astonishment. "Why, that's new," he exclaimed, "Aiming for teacher's pet, are you?"

Expecting a snappy answer, he glanced down at Emma with a concerned look on his face when instead Robin gave them a saddened look and disappeared down the hall. "What was that all about?"

"I think Robin needs a little intervention. I have an idea."

He gave her a quick kiss as they left, locking the door behind them. "I'm listening, Swan."

On the way to the Jolly Roger, they made plans.

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A few days later, Killian burst through the door of the apartment and, while on the way to his
bedroom, passed by Robin, who was sitting at the table. Taking one of his electric guitars off its stand, he slipped the strap over his shoulder and picking up a small amplifier, retraced his steps into the front room. He plugged in the amplifier, connected it to the guitar and then once tuned went through a few finger exercises before realizing that Robin hadn't moved. In fact, he hadn't said anything at all, which was quite unlike him.

"Robin, you alright, mate?" Killian stopped playing and waited to see if his friend would respond.

Robin's eyes moved from the window to him and by the look in his eyes, Killian could tell that something had happened. "I received an email from Liam. He expects me to start mid-June."

"Oh." Killian was taken aback a little by this information because while Liam had mentioned they needed to talk, there had never been anything definite about specifics, such as a starting date or time. "He thinks you can graduate, find an apartment and move in two weeks?"

Closing his laptop and pushing it aside, Robin moved to the sofa across from where Killian sat. "There's more. They are ready for me to start looking into locations and have me scheduled to start traveling right away, Kansas City, Denver, Salt Lake City, Seattle, Portland, San Francisco, etcetera, etcetera."

Setting his guitar aside, Killian leaned forward onto his knees. "You know, when Liam called the other day, I had a feeling he was up to something." He still couldn't get a handle on exactly what it might be, but something felt off. "Have you talked to Ms. Mills?"

"I talk to her all the time. Ask her about projects, papers, designs, shall I continue?"

"Arsehole," Killian leaned back and crossed his arms, "you know what I mean."

"Have you talked to Emma about New York?" Robin turned the tables on him.

Killian gave his friend a disgusted look, "You know I haven't talked to her yet, but I plan to, and soon. But," he picked his guitar back up, "I'm meeting Emma and Henry in a few hours and I have orders."

Once Killian had explained Emma's idea, Robin went to get his guitar and they spent time jamming in preparation for their next performance with The Minors.

**Early May 2016**

Emma pulled on her dress, ran a brush through her hair and was ready to go. Opening her door, she met Elsa and together they descended the stairs to Regina's apartment. Elsa lifted her hand to knock and just before hitting wood, Emma stopped it. "She knows we're coming, right?"

"Of course, she knows we're coming," Elsa responded with just enough hesitancy in her voice that Emma knew there was more to the story.

Pulling Elsa away from Regina's door lest they be overheard, Emma whispered, "Okay, spill. You were supposed to arrange this evening." Elsa grimaced, "I know, but I was afraid she would say no, and well..."

Emma just shook her head. "That explains why she looked at me like I had two heads when I said I'd see her later, when we rode the T together earlier." Unsure how to proceed, she was relieved when her phone pinged, giving her a brief reprieve. With a smile, she read the message from Killian, put her phone away and with a determined smile looked back at Elsa, "Now what?"
Elsa's eyes grew round and she laid her hand on her chest. "Tag team?" Upon Emma's nod, they linked arms and ascended upon Regina's door once again.

When Regina answered the door, Emma gave Elsa a look that said what the hell do we do now as, apparently, they had interrupted spa night. Regina's hair was wrapped in a towel, she was wearing a ratty old robe, her face was covered in a mud mask and she had just finished a pedicure as she still had cotton between her toes. "Elsa? Emma? What's going on?"

Squaring her shoulders and taking a deep breath, Emma took charge. "It's not what's going on, but who." She took one of Regina's arms while Elsa took the other and they led her toward the bathroom. "And the who is Robin and Killian, in about an hour."

Not giving Regina time to question, they pushed her down onto the commode. One removed the toe cotton and the other handed Regina a cloth to remove the mask. Once that was complete the towel was removed, causing deep sighs when they discovered that Regina's hair was dry and just needed to be straightened. "Do you want to do your make-up, or shall we?" Elsa asked her exasperated friend.

Finally gathering her wits, Regina pushed back and stood up. "Wait a damn minute." She stomped out of the room. "You know how I feel about the whole Robin thing."

"Yes," Emma agreed, "we do. You've been mooning over him, just as he has been mooning over you. Can you take tonight to be just Regina, our friend, and not Ms. Mills, classroom instructor?"

Regina didn't say anything for the longest time, just stood there worrying her bottom lip. Just when Emma thought they were going to end up leaving without her, it was as if a light went off behind her eyes. They shone with excitement and her cheeks flushed. "I'm in," she squealed breathlessly in a total un-Regina like manner, before disappearing into the bathroom for make-up.

Elsa looked over at Emma with a slight smile on her face. "See. I told you it would go well."

Emma rolled her eyes and walked into the living area to send Killian a quick text, leaving Elsa in charge of Regina's dress choice. Twenty minutes later, they were on their way to The Burren.

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Walking into The Burren, Regina wasn't sure what to expect, but what she saw and heard certainly wasn't it. She was used to sedate bars where all the tables and chairs were placed just so, with music that was sedate, the conversation a low hum that didn't take away from the music and the waiters wore black pants and white shirts. What she encountered was so far removed from that her senses had difficulty keeping track.

It was loud, so loud in fact that if you wanted to talk you needed to yell in a person's ear or be seated far away from the music. There was dancing, not slow, gentle dancing, but fast gyrating bodies swinging around with a lot of bumping and grinding. It was crowded, also, with people sitting at tables, standing two to three deep at the bar and in between the tables. The wait staff could be seen carrying trays of food and drinks weaving in and around customers as if the large crowds were commonplace.

Regina followed Emma and Ruby, who were doggedly making their way around various parties as if they knew what they were doing and had a specific destination in mind. Wherever it was, she hoped it was away from the music, as any closer it would be difficult for her to think, much less have any kind of a conversation. When they stopped at a table and pulled out chairs, she almost turned to go the other way, but when Elsa pointed to a chair between her and Emma, she had no choice but to sit down.
Their table was situated in such a way that it was close to the stage, close to the dance floor, but out of the main flow of traffic. Thankfully the huge speakers weren't directly in front of them, so while it was loud, when the waitress stopped by for their drink order, she could order without too much yelling.

As soon as a drink was put in front of her, she took a sip for a little courage and glanced up at the stage, expecting to see Robin and Emma's Killian rocking out with a few friends. What she saw caused her to blink several times to make sure her vision was clear. Glancing at Emma and Elsa, both watching her closely, she could only shake her head and grin for the members of the band could have very well stepped out of the pages of a book.

"So, what do you think?" Emma grinned at her, "Aren't they good?"

Finally getting a chance to listen to them, she had to admit they didn't do too badly covering some of the 80's rock bands, but she was having a hard time getting beyond their appearance. "They're good but don't they remind you of Disney characters?"

"Like who?" Elsa leaned over to join the conversation.

"Oh like," Regina looked from one to the other, "the dwarves who were best friends to Snow White. Isn't that why they call themselves The Miners?"

Emma studied the guys on stage to see if she thought they resembled any of the characters from the story she had loved so much as a child. Since she had dreamt that Snow White was her mother, then the dwarves would have been her honorary uncles. Squinting at Leroy, who was playing the drums, she tried to picture him in bibbed coveralls with a pick-ax over his shoulder but it didn't fit. "Sorry, Regina, I just don't see it. And it's The Minors, with an "o" as in a minor key."

Regina nodded her head, "Oh, okay, that makes more sense," she answered before turning back to the stage.

Emma kept watching Regina for signs of fear, but so far she just seemed curious, absorbing everything around her as if it were all new. She was a thirty plus year old woman though, surely, she had been to a bar or a concert before. "You've been to places like this in New York City, right?"

The look she got was all the answer she needed to assure her that, no, Regina hadn't. That this was a new experience only added to the mystery surrounding the woman who had captured Robin's attention. "My mother wouldn't feel that it was appropriate to be in a bar like this. And concerts, yes, I've been to concerts, but the type where there's no singing, unless it's opera and the music is generally classical, much more refined than this barbaric, hedonistic environment. But," a huge smile lit her face and when she looked at Emma again, her eyes were shining, "I love it." And as the music died down, her applause was loud and enthusiastic.

"Wow, that's just... wow." Emma looked over at Elsa, before coming back to Regina. "Your mother sounds like an interesting person."

Regina rolled her eyes, "I love my mother, but she's rather domineering. I feel so free." And she giggled, but quickly covered her mouth to quiet it. "I thought you said Robin and Killian were singing."

"Oh, they are. They go on," she checked the time, "in about ten minutes."

"Are they any good?" Regina side-eyed her.

Before she could answer, Elsa popped in, "Well, Killian pretty much sang Emma out of her panties
the first time she heard him."

Laughter burst out before she could control it, "Oh, stop. He did not." When Elsa raised her brow, she amended her statement, "Well, not out of them the first time, but he certainly made my lady parts tingle." She giggled, "Now since then..." She left it hanging thinking about just how many times he had sung them off her.

As Emma watched Regina waiting for Robin and Killian to take the stage, she kept a close eye on her face to see if she could tell what she was thinking. What she saw was yearning for a man, just as he yearned for her. The question was would Regina continue to allow her guard to stay relaxed or would she freak and slam it right back up when Robin sang the song he had planned?

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Sitting backstage waiting for their turn, Robin had to admit he felt a little anxious, nervous even. This mattered to him. She mattered to him and with all the changes happening soon, he needed to know if they were on the same page. However, as he sat waiting, he had to wonder if the unknown, or better yet what he had been imagining, would be better than his reality.

"Earth to Robin," he heard Killian calling his name, looking up to discover him standing directly in front of him.

"I'm right here. No need to shout." Standing, he moved across the room. "Plus, blimey Killian, give a man some space." Killian didn't move but also didn't take his eyes off him. "What?" He couldn't stand it any longer, finally giving in to the demands he could see in his friend's eyes.

"Why are you so nervous? You're never nervous when we perform."

"Regina's out there," he blurted to his chagrin, feeling embarrassed by his admission.

Killian shrugged his shoulder. "You've sung for a woman before, Robin. I can remember a handful of times as we made our way across Europe, you'd croon into the eyes of some pretty lady, flash those craters you call dimples and have your choice of who warmed your bed. Why is this any different?"

Robin's head immediately lifted. "This is nothing like those times," he started before noticing the gotcha grin on Killian's face. "Weren't you nervous when you were planning to sing to Emma that first time?"

"Sure, I was. Just as I was nervous when I finally found her, but do you remember what you told me?" Robin shook his head. "You said I'd been mooning over the girl for months and I should go get her.

Robin laughed, "Well, that was certainly true."

"Aye, and now I'm returning the sentiment. You've been mooning over this woman for months. Go get her."

As they started to walk onto stage for their first set, Killian stopped him. "I've got your back, bro."

Meeting his serious gaze with one of his own, Robin returned the favor. "And I'll always have yours."

The first set went well and Robin had a good time. He felt that he and Killian and the band had really jelled and the audience got into the songs. He even noticed Regina smiling and clapping along with
Emma and Elsa. Finally feeling comfortable, he kicked it up a notch, singing the words as if his life depended on them.

Between sets, he and Killian had gone out to sit with the girls and when Killian had stolen Emma away for a slow dance, he had thought about extending an invitation to Regina. However, the panicked look in her eyes, as well as the fact that it would have been rude to leave Elsa alone, prevented it from happening. When they said goodbye to go prepare for their next set, he felt her eyes follow him as he left the table and, just before disappearing into the green room, he had looked over his shoulder to see if he were imagining it. To his delight, he had been right and the shy smile she bestowed on him warmed him much more than he had ever thought possible.

As the evening progressed and it was time to make their way to the stage for their final set of the night, he took several deeps breaths and said a silent prayer. He was covering Foreigner's, Waiting for a Girl Like You, and he hoped the message was received loudly and clearly and that it wouldn't send her running from him.

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Regina was feeling good and, best of all, she was having fun. She couldn't remember the last time she had gone to a bar with other women and listened to music while enjoying life. Sadly, her only other bar experiences had been work-related and those times certainly hadn't been fun. She had been bored and felt awkward, never knowing exactly what to say to the other women. And they hadn't helped making it obvious they weren't interested in getting to know her, either.

Emma and Elsa, on the other hand, had gone out of their way to make her feel comfortable and take some of the fear of the unknown away. The conversation had been easy and flowed smoothly all evening and when Robin and Killian had been singing, she had felt a little like a girl with her first crush. She laughed silently to herself, thinking that in a way she was, for Robin was the first man that she had chosen. And while she couldn't have him quite yet, her heart seemed to have made up its mind. Could she make it a few more weeks without getting herself into trouble?

When the last set started and Robin and Killian walked out, the mood was different. The lights lowered and the music was quieter. "This is different," she murmured as she watched Killian take his place at the microphone and Emma sat forward in her seat.

"Just wait," Emma murmured back, never taking her eyes off her man. "Killian's going to sing a song we danced to at the Ball in the fall."

When the music started and he started singing the song that was made famous by Josh Groban, When You Say You Love Me, she thought Emma was going to melt into a puddle. "See what I mean," Elsa leaned closer. "Right out of her panties."

"Yeah," Emma gave them quick grin before turning back to the stage, "he's so getting lucky tonight."

"Did we need to hear that?" Regina asked Elsa as they continued to watch the display of unadulterated adoration between the singer and his Swan. "I started to ask if he had women throwing themselves at him, but one look at him when he's singing to Emma and they would know they didn't stand a chance."

"Agreed," Elsa responded. "It must be wonderful to have someone treat you as if you are the only thing they see. You know," she nodded her head toward the stage as Robin moved toward the microphone for his turn, "much like another certain singer behaves toward you."
Not recognizing the melody to the song Robin was strumming on the guitar, she leaned on her hand while listening. His voice sent chills down her spine and his eyes were doing an amazing job of making her forget all of the reasons why she needed to be cautious. The lyrics reached inside, touching her heart, making her feel things that she shouldn't be feeling just yet and she had to fight with herself to not run away from those feelings.

As the song faded away, she surreptitiously wiped away a tear and returned the tender smile he was giving her. When he left the stage and disappeared into the back room, she knew she needed to get away to think because if she stayed, she would surely do something that needed to wait. Timing was important, and she knew that, but did he?

"Emma, Elsa, I need to go," she could hear the panic in her own voice. "I need to think. I'll take the T and see you at home." Gathering her bag and saying goodbye, she disappeared into the crowd.

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Robin caught up with her just before she reached the T and, not wanting to startle her, calmly called her name. Worried that she would ignore him, he continued moving her way and when she stopped and turned, his heart resumed its beating.

"Robin?" Her voice was hesitant but didn't sound unhappy, which pleased him immensely.

When he reached her side, they moved out of the flow of traffic. Taking her hand, he rubbed her fingers with his while her dark eyes pulled him closer. "Did I do something wrong?" Not breaking his gaze, he waited patiently for her to answer.

She sighed, "Robin, you didn't do anything wrong. In fact," she closed her eyes and swallowed before continuing, "it was perfect. You were perfect."

He heard the words, but they made no sense and didn't explain why she had run away. "Then why did you leave?" He had to ask her but hated that it came out sounding so pathetic.

She stared at him so long he wasn't sure she was going to answer. When she took a step closer and put both hands on his arm, he stopped breathing and waited for her next move. "I was afraid of doing something I shouldn't," she told him quietly.

He tilted his head, giving her a small smile. "And what would that be, Regina?"

It didn't take her long before she went up on her toes and just before her lips touched his, she breathed, "This." Their kiss set his heart racing, and when she released his lips, he immediately dove back in for one more mating of their lips. The kiss slowed and as their lips parted, she stepped back and dropped her hands from his arm. Taking a deep breath, she looked up at him. "We have two weeks before you're finished with my class. Will you wait?"

He gave her the benefit of his full smile. "Do you even have to ask?"

"No." She smiled, shaking her head.

"Good." He grinned and then told her in a no-nonsense voice, "And then you'll go to dinner that night with me and we'll talk."

She gave him a little smile, "Until then," and started toward the T again. "But don't expect extra points just because you're a good kisser." She giggled before she disappeared into the station.

Thanks for reading. Be sure and let me know what you think of the development of our couples.
In next week's chapter, you find out where the title of the story came from.
Chapter 11

Chapter Summary

In this chapter you will learn how the story got its name. The chapter has a lot of feels.

This is the T+ chapter 11. If you would prefer the M rated one, it can be found on FF and on my tumblr page.

Chapter 11

Mid May 2016

Finals week was always a stressful time because everything seemed to happen at once. And as a graduate student as well as a TA, Emma had extra hats to wear. Thankfully, she had completed her exams, turned her papers in and graded the final projects that her art students had completed. All she had to do was clean her stuff out of the TA office and she would be free. "Nothing like waiting 'til the last minute to decide the rest of your life," she moaned just as someone knocked on the door.

Opening the door, she was surprised to see Elsa, Ruby, and Ashley standing there. "Did I forget something?" She asked the women curiously.

"Didn't you get the text?" Ruby asked as they came into the apartment carrying bags of take out and immediately starting unpacking containers of various Chinese dishes.

Picking up her phone, Emma saw a text had come in she had missed. She read the group text, "'Have news. Picking up Chinese food on the way.' Sorry, I missed it. So, what's the news?"

"Patience, my dear." Ruby gave her a secretive smile, before continuing what she was doing.

Emma looked at Ashley and Elsa for hints, but both just shrugged their shoulders and continued setting the table. Realizing she wasn't going to get any information until they were eating, she brought out plates and silverware and they filled their plates and sat down to eat.

"Okay, Ruby. Spill," Ashley addressed their friend in a rather stern voice.

Ruby looked around the table, worrying her bottom lip, before finally opening up, "Have you heard of the Mercy Ships?"

Elsa nodded her head, "Sure, it's the big ship that sails around providing medical care to individuals, right?"

"Exactly." Ruby smiled at them, "Victor and I are leaving for six months on one at the beginning of June."

The other three women sat there stunned for a second and then all started talking at once. Once they had gotten their questions about Ruby answered, and a few tears had been shed, they looked at Elsa.

"You're taking the bar exam in July, right?" Emma asked her.
"Yes," Elsa confirmed. "There are a few firms I would like to join in New York. What about you, Emma? Have you and Killian talked about the future."

Emma grimaced. "Not specifics. But I just got offered a job at the Stewart Museum."

The rest of the evening was spent talking about the changes that were on the horizon and how life would never be the same. Where would life take her, Emma wondered. in a month, six months, a year? She couldn't imagine any scenario other than one where her and Killian were living their happily ever after.

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Killian finished his exam and laid his pencil down just as time was called on his final. He followed his peers as they made their way toward the table where Ms. Mills was waiting for them. Putting his paper in the appropriate pile, he chanced a glance her direction and smirked when he noticed she had eyes only for one person, Robin.

"Meet you outside," he muttered to Robin, who was behind him. Once out of the classroom, he leaned against the wall and waited. Unsure how much time Regina would give his mate, he looked around to see who was left and was surprised to see Arthur talking on his phone.

Arthur pocketed his phone and walked his way, his steps quick and his smile happy. "Killian," Arthur inclined his head, "your last exam?"

"Aye." He nodded his head in the direction from which Arthur had come. "Good news on the phone?"

Arthur smiled again, "I just found out the position I wanted came through. My wife will be happy we don't have to move. How about you and Emma? What are you two doing?"

Killian grimaced. "We haven't really spoken about it," he said sheepishly.

"Oh, sorry," Arthur commented, "I was under the impression you two were serious."

Killian started at his announcement. "We are, but the last few months have been one thing after another and finding uninterrupted time to talk has been really tough. But that's going to change today."

"Really?"

Robin walked up before any questions could be asked and seconded the comment, "Really? So, you've finally grown some bollocks and decided to actually talk to Emma?"

"Bloody hell, Robin. I don't believe you can cast too many stones." Killian retorted. "But yes, I'm surprising her with a trip to Portland. And you, Mr. Locksley," he gave him a cheeky grin, "what do you have in mind?"

"Dinner, a little wine, a little conversation and then it's up to Regina where we go from there." He gave them a smile that didn't quite reach his eyes. "I'm nervous. That's new."

Killian patted Robin on the back, "You'll be fine, mate. Wish me luck with my discussion with Emma." He made a face, "I just hope I've not waited too long."

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Emma was tired and it was still early in the day, but her morning had been productive. She'd gotten up early and taken the T to Dorchester to borrow the bug and then had driven to the campus. Once there, she had packed up her things, dropped the boxes by her apartment and returned the car. Now, her only thoughts were of stripping off her clothes and standing under a pounding shower.

Pulling off her shirt and pushing down her pants, she stepped under the warm water. When it hit her lifted face, it washed away not only the dirt but the fatigue as well. If her worries over the future could be washed away just as easily, that would be a feat. But no matter how hard she tried, the same things kept reverberating inside her; questions that she would never know the answers to unless she spoke to a certain dark-haired man. Why were some questions so difficult?

What where Killian's plans? She knew that his brother had been instrumental in his coming to the States, but that was it. What did his brother have planned? Killian had asked about the future a while ago, even bringing up marriage and kids. Had her answers scared him off? She didn't think so, but why hadn't he said anything more? Why hadn't she? Frustratingly, that answer was plain and simple. The truth was, she was a chicken.

After dropping Robin at their place, Killian made the drive through the streets of Cambridge on his way to Emma's apartment. He kept reviewing what he wanted to say to her, worrying that he might forget something or might not say what he needed to say in just the right way. If all went well, tonight they would be planning their move to New York City together. A new beginning for him and his swan was all he wanted.

Once he had parked, Killian took the stairs two at a time up to her apartment. He used his key, expecting to catch her relaxing on the sofa, but when he opened the door, the sofa was empty. Hearing the running water in the other room alerted him as to his swan's whereabouts and the view that greeted him when he rounded the corner threatened to derail their plans for the day. While exchanging a car and bike ride for a long day of dancing between the sheets might give instant gratification, that wasn't what he wanted. With Emma, he wanted everything and he wanted it forever.

He cleared his throat before calling her name, loud enough to be heard over the water, "Emma."

She opened the door just enough for him to get a look of her pink kissable girl parts, quickly sending more blood rushing to his nether regions. He allowed himself a glance down but quickly brought his eyes back to hers and grabbed a towel. "Come with me?"

She pushed the door open a little wider. "You could come in here." Licking her lips, she gave him a come-hither smile.

He tilted his head slightly and gave her a sexy smile. "I could," he let it hang for a heartbeat, "but I have plans for us." Holding the towel in one hand, he helped her step out of the shower and wrapped the towel around her body. "Go get dressed, love, we need to talk."

Emma took a few steps toward the door before looking at him with a worried frown on her face. "I've found when a man says that, I'm rarely in for a pleasant conversation." Without waiting for an answer, she left the room.

Her body always called to him as if she were a siren and he were the ship, but with it warm and wet and wrapped in a towel, the call was exceptionally loud. Small beads of water were sliding off her shoulders toward the treasures below and only the clenching of both his jaw and his hands kept him focused on the goal and not his need to trace every one of those drips with his tongue.

He flipped on the tap and splashed cold water on his face, feeling the heat that had climbed up his
neck subside. When he looked in the mirror at the man he'd become and thought about the future he planned to discuss with Emma today, he knew he would have finally made his mother proud.

Unsure what was going on, Emma dressed in a tank and jeans and was slipping on tennis shoes when Killian walked into the room. She could tell by his expression that whatever was on his mind was weighing heavily, and while she had an idea it was about the future, she couldn't fathom to guess any more than that.

Taking her hand, he sat on the bed and pulled her down onto his lap. "We've tried to have serious conversations several times lately, haven't we?"

"Yes," she replied, caressing his strong jaw with her hand, "and something always gets in the way."

"That's why I want to take you away. Just you and me with minimal technology." He cupped her face bringing her lips to his in a tender kiss. "Will you, Emma? Will you come away with me?"

Her answer was a kiss on each cheek and another on his lips. "I would love to come away with you. Can you tell me where we are going?"

He flashed her a grin. "Trust me?"

"Always."

"Good." He gave her a devilish smile. "You have ten minutes to finish dressing while I grab a few things and then we are off."

As he walked out of the room, her excitement grew for what the day had in store for her.

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They didn't talk much as Killian navigated the roads out of Boston. Once they were out of the city proper and on I-95, Emma glanced sideways, noticing he looked nervous. He had both hands on the steering wheel but they were never still, his fingers constantly in motion. And there was a tic in his jaw as if he were clenching his teeth. She laid her hand on his thigh and the muscles under his fingers immediately tightened. "Killian," she implored, "talk to me."

He cut his eyes to her, and squeezed her hand. After several silent heartbeats, he took a deep breath and she saw him physically relax. "I was hoping to talk when we got there, but if you're sure."

"I've heard," she whispered, not wanting to break the spell she felt they were under, "sharing your burden can help you feel better."

"But Swan," he started before clamping down on the words again.

"Killian," she pleaded, unsure why he was so nervous, "I love you. Nothing can change that."

"That's quite a lot of faith you're placing in me, you know?"

"You're worth it. Now spill."

"I'm moving to New York City," he blurted without warning.

_Did she just hear him right, Emma wondered, _he's moving? "You're what?" She tried to move her hand off his thigh but he tightened his hold, not letting her go.

"Moving, but there's more," he stated and then continued without giving her a chance to say..."
anything. "I want you to come with me."

As soon as she heard those words, her vision blurred and she had to blink several times rapidly to clear the tears from her eyes. There was only one answer for him, but the way he had tensed, he obviously didn't believe that. "Okay."

"Okay?" His voice came out sounding strained. "Okay!" This time he sounded happy and when a huge smile bloomed on his face, Emma knew they had made it over the hurdle and everything would be alright.

As soon as he had blurted out that he was moving and she had immediately tried to remove her hand, his thought had been, you big git, you should have prefaced that by telling her you loved her and wanted her to come with you. The wait after he had continued his statement, telling her he wanted her with him had been one of the longest waits in his life and her simple okay had sent his heart soaring.

"I need to kiss you," he admitted as they flew along the highway.

"I need you to kiss me," was her simple answer.

They passed a sign for a rest stop and, not bothering to ask if that would be alright, he accelerated past several cars, followed the exit lane to parking, and before the car had completely powered down had his lips on hers. Unable to get close enough, he fumbled around for her seatbelt, unlatched it and hauled her across the console into his lap. Her lips were already red from his assault, but the love in her eyes pulled him back for more.

When he released her lips, not wanting to go far, he leaned his head against hers. "You'll really go with me?" He murmured, not understanding how he had gotten so fortunate.

"Killian, of course, I'll really go with you."

"Even though Boston is your home?" He began.

She put her finger over his lips stopping his flow of words. "You've got that wrong. I am home... right here."

He looked outside the car, and then back at her in confusion. "I'm afraid I don't understand."

"Don't you know?" she marveled, "You are my home."

"And you are mine, love," he whispered against her lips just before he captured them again. With her locked in his embrace, he wanted nothing more than to strip their clothes away and worship every inch of her but that would have to wait until later. Releasing her lips, he held her tightly in his arms until their breathing was under control.

Emma scrambled back onto her side of the car. "Do you want to use the facilities before we leave?"

"Waiting is the best option to prevent injury, I believe." He tugged at his jeans to adjust the fit, hoping to prevent zipper teeth from leaving a permanent mark on a certain part of his anatomy.

"Oh," she smirked, "I could help with that, you know."

Putting the car in gear, he headed back toward the interstate. "I believe you've done quite enough to help this time."
Her giggle put a smile on his face, and taking her hand in his, they continued their journey.

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After Killian's confession and subsequent request, their journey to Maine was more relaxing for both. Killian no longer had to worry that she wouldn't go with him and Emma no longer had to worry about what the future would hold. They were on the same page, a unit.

Deciding that it was time for her to get to know the brother he grew up idolizing, Killian introduced Liam into the conversation. He shared with her what it was like being the boy that hadn't been expected and how he had been doted on for more years than he cared to remember. How as much as he idolized his brother, in some ways Liam had idolized him even more, almost putting him in a bubble; a place where he never felt pain, but also where he never had to take responsibility. That might seem like a positive way to bring up a child, but it was also a place where he never really felt satisfaction for job well done and felt stagnated in his growth.

"What changed?" Emma asked him quietly.

He smiled, remembering the day things had changed in his life and he had started growing up. "I was ten and Liam was seventeen. He was kicking a ball around with me before it was time for him to get ready for a big date." He glanced her way and made a face, "I kicked the ball and broke one of my mum's garden gnomes and, as usual, Liam took the blame, but this time she didn't let it go. I couldn't stand it any longer and fessed up."

"Oh, that was very mature," Emma sympathized. "I bet Liam really appreciated that you admitted it was your fault."

Killian thought about Liam's behavior after that incident. "Actually, it was just the opposite. He became even more protective, always assuming he knew what was best for me. It was actually freeing when he went off to the University and then joined the Royal Navy."

"Did your relationship change?"

"Aye, Swan, it did." He gave her a little smile. "We were good for a while until something happened with Lily, his wife, and he changed into a man who cared about very little."

"Except you, I gather," Emma added.

"Right, except me. And while one part of me is looking forward to seeing more of Liam, I just wish he would have come up to Boston. Met you, met my friends. Seen what is important to me."

"I'll meet him at graduation, right?" Emma asked him curiously.

"That's right. And I have faith he is going to understand why I love you as much as I do."

She smiled sweetly at him and laid her arm along the back of the seat where she could run her fingers through the hair at the base of his neck. "I have to say that standing up to your brother was a very brave thing to do."

"I was a right little prat." He smiled at her and winked. "And now, I have other priorities." His eyes caressed her face, searing her with their heat.

"Yes, you do," she sighed as her eyes traced the way his hair fell over his forehead and then followed his hairline down over his elf ears to just touch the collar of his shirt.
"Emma," Killian begged, "stop looking at me that way...now."

"Later?" She hoped that's what she heard in his voice.

"Definitely," he promised.

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Twenty minutes later, Killian saw a sign advertising Starbucks. "I could use a shot of caffeine. Would you care for something?"

"A hot chocolate sounds wonderful, with..."

"...whipped cream and cinnamon." He smiled at her.

"You know me so well," she affirmed as they waited in the drive through line. "How did I get so lucky?"

Killian kissed her hand. "I think the same thing every day." He leaned across the console for a quick kiss. "We are very lucky to have each other."

Moving forward in line, he gave their orders and pulled forward to pay.

While he was dealing with the drinks, Emma was people watching. There were people of all ages, both singles and families. Her attention was captured by one family that was exiting their van, and the mother was holding a baby of just a few months, the father was holding the hand of a toddler, who looked to be about three or four, and then another boy of eight or nine climbed out, close to Henry's age.

"Henry! Oh no, Killian! We forgot Henry!" Emma exclaimed, feeling panicked.

Killian took the drinks, set them in the holders and pulled into a parking space to give Emma the attention her panicked voice deserved. "Emma, love, what is it?" Careful not to spill the drinks, he moved them to the cup holders in the rear seat and leaned on the console to take her hand.

Emma gripped his arm with her hand. "Killian, that family reminded me of Henry."

Still not understanding, he frowned, "What about him?"

She felt tears fill her eyes. "If we move to NYC, how can we be there for Henry?"

He studied her face, realizing that, indeed, Henry needed to be a factor in their decision because he had become important to them. Could it be as easy as making him a part of their family? "Emma, what if we became his family? Could we become his foster parents and take him with us?"

"Oh, Killian! That's the perfect solution. Should we ask him?"

He thought about it but decided that it would be best to surprise him once it was legal. "No, let's wait until it's time. While I drive why don't you contact Blue and get the paperwork started?"

"Really?" She grinned at him. "I thought this was a no technology day."

"But this is important," he kissed her nose. "Ready?"

When she nodded her head, he pulled out of the spot, and while he drove she contacted Blue and they answered questions to start the process to become Henry's legal foster parents.
The Old Port Festival was held annually to kick off the summer season. Emma had heard about it her entire life, and even though she, Ruby and Ashley had talked about coming up for it, they never had made the drive. Now, she was happy as she was getting to experience it with Killian for the first time.

Stepping off the trolley, her senses were at war as they were constantly bombarded by new sights, sounds and smells. Unsure where to start, they joined the sea of other people who were meandering toward the festivities. On the way to the area where the paintings and other types of art would be displayed, they passed by a booth with mouth-watering smells emanating from it and Emma's stomach decided they would visit the food venue first.

After enjoying a variety of festival foods from pizza to Philly cheese steak, Killian caught Emma eyeing the cotton candy and bought her a large bag. Stuffing a large piece in her mouth, she grinned up at him, "Yum, I love this stuff."

Wiping a piece of cotton floss off her lip with his thumb, Killian licked it off and made a face. "I fail to see the appeal of that fluff, Swan."

Stuffing another mouthful in, she grinned, "You didn't think it was special. Hmm." Tearing off another piece, she stuffed it in his mouth and pulled his head down for a sugary kiss.

When they parted, Killian licked his lips slowly before reaching into the bag for another bite of cotton. "Perhaps I was a bit hasty with my conclusion."

"Hey," she called, holding the bag away from him, "this is mine, get your own."

His response was to haul her close for another kiss. "That's alright, love, I'll take your leftovers." He kissed her again.

"That works," she muttered around more cotton as her attention was caught by a display of paintings. Moving closer, she studied the artists' use of color and how they had blended them together seamlessly. The paintings, mostly abstract, were displayed in various ways, both hanging and on easels, but each stood in such a manner that its color shown vibrant and true. "At one time, I thought about doing this," Emma mentioned calmly as she walked from piece to piece.

Killian glanced at her before looking back at the display. "What was that? Tossing paint at a canvas to see where it landed?"

"Shush!" She handed him the rest of the cotton candy. "No, ...painting and traveling to art fairs. Maine, New Hampshire, Massachusetts in the summer, Florida in the winter. But..." She shrugged her shoulders unsure what else to say.

"Didn't want to leave Boston?" he asked her quietly, with a hint of uneasiness behind his words.

Her head came up quickly in response to his question. Seeing a hint of something in his eyes, she laid her hand gently on his arm. "Or maybe I just didn't want to leave alone." His tender expression told her she had said the right thing and, with his hand at the small of her back, he followed her from booth to booth as she perused all the artistic displays.

Once they had reached the end of the art booths, they moved over to the part of the festival where all the games were located. Killian wrapped his arm around Emma's waist, holding her close as they walked along. Everything from ring toss, basketball shots and knocking down weighted bottles with balls could be found, and by the number of people carrying stuffed animals, there were plenty of
winners. "Shall I win you one of those unicorns, Swan?" Killian pointed at one of the colorful stuffed animals hanging from the many booths.

Emma gazed around at the brightly colored animals and smiled up at her man. "You're feeling lucky?"

He laughed a low, sexy sound. "What if I am?" His hand caressed the side of her face. "Your heart's desire is all I ever want."

"Well then," she scanned the many choices in front of her, "I want one of those necklaces."

Killian looked to see what she was pointing at and saw several strands of glass beads hanging off to the side, almost hidden from view. "Which color would you like?"

"Oh, that's easy. Blue, like your eyes."

Killian paid for the balls and just before he tossed the first one, turned back to Emma. "A kiss for luck?" he asked her hopefully.

She gave him a flirty smile and took one step forward, reaching toward his lips with hers. When their mouths touched, and clung together, that electric current that was never far away reached inside to grab hold of his heart. As she stepped back and their eyes met, there was a message that hadn't been there before. "Good luck, Killian," she whispered softly.

With one last look at her, he tossed the balls, knocking the weighted bottles aside easily, winning her the blue glass beaded necklace. "Here, love." Killian gently placed it around her neck and kissed her on the cheek. "Beautiful."

Lifting the beads, she inspected them. "They are pretty, aren't they?"

He smiled. "Aye, love, but I was referring to you."

Her shy smile touched something inside of him in a different way. He couldn't give words to the feeling yet, but something momentous was going to happen and he just needed to be ready.

Continuing their journey, they made their way toward one of the stages where musicians performed throughout the day. Emma could hear Elvis Presley songs blasting through the speakers and from the looks of the crowd surrounding the stage, the singer was getting a warm reception.

As it was standing room only, Killian and Emma were lucky to find a place to stand near the back. With the music so loud, though, it was almost impossible to carry on any semblance of a conversation unless you spoke directly into the other person's ear. Taking advantage of an opportunity to be close, Emma stood in the circle of Killian's arms, snug against him. "Blue loved watching old Elvis movies when we were kids," she whispered.

He gave her a grin. "And did you watch them too, Swan?"

"Well," she drew the word out, "I do appreciate a good singer when I hear one."

"Oh?" He gave her a teasing smile.

"Mmm, hmm. In fact, one movie, I remember featured a nun in disguise, and I couldn't believe she didn't fall for the singer. Of course," and she made a face, "Blue didn't agree, but come on."

He looked at her carefully. "Are you trying to tell me you only fell for me because I sing?"
"Well, that, and it certainly doesn't hurt that you look like the Captain Hook I've dreamed about for years." She sighed happily.

"Your heart's desire?" He asked her quietly.

The singer was singing *Can't Help Falling in Love with You*, one of the songs Elvis sang that Emma really liked. So that there would be no mistaking her message, she wrapped her arms loosely around Killian's neck. "You, Killian. You're my heart's desire." His eyes darkened with such strong emotions that Emma felt her pulse speed up and knew if they weren't in public, he would have no difficulty showing her exactly what those emotions meant. Feeling breathless she waited for him to say something, anything to break the spell that the song was weaving around them as it played on.

As the music from the song faded away, Killian gently kissed her, and using one of the lyrics from the song held his hand out to her. "Take my hand, Swan?" She tilted her head and waited. "What?" he asked, frowning slightly.

She giggled, "You're supposed to finish," and she sang, "and my whole life too. Remember?" She took his hand as they started walking. "I fell for the singer and..."

He hooked his arm around her neck, dragging her close. Nipping her earlobe, he sang the last few lines of the song to her.

*Take my hand, take my whole life too*

*For I can't help falling in love with you*

*For I can't help falling in love with you*

His hot breath in her ear caused certain parts of her body to stand up and pay attention, making her wish for a thicker shirt. "You don't play fair."

"Welcome to my world, love," he smirked as he took her hand and they ran to catch the trolley.

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After they left the Old Port Festival, Killian planned on driving them to the Fort Williams Park for some quiet time. Stopping at a market just before entering, they chose fruit, bread, cheese and wings for a quick picnic. While standing in line waiting for the cashier, Killian noticed a tub of ice holding several champagne bottles. Without giving it much thought, he picked a bottle and added it to the pile on the counter just as Emma settled in beside him.

"Champagne?" She asked him, curious about his purchase.

"It feels right," he shrugged over the purchase. "We should celebrate."

She studied him for several seconds before agreeing, "We should, but we have no glasses. Should I get some?"

The cashier had been listening to their exchange and handed them two plastic champagne glasses from behind the counter. "They're on the house. Congratulations."

Killian thanked the person, paid for their purchases and they made their way back to the car. As they drove, he thought back over their day and how much he loved spending time with Emma. He found that it didn't matter what they did, or what they didn't do, it was just the fact that they were together.

She was looking out the window of the car and the way the sun made her hair shine very nearly took his breath away. Her face was radiant and when she glanced his way, her eyes were shining like
emeralds. Why was he feeling like he was just noticing her for the first time? Like the world around them was more alive?

Turning off the road, he followed a dirt path and parked the car under a canopy of trees. When he got out of the car and walked around to open the door for Emma, he pulled her up and directly into his arms. "Can you feel it?"

She didn't question what he was talking about, but simply answered, "I do. What changed?"

With their arms around each other, they started walking away from the car, toward the water. They had parked high on a cliff, surrounded by huge low hanging trees. The surf could be heard down below, pounding against the rocks and as far as the eye could see, the blues of the ocean mixed with the blues of the sky.

"Do you believe in destiny, Emma?" Killian asked her in a hushed voice.

She smiled up at him. "Killian, I'm an artist. I'm bound to have fanciful thoughts in my head. The question is, do you believe in destiny?"

He didn't say anything for the longest time as they continued their slow journey to the edge of the cliff. "I shouldn't. But my parents should never have met. They should never have fallen in love. Yet here I am, the product of that true love." He stopped to gather his thoughts before continuing, "For the longest time, I felt that I was searching, yet never understood what for exactly. It wasn't until one night twenty months ago that I walked out on stage and I heard a woman laugh, and was instantly captivated." He turned toward her and tilted her chin so they were looking directly into each other's eyes.

"Me?" she breathed out, "You heard me laugh?"

"Aye, love. Your laugh drew me to you and I sang that night directly to you. And by the time I got to...

"Cause I wonder where you are and I wonder what you do
Are you somewhere feeling lonely? Or is someone loving you?
Tell me how to win your heart, for I haven't got a clue
But let me start by saying I love you.

"I knew I had found the one I had been searching for. The year before we found each other again seemed like an eternity, but Emma, I wouldn't change a thing." He kissed her, pouring all his love into that kiss. With the breeze blowing in the trees and the water crashing against the rocks below, he knew what needed to be done. "Marry me." It came out so abruptly he could tell he had shocked her. Taking a deep breath, he tried again, "marry me, Emma Swan. Move to New York City with me as my wife."

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When he was talking about the first time he had seen her, the eloquence with which he made the speech had melted her heart, removing all ability to think. He was offering her the world, something that little lost girls should never expect, because dreams were just that, dreams. Her life had taught her that people make their own destinies and shouldn't expect to be saved.

The tears were streaming from her eyes so fast that she kept having to blink to clear her vision. "Killian, I never believed in destiny until one night about twenty months ago, I looked into the face of the man I had been dreaming of for almost ten years. And once I heard your voice and looked into
your eyes, you became a part of me. I don't need a ceremony to know how you feel."

He cupped her face, wiping the tears away with his thumbs. "But what if I do?"

"Then a ceremony you shall have." She tightened her arms around his neck and went up on her toes. "Yes, I will marry you."

She saw his smile light up his face before he covered her lips and proceeded to kiss her breath away. When their lips parted it was only brief enough to allow another breath before he swooped in for another kiss, swinging her around and around, their laughter filling the air.

"You make me happy," he told her tenderly.

"I'm glad." Looping her arm through his they started the walk back to the car to get their food. "You make me happy, too."

Killian handed Emma the champagne and glasses and he carried the bags of food and an old blanket and they found a spot for their picnic. Their conversation was full of plans of the future and once they were finished eating they looked through some pictures of apartments in New York, choosing several they liked.

"Killian, some of these are so expensive," Emma exclaimed. "I don't need big. I just need you."

He kissed her quickly before pulling her back into his arms. "I want to give you the world, but will abide by your wishes. We just need something big enough for the three of us."

"Sounds perfect." Leaning back against him she sketched the beauty around her. The trees with their over-hanging branches. The surf crashing into the rocks, periodically sending spray up into the air. The smell of the sea and the flora around them. "Killian, I don't want a big wedding. Just our friends and family." Suddenly, a vivid picture of what she wanted appeared in her head, more real than ever before.

"Can I tell them all how much I love you?" He nuzzled her neck, kissing just below her ear feeling her shiver.

"I think this place," she began, "has been here waiting for us to find it. I want to have our ceremony here, now."

"Now?" Killian gave her a confused look as she jumped up and ran toward a large rock close to the edge of the cliff.

"Now," she nodded. "Help me move this rock."

He shook his head but didn't question her any further, as he could tell she had something on her mind.

Once the rock was moved, she pushed aside enough debris to hollow out a small hole and took off her glass beads. "I believe when two souls are destined to meet, when they become one, nothing can pull them apart. Today, with these beads, I thee wed for as long as this rock, this earth, this sea and the sky shall live. And I promise you that I will never forget these beads and our promise to each other and what they stand for. I love you, Killian." She dropped the beads down into the hole and looked at him expectantly.

Killian looked out at sea and then, their gazes meeting, said his vow to her, "And I promise to always be there when you need me and to never, ever say goodbye to you. I love you, Emma."
With tears rolling down both their cheeks, their lips met above the hole where their beads were resting and with the kiss they affirmed their promise to each other. When they parted, they rolled the rock back on top of the hole and patted the dirt back around it. "This place will always be ours. A place where we pledged our love and made promises to carry with us forever."

Emma stared into his blue eyes memorizing the look in them along with the colors and sounds and smells of the space around them. With the crash of the waves against the cliff below, and the rustle of the wind in the trees and the fact that there were no other people in view, she felt they were the only two souls on the earth.

As if their eyes were communicating the same thing, they moved in unison in a clash of lips and teeth and tongues. The emotional high of the day served as a powder keg to the heat that always sparked to life whenever they were together, and as the kisses continued, an inferno was created.

Killian's body tightened and needing to get closer, he lifted Emma, encouraging her to lock her legs around his hips. He didn't miss the fact that the position put her heat in close proximity to his already straining body. Subtly lifting her up and down served to create friction in just the right place, the fire was soon out of control.

The heat between their bodies exploded into such a combustion that, within minutes, Emma was writhing in his arms, reaching toward that high that can only be experienced between two beings who are truly in love. He felt her push a little closer before she shattered, burying her face in his neck, her body heaving.

As her breathing slowed, she lowered her legs and slid down until her feet touched the ground. His body still throbbing, Killian grabbed handfuls of her shirt and leaning against her forehead, prayed for control.

"But Killian, you didn't..." She reached to touch him.

He grasped her wrist between his fingers. "A minute, love." Her emerald eyes beseeched him to let her help but so great was his need that he was afraid if they started, he wouldn't be able to stop. "I'll be alright."

Walking closer to the edge, he tilted his face to the breeze and thought about all the scientific laws that he'd had to memorize. Surely one of them would serve to bring down what was once up, he groaned, not even allowing the thought to continue, as thinking about the law of gravity certainly didn't help. The image of Emma riding his body up and down until she fell apart was in his head, refusing to disappear.

One of Newton's laws of motion popped into his head next, a body in motion will stay in motion unless acted upon by an outside force, which certainly described the communication between their bodies just a few minutes ago. Damn, he thought, as his body tingled with energy.

Which led to thoughts of the first law of thermodynamics - energy can be transformed from one form to another, but can never be destroyed, which certainly seemed to be the case between him and his lady, because whenever they were together the energy in the air was palpable. Killian decided what needed to be done and, like a madman, set about making it happen.

Gathering up their things, he hurried back toward the car and stowed them in the rear. Emma was leaning on the hood waiting when he closed the trunk. "Killian? Are you okay?" She moved closer. "Is there anything I can do?"

When she pursed her lips extra-long on the word do, and then licked them, it gave him some idea of
what she had in mind. And while the idea did excite him, he was beyond instant gratification and straight to what had become the Jones law - to conquer frustration, one must remain intensely focused on the outcome, not the obstacles. "When we get home, in many ways." Pulling her head close, he gave her a hard kiss before escorting her around to her side of the car.

As they turned around to get back on the road, he glanced in the mirror and their rock outlined against the sky was the last thing he saw as they drove out of the park.

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Emma watched Killian as they drove out of the park and, by the grip he maintained on the steering wheel and the tic in his jaw, it was apparent he was still left with some frustration. Vowing to take care of her man's problem in as many ways as he would allow once they got home, she set about distracting him with wedding plans.

Sending a group text, she shared the news about their engagement with Ruby, Elsa and Ashley. Once the excited emojis slowed down, they started talking about the wedding. She tried to keep Killian distracted while they drove as well as involved in the wedding, periodically asking his opinion. When his comments were limited to only a few words before he once again fell silent, she worried that he was still upset about his discomfort.

With most of the major decisions made, an email was sent to Blue, as she was going to help coordinate the big day. Their wedding would be held in the backyard of the Home where the girls had grown up. They had decided on the Sunday after their Saturday Graduation, which would be convenient, since both Killian and Robin's families would already be in town. Happy with the plans, Emma invited Blue to go wedding dress shopping with them in a few days, and then put her phone away.

Glancing sideways at Killian, she could tell that he still had something on his mind. "Killian?" He didn't say anything, but sent her a look and raised his brow. "Are you still upset over not..." she didn't know why, but she felt the heat climbing up her neck.

He gave her a cheeky smile, kissing her fingers before laying them on his thigh. "I was thinking about Liam."

"Liam?" Both brows went up, "Why?"

"I need to talk to him, Emma. I want my brother back."

There was a lot behind those words that Emma didn't understand and, possibly, Killian didn't understand either. But he was right, the brothers needed time alone to see if they could come together. "Go to New York, Killian. Make things right with your brother," she told him with quiet assurance.

He squeezed her hand. "You wouldn't mind?"

"Why would I mind?" She frowned a little.

"Well, we just became betrothed and I would be running off without you. I would hate for you to feel neglected."

He gave her one of his patented sexy smiles, the kind that caused her heart to flip over in her chest and her panties to catch fire. "I guess you're just going to have to do your best to make sure I don't have any reason to feel neglected. She allowed her fingers to slide up higher on his thigh and gloried at the tightening of his muscles beneath her hand.
"Behave, love. I'd hate to have a crash and not be able to rise," he winked at her, "to the challenge just issued."

Her pinky slid slowly back and forth as he talked, each movement bringing it closer to that area between his thighs that brought her such pleasure. "Should I make you a flight reservation?"

She stopped the motion of her hand before she reached the good parts and with a tiny pout, but a sassy wink, she removed her hand and pulled up the commuter flights for early the next morning. While she was on the phone, she also sent a quick email to Killian's realtor, William Smee, making plans for him to see several of the apartments while he was away. Once the decision was made she could tell Killian's heart was lighter, which made the rest of their journey comfortable, yet the closer they drove to the apartment, the higher their anticipation and need for each other became.

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When he drove into the driveway of the large Victorian that Emma had called home for the past two years, the air in the car was so thick, it was almost tangible. The closer they had gotten to home, the more his body had awakened, and the fit of his jeans felt several sizes too small. It didn't help that every time he had glanced Emma's way, her chest was heaving and the thin material of her shirt did nothing to disguise how she was feeling.

Powering down the car, he sifted his fingers through her hair, shining golden in the light from the street. "Do you have any idea how much I want you?" he whispered, not wanting to break the spell surrounding them.

She placed her hand on his thigh allowing her fingers to skim across the placket of his jeans. "Oh, I have some idea," she whispered back. Rolling her bottom lip between her teeth, she leaned toward him, "What do you plan to do about it?" She popped the 't' as she'd heard him do many a time.

"To start with," was all he got out before pulling her head forcefully toward him and covering her lips in a bruising kiss that left her gasping for hair. Slowing his assault on her senses he nipped at her lower lip, causing a quick intake of air before licking across the seam and plunging inside for a heated moment. "I haven't been able to stop thinking about what I want to do to you since the park." He kissed her again before leaning against her head trying to regain his breath.

She squeezed him through his jeans, which caused his body to jump with longing. "Take me inside, Killian."

He was out of the car and opening her door in seconds. He wanted to kiss her but not wanting to waste precious time when they could be naked, took her hand and they hurried up the steps.

Following her up, watching the sway of her ass, he found himself holding tight to the banister, because what he wanted to do to her shouldn't be done on the stairs. As soon as the door was unlocked, he swung her in his arms bridal style, earning him a little squeak. "Shush," he grinned wolfishly, "we made promises to each other today, right?" She gave him a shy smile and nodded her head. "Then it's my right to carry my bride over the threshold."

Once inside he backed her up against the wall, holding her hands on either side of her head. The stance caused her back to arch slightly, pressing her breasts against the hard wall of his chest as he leaned in to suck her earlobe into the hot cavern of his mouth. "I need to show you how much I want you." He ground his hard body against hers and a low moan slipped from her lips before she could stop it. "Your scent...it drives me crazy." He scraped his scruff across her neck. "Your skin...it's just so soft, so kissable."
Finally bringing his mouth back to hers, he invaded with his tongue making her half-moan, half-gasp at how good it felt.

"Again," he sighed into her mouth. "I need to hear those sexy sounds again."

The truth was she hadn't stopped thinking about him since he had given her pleasure at the park. She had barely held her desire at bay while they traveled home, when all she wanted to do was touch him and be touched by him.

When his lips crossed hers again, she took the kiss deep so fast that she was surprised their clothes didn't ignite into flames. "You know you weren't the only one frustrated earlier." He didn't say anything, just lifted that damn brow waiting for her to continue. "I wanted to rip your clothes off. I wanted to touch you." Her gaze held his as she slowly opened his belt. "I wanted to taste you," still watching him, she slid the leather through buckle, "to make you fall apart in my arms, just like I fall apart in yours."

He cupped her jaw. "I'm here, love. Take what you need."

"You, Killian, I need you." Emma kissed down his cheek to his neck while her hands were busy lifting the hem of his shirt. Pulling it over his head, she tossed it in the corner and latched onto his collarbone. His skin was a mixture of soft and hard and tasted of something that was uniquely him.

Once she had the belt free, she slipped loose the button and slowly lowered the zipper. As her fingers grazed his hard body, his hiss showed her just how much he was holding onto his control. She pushed both his jeans and boxer briefs down to his ankles in one motion until he was standing there in all of his naked glory.

Emma looked up at him as she slowly ran her hands over his body, paying special attention to the places that made his nostrils flare and the tendons of his neck strain as he fought for control. She could tell by the tautness of his features that he wasn't going to last long, and when she substituted her lips for her hands, his groan was long and loud. He threaded his fingers through her long hair, controlling her movements with a subtle tightening of his fingers, kneading her head in pleasure.

Allowing him to set the pace on the outside, Emma used her tongue to drive him wild from the inside. She kissed, licked and sucked wherever she could reach, finding all of those spots that set him on edge and caused his breathing to accelerate. As she continued her motion, never staying in one place too long, she could feel that Killian was barely holding onto his control and knew that it wouldn't be long.

Killian looked down at the woman whose very presence in his life gave him more pleasure than he had ever thought possible. When she touched him like this he knew that nothing had ever felt this good. Wanting to prolong the feeling, he let his mind fly free and Newton's third law flitted into his mind - for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction, and watching her move with his body, that could never have been truer.

His hands tightened in her hair as her fingers tightened around him. Time ceased to move. Everything seemed to come down to this one moment. This pleasure. This woman. "Emma," he breathed her name reverently, the only sound in the otherwise quiet room. And everything exploded bright and colorful. Even after all the times they'd been together, none compared to the storm that ran through his body just now.

Moments later, he was on his knees with her, their kisses more passionate than ever before. She had taken from him something that was more than just the wild eruption. She had taken his soul and now it was his turn. Tearing his lips away, he wrenched his pants aside and lifted her over his shoulder.
and carried her to bed.

Stopping just shy of it, he slid her body down his until her feet touched the floor. The friction of her sexy curves against his body brought him back to life, and within minutes he was ready for her all over again. He seated her on the edge of the bed. "Wait for me," and walked around the room, deftly lighting several candles.

"The candlelight reflecting off your hard...chest looks good," she murmured as he glided back her way.

He pulled her back up, thinking how finally, after all the hours he had been on edge, the time to claim her was here. His desire burned hot, racing through his veins, nearly stealing away his wish to take it slow. And while he had thoughts of claiming her hot and fast, he knew that tonight was not the night. It wasn't about speed. Right now he planned to give Emma endless pleasure with his hands and his mouth and then, afterward, it would be about the two of them and what they could give to each other.

He slid his hand down to cup the nape of her neck. "Do you have any idea how much I need you? How many times I've dreamed about being with you, inside of you, today?"

"Show me, Killian," she murmured as she moved to pull her shirt over her head.

"No, no, no. Let me." He moved his hands to her waist, letting his thumbs skim the soft skin of her abdomen as he lifted her shirt up and over her head, tossing it aside. His fingers brushed over her shoulders, moving her bra straps. "Your skin," he sighed as he lowered his mouth to press a kiss to one shoulder, "it's so soft. So sensitive. And so sweet."

He brushed her hair aside so he could close his mouth over her collarbone. When she arched, offering more of herself to him, he reached around and popped the hooks on her bra. As he worked his way toward her other shoulder he stopped to lick at the hollow in her throat, thinking how intoxicating her taste was, making it difficult to hold onto his self-control.

"Killian." He could feel her nipples through her satin bra beading hard against his chest as she pressed tightly against him while working to bring her breathing under control.

He gave her more of what she wanted by tasting the upper swell of her breasts on the way to her other collarbone. She didn't say his name again, but every sexy little moan she made caused his heart to flip and his body to tighten even more.

Lifting his mouth from her skin, he stepped back so he could slide her bra down her arms, dropping it at their feet. "This picture," he said in a voice that was already raw with need, "of you standing here with the candlelight casting shadows is the most beautiful sight I have ever seen. A sight I'll replay in my head over and over again."

She drew a shaky breath, "I will too. The way you look at me is just so," at a loss for words she ran her hands up and over his pectoral muscles, "as if I'm..."

"Beautiful," he breathed out. "You are so beautiful." With shaky hands, he unbuttoned her jeans and slowly lowered the zipper. Pushing them down her smooth legs, he left her in only a pair of tiny, translucent panties. Just the sight of her caused his breath to stop, she was so beautiful. Hooking his hands in those tiny panties, he pushed them off leaving her bare to his feasting eyes.

"It doesn't matter how many times I see you without clothes, you still take my breath away," he told her reverently as his eyes worshipped her body.
She sucked in a breath when he cupped her bare flesh and as he slid his hands over her taut peaks, she closed her eyes, a gentle shudder working its way through her system. She was both hard and soft against his palms, and though he tried to be gentle, he couldn't control the urge to stroke, to tease.

"Whenever I touch you, your skin flushes," he murmured as he grazed his fingers over her, teasing both of them. "Did you know that?"

"All you have to do is look at me and you set me on fire," she answered him, fanning the flame that was burning higher and higher.

She felt like heaven, but it wasn't enough to just touch, he wanted to taste. He didn't give her any warning as he lowered his mouth, and then he was licking, kissing, sucking. He began at the sweet, soft flesh, his lips nipping and sucking as her body beckoned to him again and again. He was starved for her, desperate for her, needing her more than he could ever remember needing her before.

Emma moaned his name and arched her back and pushed herself farther up on the bed. Following her, he cupped her breasts in his hands, pressing them together so that every kiss, every scrape of his teeth, came right on the heels of another.

She moaned his name, and lifting his head he studied her face. Her eyes were so dark, he could barely see any green and her bottom lip was swollen as if she had been nibbling on it to keep quiet while he had been kissing other parts of her body. Unable to resist, he took her lips with his, devouring her mouth, continuing to pull them both higher and higher.

Slowly, so slowly that he knew it just might kill him, he slid his hand down her body, over her breast, her flat stomach to roam all the curves and valleys that made up Emma Swan. She moaned and shifted her body closer to his and Killian knew he was getting close to the edge. Too close. So close that he might not be able to form coherent thoughts much longer.

Kissing his way down over her soft breast, her taut stomach, until he reached her heated skin, he replaced his hand with his mouth. As his lips and tongue journeyed around her body, she made a sound that he thought might be his name, but he could barely hear over the pounding of his heartbeat in his ears. He could feel her rising, reaching for the top, as he loved every inch of her over and over again. "I need to feel you let go, Emma."

Killian still wanted more, though, and before she even had come all the way down, he brought her back up again.

"I can't-" she began faintly.

But he could feel how close she was to coming apart again, and less than a minute after, he was bringing her up again. Shifting, he kissed her mouth. "Once more, love." he thrust his tongue against hers, setting a rhythm that she matched with her own. Within seconds she shattered around him, becoming boneless in his arms.

He gripped her head between his hands forcing her to look at him and covered her body with his. "I love you, Emma," he repeated just before he started to move.

The pace he set was frantic, wanting her to let go one more time before he spiraled out of control. Their bodies moving as one, he gave everything he had to give. Sweat pouring from his body, he looked down into her face.

"Let go for me, Emma," He pleaded as his body threatened to drag him over the wave.
She looked up at him, her eyes glassy with the pleasure. "But I'm not ready for it to end," she moaned as his hips hit just the right spot.

From somewhere deep inside, Killian found the ability to slow his moving hips, turning the movement into a slow, sensuous dance. "But, Emma," he sighed against her lips as he twisted his hips, feeling her shiver. "Today wasn't about our happy ending." Another twist as he slid out and then back in slowly. "Today was just the beginning. Our happy beginning."

With one final push, he felt her body tighten around him and their release pulsed, hard and desperate between them.

Emma felt like her bones had melted and the only thing holding her together was her skin. She thought about Killian's words about today being their happy beginning, deciding that it fit perfectly. They were graduating, moving to a new city, and had begun the process to become Henry's family.

Rolling to his side, Killian spooned himself around her just the way she liked. It was warm and made her feel surrounded by his love. As sleep pulled her under, her future had never seemed brighter.

Thanks for reading. What did you think? Chapter 12 will be posted next Wednesday morning.
Chapter 12

Chapter Summary

Now that Emma and Killian are engaged - what comes next?

And here we are at Chapter 12 and you'll finally get to meet Liam. Hold on tight because that roller coaster is coming close to the top. Here we go...

Chapter 12

Sunday in Mid May 2016

When *Wake Up Little Suzie* started to play on Killian's phone, Emma groaned and opened one eye. "That time already?"

"I'm afraid so, love." He rolled over, shut off the music and pulled her close to nuzzle her neck. "But I will be back tonight. What are your plans for the day?"

Emma pressed her cheek against the side of his head and inhaled deeply, "Since I've already cleaned out my office on campus, the only plans I have are with Henry."

"And how will you and the lad spend your time together?" He murmured.

She ran her hand up and down his bare back, eliciting a groan of contentment. "I thought I would let him choose between a trip to the beach or to the aquarium. We'll miss you, though."

"I'll miss you too, but this is something I need to take care of, and while there I'm going to look at those apartments." He kissed her quickly, moving away before it could progress any further. "I'd better jump in the shower or I'm going to miss my flight. Join me?"

Emma smiled up at him. "If I joined you in the shower, you probably would miss your flight. Besides, someone kept me up all night and I'm still tired."

"I didn't hear any complaints." He tipped her chin capturing her lips again. "Go back to sleep. I'll wake you before I leave."

Emma watched him push off the bed and grab a pair of boxer briefs from a basket of clean laundry. In the dim light, she could see the subtle movement of the muscles beneath his trim frame and when he noticed she was watching and winked at her, she almost crawled out of bed to join him. Only the fact that he was catching an early flight kept her snuggled down under the warm blankets.

As she lay lightly dozing, she could hear Killian singing the chorus to *Wake Up Little Suzie* over the sound of the shower as he got ready to fly to NY to meet with Liam. It was difficult for her to visualize the person Killian described to her while growing up, with the man who seemed to have no desire to spend time with his brother or meet the woman who had captured his attention some twenty months ago. Even though he had been invited up several times, Liam had always had a convenient excuse to decline. She knew that it hurt Killian for there to be such distance between them and mentally crossed her fingers that they would be able to put the past behind them.
Hearing the bathroom door open, bringing with it the steamy heat from the hot showers, she cracked her eyelids slightly as he moved from there into the walk-in closet. Once he was out of sight, she listened to the sounds emanating from inside and imagined him sliding a pair of jeans up his legs, allowing them to hang around his waist as he reached for a shirt. He would then rifle through his shirts before settling on the first one he had touched, pulling it off the hanger, slipping it on and buttoning it up, leaving that chest she loved to nuzzle uncovered. Once his shirt was tucked into his pants and they were buttoned and zipped, he added a belt to complete the process. Black socks and his favorite pair of boots were slipped on added before it was all topped with his black leather jacket. But then it was back into the bathroom to check out his hair and make sure it was artfully mussed.

The images of his dressing ritual served to stir her senses just enough for her to realize there would be no more sleep without Killian beside her. With a sigh of what could be if he weren't leaving, she climbed out of bed and slipped on a robe, tying the belt just as he stepped out of the steamy bathroom for the second time. Without warning, he invaded her space, wrapping one arm around her back, the other around her neck, tucked a knee between her legs and backed her against the wall as his lips hovered over hers.

"Looking for me?" He tucked her a little tighter against his hard chest.

Not one to be outdone, Emma tightened her hold of his jacket lapels and pulled his lips flush with hers. As always when she was in Killian's arms, her heart sped up and her breath halted in her chest and she became lost in the moment. His embrace always made her feel as if she were truly home and his lips without fail sent her flying to the stars. As the kiss slowed, she loosened her grip, allowing their lips to separate but their foreheads to remain in contact and opened her eyes slowly. "Are you driving to the airport?"

"Aye, Swan. And I should go. Walk me down?"

Mindful of the early hour, Emma linked their hands and followed him down the stairs. "Do you want food before you leave?"

He opened the front door and pulled her in for one more hug. "I'll get something at the airport. I'll see you tonight." He kissed her again before walking out into the still dark morning, got into his car and drove off. Emma shut the door and headed back up the stairs for a hot shower and a strong cup of coffee or two, for a morning person, she was not.

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Killian fastened his seatbelt and sat back watching out the window as the plane taxied down the runway. He wished Emma were sitting next to him but knew that this step needed to be taken alone. Even though he had been talking about her for nearly two years and they had been together over nine of those, she still hadn't met his family. Liam was still too bitter from whatever had happened with Lily to listen to him when he professed his love for Emma. The walls his brother had constructed were too tall to allow him to believe that she was different, that they were different, and he had refused to meet them halfway. But now, he thought with a smile, everything was different. He had proposed, and she had accepted. Graduation was in a week and they planned to marry the following day. And then, before settling into their place in New York and starting their life together, he planned on taking her to Europe to show her a little about his beginnings. Nothing could make him happier. He just hoped his brother listened and stopped behaving like the arse he had come to expect.

While he was in the City, Killian also hoped to secure a place for him and Emma to live once they moved to town after their honeymoon. He pulled out the listings of the two condos they had finally decided would fit their needs. Both were located on The Upper East side and both were perfectly
suitable for the three of them. But neither was what he wanted to give to his new family. He pulled a folded listing from his pocket and stared at the brownstone with its 4-bedrooms, 3.5-bath, and 6 fireplaces. It was four floors and the perfect place for them to start their lives and raise a family, however the number of zeros in the price when he had suggested looking at it had upset Emma. He briefly wondered what she would say if he purchased it without telling her, but then quickly threw out that idea as he knew exactly how she would react. He could hear her lovely voice perfectly, "Killian, I don't need things, I just need you." And while he felt the same way, he still wanted to give her objects and experiences that she had never had before. That wasn't too hard to understand, was it? He didn't think so but maybe he would wait a few years for the brownstone. After all, their life together was just beginning, and they had forever.

When they landed at La Guardia, he deplaned and quickly hailed a cab for the ride to look at the properties they had chosen. William Smee met him at the first one, a decent sized two-bedroom place on 92nd street that he knew Emma would appreciate for its high ceilings and marble floors. He also looked at a new construction unit on 89th street that was on the twenty-third floor with both eastern and southern views but worried that the fact that the condo was all sterile chrome, marble and glass wouldn't contain enough life to appease Emma's artistic eye. When Mr. Smee happened to mention a three-bedroom condo that had just come on the market, Killian made a quick decision that he thought his fiance would appreciate.

On the way to E 73rd Street, Killian sent the link to the apartment to Emma and was pleased when she sent back a positive response and that she trusted his judgment. When they walked into the building, he couldn't help but appreciate the doorman and realized the 24-hour security might be something beneficial in more ways than one in a busy city. A quick decision had him placing a call to Emma and as they entered the apartment, he kept his phone on, allowing her to see what he was seeing as they walked through the front door. The minute they walked inside, he heard her intake of breath and hoped it was because she felt it too - that instant connection and knowledge that this was the place they would call home. From the decorative wainscoting on the walls to the real wood floors throughout, Killian continued to grow more confident with his choice until a vivid picture formed in his mind's eye.

He could see their furniture filling the front room, from period pieces to overstuffed colorful chairs they would choose together. The master bedroom would hold a large king-sized bed and, if it were the same as with their bed now, both sleeping in the middle, never wanting to be too far apart. The closet held their clothes, the bathroom door, both their robes. There was a second bedroom that would be perfect for Henry and an extra bedroom for when Emma's friends came to visit. Everything he needed to make his future perfect. He stepped out onto the balcony, turning the phone back so he could see her beautiful face, "What do you think, Mrs. Jones? It's perfect, isn't it?"

Emma's exaggerated eye roll was understood perfectly. "You're rushing things, Killian. What if that's bad luck?" The smile on her face told him that she couldn't wait for that to be true any more than he could.

"No bad luck, love. Just anxious for you to be my wife." He took a deep breath. "This is sufficient to meet our needs, isn't it? A bedroom for us, one for Henry and an extra for friends."

"It's perfect, Killian. Thank you for understanding me."

"Of course, love. I'm glad we found this place and I can't wait to move into it with you, and of course, Henry."

"I love the place," she smiled tenderly, "but it's not the place we live that I need, I just need you."

"And I you, Emma. I'll see you in a few hours, alright?"
"Hurry back, Killian." She blew him a kiss before disconnecting the call and after pocketing his phone, Killian went inside to meet with Mr. Smee. Standing in the kitchen signing the papers, a shadow briefly crossed the sun causing a slight shiver to run through his body, even this close to the end of May. Killian was happy when it didn't linger, and they were able to finish the paperwork without further complications.

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After saying goodbye to her fiance, Emma hugged the phone to her chest and spun in a circle laughing. Such an unEmma thing to do but a feeling that was becoming more and more commonplace in her life. She sank down onto the sofa and, still holding her phone to her chest, pinched her arm to make sure she wasn't dreaming. She couldn't believe how much her life had changed in the past two days and how it would change even more in the next few weeks. As of yesterday, she was engaged to marry Killian. As of today, they had a new house to move into in New York City. And in just over a week, she would graduate and marry the man of her dreams. What more could a woman want? Or need?

Taking her phone, she pulled up the photos they had taken yesterday of their cliff, as she would always consider it to be. Sitting high above the water, sheltered by an umbrella of trees, was the place they had pledged to love and always know what the other person needed. Their pledge had been accompanied by the rustle of the leaves as the breeze blew through them and by the spray from the waves as they washed ashore carrying drops of salt water from the sea. And when they had sealed their promise by placing the beads Killian had won for her under a large stone where they would be protected for all of time, she had felt happier than at any other time in her life.

Picking up her art book she opened to the sketch that she had drawn while they were sitting around making plans for the future. As soon as they drove through the canopy of trees, her fingers had itched to draw what was around them. She kept thinking that if she captured the picture with charcoal, the memory would stay with her forever and it would feel real and not like a really good dream. Can I bring it to life, she wondered? Wanting to try, she pushed off the sofa and went to gather supplies.

Setting up her easel with a new canvas, close to the best light, was the first step she took to try and create the image she was seeing in her head. Gathering her paints, brushes and palette, she pushed play on her playlist and was ready. As she studied her sketch and looked back at the pictures they had taken, she found herself closing her eyes, revisiting the cliff again, if only this time in her mind. She wanted to try to recapture the very essence of the spot by using all of her senses. Seeing, feeling, smelling, tasting and touching the very heart of the place was her goal as she picked up her pencil and made the first mark on an otherwise clean canvas.

Her playlist was on its second time through when she completed her sketch and sat back to examine her work. She liked it and not taking any time to rest, arranged her palette with a variety of colors and started painting. The way the sky, the water, the trees and the ground fused into one another in harmony, yet when one studied the picture each area could be uniquely discerned. And just as always, she was amazed that as the picture came together there seemed to be some indefinable component that spoke to her and allowed her to appreciate what she had created. As she applied each individual color to the canvas and then blended them together, so one would never know they were not always the same parts of a whole. She had always felt that there was a little magic involved in her art. She also thought it was like her and Killian, individuals in their own right yet together a strong and unbreakable bond existed.

Emma cleaned her brush and picked up her favorite sable filbert that allowed her to soften the edges of the leaves. This would allow them to blend more with the branches and afterward with the sky
when she was ready to add that. Experimenting with colors, she created a mixture of the many moods of the ocean, where they had pledged to love each other forever. Shades of blue mixed with green, a little white showing the breaking of the waves as they rose and fell when coming to meet the sand. Allowing herself to get lost in the moment, she created on canvas a picture so lifelike she imagined she could feel the breeze blowing and hear the roar of the water. Finally, reaching a point where she could do no more until it dried, she cleaned up with a sense of satisfaction running through her veins and excitement to share her work with Killian. She hoped he would hang it on the wall in his office and every time he looked at it, he would think about her.

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Leaving their new home behind, Killian followed E 73rd St all the way to Madison Avenue before heading back uptown. His plan was to walk until his thoughts coalesced and then make his way to the nearest train station on his way to Liam's in West Village. As he meandered he allowed his mind to catalog the differences between living in Cambridge versus living here in New York City. While Cambridge was busy and crowded, there were also homes with grass in front of them as well as backyards. The homes had lovely verandas where they could sit and talk about their day. Living in an apartment where they had to walk to the park to step onto the grass or throw a frisbee was going to take some adjustment.

As he neared 59th and Madison, Killian saw the sign he had been looking forward to visiting. It was old and worn, appearing as if it had been there for hundreds of years, but Killian knew that in reality, it had only been there six. Hidden Gems had been born when Robin's mum had passed and his father had moved to the states to take over a jewelry business that had been on the verge of folding. From what he understood, Marco had the right touch and the business was once again a thriving one. When he pushed open the door, he heard the tinkling of a bell heralding his arrival, but other than that all other sounds were hushed. There were two other customers in the small shop, each assigned salesperson hovering nearby. One was an older woman with her hair up in a bun, tiny glasses on her face and the other a petite dark headed woman who looked up as he entered.

"Welcome to Hidden Gems," she said as she came around the glass cases. "I'm Jasmine. How may I be of assistance?"

"Killian Jones." He shook her hand looking around to see if Robin's father had shown up. "I'm looking for Marco." She disappeared to the back of the store and he bent over looking at the array of diamonds, wondering which, if any, fit Emma.

"Killian?" He turned and saw Marco walking toward him, a concerned expression on his face. "My boy, he is fine?"

It took a moment for Killian to process that Marco thought he was there because something had happened to Robin. "He's fine," he quickly assured the older man. "I left him working on his last project before graduation."

"Has he met anyone like your Emma?" he asked a wistful tone in his voice.

Killian grinned, "No one is like my Emma, but if that's your subtle way of asking if he's settled on one woman, then maybe, but I'll let him fill you in about that."

Marco sighed, "I will have a talk with him at graduation then. Come, I have just what you need." He walked away, expecting Killian to follow, all while grousing under his breath about Robin not letting his papa know what was going on in his life. Killian bit his lip to keep from laughing out loud as this wasn't the first time he had heard Marco's complaints. Following him into his office, Marco pointed at an empty chair. "Sit." Without another word, he walked to the bookshelf in the corner and moved
aside a few books, revealing a hidden safe. With a pensive look on his face, he spun the old-fashioned dials, the look on his face moving to satisfaction as the last number clicked into place and he opened the door, reaching inside.

Shuffling back across the room, he placed something in Killian's hand. "For your Emma," he stated with quiet satisfaction.

Killian looked down at the ring in his hand and with only the overhead light shining on it, there was no doubt that what Marco had given him was indeed a very special ring. He looked up at his best friends' father, giving him a crooked smile, "How did you know? Even Robin doesn't know yet." He shook his head and a slight frown appeared between his brows.

Marco smiled tenderly as he studied the young man sitting across from him. "When you've known love, and had as many years as I did with my Rosie," he crossed himself as he murmured, "God rest her soul. You recognize True Love when you see it."

Killian glanced back down at the ring and could imagine sliding it on her finger. It was perfect for Emma. Simple in design yet the diamond was brilliant in its cut and clarity. Not quite believing that he had been given such a perfect ring and that it would make its home on the finger of the woman he had been looking for his entire life, he gave Marco a gentle smile, "Thank you. I'll not accept this as a gift, though."

Pushing himself up from his desk, Marco patted him on the back. "Don't worry my son, we'll work it out. Let's find a box."

Killian followed Marco out of the office and watched him clean the ring and put it in a black box where the diamond's shine was displayed magnificently against the black velvet interior. When he started to put it into a bag with the shop's logo on it, Killian stopped him and slipped it into his jacket pocket. "For luck. I'm off to speak to Liam."

Marco walked with Killian to the shop's door. "Now what can you tell me about the special lady in my Robin's life?"

Killian quirked an eyebrow and let out a little chuckle. "Robin might have met his match."

"Oh?" Marco got a contemplative look on his face. "This sounds very positive. It sounds like I need to speak with my son, and very soon."

Killian opened the door and looked back at Marco. "Something tells me the next time you speak to Robin he's going to have some news."

"I really need to speak to my son." Marco repeated again.

"Aye. I just hope the news is what I think it's going to be." He pulled Marco into a bear hug. "Thank you again. I'll will see you at graduation and the wedding."

"Be happy. I will see you and your lovely bride soon." Killian waved one last time and left the store to continue his journey.

The rest of his walk was uneventful and as soon as he was in the elevator on his way to Liam's new home, his frustration at this entire situation grew. Growing up, he had always been close to Liam, even though Liam was seven years older. He had been someone who was a good friend and a person who would always support him, no matter the circumstance. Since his situation with Lily, he had turned from the supportive brother to someone who was autocratic. The fact that his brother had not met the woman he planned to make his wife was untenable. He just hoped that Liam didn't push
and try to make him choose, for as much as he loved his brother, he was not willing to lose Emma. A future without her in it would be a bleak place. As he stepped off the elevator, he wrapped his hand around the box in his pocket, allowing its symbolism to calm him as he had known it would.

Killian knocked three times swiftly on the door and waited for it to be opened. He hadn't told Liam why he was going to be in the City today, just that they needed to talk, preferably at his home. Hearing the door being unlatched from inside, Killian stroked the ring box one more time and murmured, "Here goes nothing," just as the door opened.

"Brother, it's good to see you." Liam pulled him into a hug. "What brings you to the City so close to graduation?"

Killian was taken aback upon seeing Liam for the first time in months. His brother looked unkempt. His hair was too long so it was a tangled mess of curls, his beard was unruly and his clothes were wrinkled as if he had been sleeping in them. "I bought a place to live."

His first impression of Liam's new home was that it was grandiose and nothing like he had expected when he had heard about its purchase. As he followed Liam inside, he noted the large open concept ended in floor to ceiling windows, displaying a view of the skyline beyond. Killian had an impression of a large space carved from glass and marble and loneliness. While the room wasn't overly furnished, he noted a table by the entryway, one behind the sofa and one next to the sofa, and the only item of a personal nature was a glass vase that had been a favorite of their mother's. The place appeared devoid of life, very sterile, with the only mementos of childhood being a few family pictures on the shelf next to the fireplace.

Off to the left jutted a hallway, ostensibly to a bed or powder room, and to the right pillars separated a chef's kitchen with high-end appliances and marble countertops. Between the kitchen and another set of windows was a separate dining space holding a large walnut table and chairs. He could also see to the right a staircase, but this one leading down, and not up as was usual, indicating a whole other floor to the condo. Much too large for one man, and after spending most of his time in a tiny cabin on a ship, a rather ostentatious move. He was so lost in thought trying to integrate the two parts of Liam that he almost missed Liam's question.

"A place to live?" Liam frowned at him as he fell onto one of the sofas. "I thought you would stay with Nemo or me for a while until you learned your way around."

"Well," Killian stalled by moving over in front of the window to stare out at the skyline, "I thought Emma and I needed our own place to start our married life." He turned back to face Liam, essentially readying for battle should it come to that.

"You're marrying that twit? You have no idea what you are letting yourself in for!" Liam pushed himself up from the sofa, his arm catching the glass vase that shattered against the floor, the harsh sound echoing in the silence of the room.

Killian winced as he looked at the shattered remains of something that had been one of their mum's most prized possessions. Pinching the bridge of his nose, he worked to keep his temper under control even though all he wanted to do was hit something. "Don't you talk about Emma that way," his voice came out low and ominous, like a panther's warning growl before he pounces. "You don't even know her."

Liam prowled the room, never quite settling in one place. "I know the type. Bang her if you must, but marry her? I'll not allow it!"

Killian didn't think, just advanced on Liam and grabbed handfuls of his shirt. While Liam had several
inches and pounds on him, Killian's adrenaline was zipping through his system. "I said do not talk about her like that." His measured tone leaving no doubt in either of their minds that he was the one in control. Pushing Liam away, he shook his head at what had become of their relationship and he didn't know if it could be fixed, in fact, if he were honest with himself, he didn't know if he even wanted it to be fixed. The man standing before him was not a person he could respect. "Liam, I've been saying this since the first moment that I saw Emma almost two years ago. That just like our father, one look was all it took. You don't know my Emma, why must you be so quick to judge?"

Suddenly weary from the events of the day, he dropped into the nearest chair. "Liam," he said quietly, "you haven't answered my question. How can you be so quick to judge?"

Liam didn't answer immediately but continued prowling around the room, as if looking for a way to respond. Finally, he too dropped onto the sofa adjacent to where Killian sat, and leaned forward, his elbows on his knees. "I said I know the type. She's just like Lily." He finally mumbled without meeting Killian's eyes.

The way he shifted his eyes told Killian that there was more to the story, but Liam would have to choose to share it, knowing from experience that his brother never shared easily. "It's been years, Liam, yet you still wear your pain like a badge of honor. Isn't it time to let it go?"

Liam barked out a laugh. "That's real funny coming from the guy who vowed revenge on the already dead guy who got drunk and killed our parents. And when that didn't work, you whored across Europe for nearly a decade."

Killian winced at the truth behind Liam's words. "It wasn't quite that bad," he kept his voice even, "but I've worked to change." He swallowed, the taste of regret strong in his mouth and attempting to redirect the conversation, tried another tactic, "I've accepted my past and acknowledge it. My past is what makes me the man I am today, just as Emma's past is what makes her the woman she is today." Once again, he reiterated, "I accept me, but what's more important is Emma accepts and loves me. Shouldn't that be worth something?" When Liam still refused to look at him, Killian tossed out another argument that had lingered between them for too many years. "Liam, I'm a man who is over thirty-years-old. Don't you think it's about time you allow me to make my own decisions?"

Liam continued to sit quietly, and Killian had just about decided to leave when finally, Liam responded, "You don't know the pain that loving a woman like that can cause." The pain behind the words caused a tiny sliver of hope to bloom inside and mentally he crossed his fingers hoping that a fragile truce was imminent.

Assuming a nonchalant pose by leaning back in the chair and crossing one leg over the other, Killian linked his fingers and waited. "I've some time before my flight. Perhaps it's time you shared."

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Running late because of her painting spree, Emma was just getting out of the shower when she heard her phone ping from an arriving text. Picking it up she saw several messages, all from Henry, all sent with a span of 10 minutes.

10 min ago

**Henry:** Emma? You coming?

7 minutes ago

**Henry:** Emma? Where are you?
Henry: Emma? I'm waiting.

Shaking her head at the impatience of youth, she sent a response.

Emma: Sorry kid. Was painting. Leaving now. Beach or do you have something else in mind?

His immediate reply came through.

Henry: The aquarium of course. Can we go, please?

Emma winced as Killian loved the aquarium just as much as Henry did.

Emma: Killian won't be with me today. That ok?

He didn't answer for a few minutes and she knew he was contemplating other activities.

Henry: It's ok. Can we stop at Granny's?

Emma: Sure kid. I'm always in the mood for a grilled cheese. See you in a few.

Henry: I'll be waiting. Hurry.

Smiling at his excitement, she grabbed her jacket, pocketed her phone and left skipping down the steps with happiness. When she reached the bottom, she heard an unexpected noise and quickly turned toward it surprised to discover that Robin had Regina backed up against a wall and was kissing her as if there were no tomorrow. Her next thought was that Regina had on the same red dress she had been wearing on Friday, which meant she hadn't been home in a while. "Well, it's about time," she muttered softly, but obviously not softly enough, as they quickly broke apart.

Robin quirked a corner of his mouth. "Well hello, Emma. Isn't it a beautiful morning?"

She grinned at the look of embarrassment on the always proper Regina Mills' face and thought it was wonderful that Regina had finally allowed Robin up close and, it seemed, quite personal. Regina gave her a tiny smile and a muttered hello before attempting to put some distance between herself and Robin, but to Emma's amusement, Robin held her in place. Perhaps he was right in claiming that he was the one who was meant to crack Regina's tough exterior, after all.

"And where have you two been?" Emma lifted a brow and tried to use a rather authoritative voice, which was belied by the twinkle in her eye.

Robin's happiness was a joy for Emma to see, as he had been mooning over Regina for months, and it appeared his persistence had finally paid off. "Oh, sod off," he quipped. "It's not as if I haven't been privy to a snogging session or two or three between you and loverboy the past few months."

Emma giggled, "True. Carry on then," but didn't immediately leave, just stood there staring at them like a proud parent.

Robin eventually got tired of her and groused, "Be off with you," while making a motion with his hand as if he were sweeping the ground.

Rolling her eyes and tossing them a grin, Emma headed toward the door. Just as she opened it, she heard, "'Bout bloody time. Now, where were we?" She didn't turn back before she shut the door but figured she had a pretty good idea of what she would have seen had she done so.
Thankfully the train station wasn’t far and with only a short wait, she was able to board the red line and settle for her short ride to Dorchester. Relaxing back in her seat, Emma still felt giddy about the development between Regina and Robin. Tempted to send a text to Killian, she pulled out her phone, but seeing the time realized he was probably in the middle of whatever was happening with Liam and decided to wait until later. It had been a long time in coming and they both were happy for their friends.

Getting lost in the scenery as it flew past the windows, she allowed her thoughts to meander as often happened when she was in a period of transition in her life. Today’s deep thoughts centered around the concept of time and the many directions that your thoughts could take it. Some directions, such as yesterday or tomorrow, easy to understand but other concepts of time, quite complex. The way time moved, sometimes too slowly and other times so quickly that you aren’t sure where the days, months or years had gone. And even though it was impossible to turn time back, it wasn’t unheard of for someone to wish that were possible.

In her lifetime, Emma had known bad times and good ones, however, she could honestly say that the past two years had been the very best time of her life. Killian, her very own dream man come to life, loved her and they were going to be married, their future brighter than anything her imagination had ever been able to conjure. A future that she wanted to grab onto with both hands and never let it go. A future so bright and shiny that she was scared something might try to take it away, but knew that if that happened, she would fight with everything she had to get it back.

And now with the decision made to be Henry’s foster parents, they would have time to make things right with him. To give him a family. She just hoped they wouldn’t have to wait too long, because how does an adult explain that to a child? As a lost girl, a child who for whatever reason had not been wanted, she always had a soft spot in her heart for children, but there had been an instant connection between her and Henry. She still couldn’t believe that it had been Killian’s suggestion to be Henry’s foster parents. However, since the decision has been made so quickly and within the month they would be married and moving to New York City, she was left feeling unsettled. She knew that Blue and Marion would do everything under their power to make sure that Henry would be able to be with them as soon as possible but there were still steps they had to follow. An updated email had arrived this morning from Marion, and even though what she had heard was not unexpected, the fear that they might have to leave Henry behind in Boston caused her stomach to tie itself into knots and made her heart hurt. She remembered part of their email clearly:

...things are beyond our control at this point, Emma. The background checks were completed before you started spending time with him and are still in order, but there needs to be a family evaluation and a home inspection and since you and Killian are getting married and moving, well it makes the most sense for it to be completed once you’ve settled.

Emma sighed, as she knew that Marion was only doing what was best for Henry and that there were rules that had to be followed, but it didn’t make it any easier. What to tell Henry had to be decided quickly and, once again, time seemed to be in charge.

When the train arrived at the station and Emma arrived at the Home, she laughed at the view he presented as she went up the walk. His little hand pointing at his wrist in a dramatized fashion, scolding her for being so late. Emma pursed her lips and pantomimed turning and leaving and when Henry disappeared, prepared herself for a flying little boy body. It wasn’t long and just as expected the front door burst open, and he barreled through straight into her arms. "Emma! You're here!"

"Hey kid," Emma hugged him tightly using exaggerated movements to swing them back and forth. "Sorry I'm late."
"But you're here now. Can we go?" He grabbed her hand and started walking back in the direction of the train station as if he had no patience for anything else.

"Whoa, kid, where's the fire? We need to let Marion know we're leaving."

Once inside Emma sent Henry to get his jacket and set off to find Marion and give her updated information on her move. Marion was sitting behind a desk, frowning at a computer screen and so she knocked lightly on the door so as not to startle.

Marion looked up with a smile. "Emma, come in. Are things okay?" She moved around the desk to give her a hug.

"Things are wonderful. I just wanted to tell you that Killian found us a place to live and we'll move into it at the beginning of July. Does that give you time to work with a social worker in New York, so we can take him with us?" She bit her lip nervously waiting for an answer.

Marion gave her an understanding look. "I know you're anxious, but you really need to be living in the home before the next steps can take place. But don't worry, once you're settled, everything should move smoothly, and I will personally help him pack."

Taking a deep breath, Emma started to say more but heard running feet and assumed it was Henry. When he peeked around the corner and gave her an impish grin, she was glad he hadn't overheard anything that might cause questions that she wasn't quite ready to answer. "Ready now?" He asked excitedly.

Marion walked with them to the door and with a wave goodbye they were ready to leave. On the way to the train, she let him choose the topic of conversation and somehow was able to follow his ping ponging thoughts. After they had boarded the Blue Line for their ride, he looked up at her. "So, where's Killian?"

Emma glanced down at him quickly before she looked back up to watch for their stop. "He's in New York seeing his brother."

He was quiet for a few minutes. "Think they're working things out?" he finally let slip, knowing that he was going to be busted for eavesdropping.

Emma let out a surprised laugh and frowned down at her charge. "And how do you know there's something to work out?" she asked him with raised brows.

"Well," he began as if hesitant to say too much, "I might have heard something..." And then he rolled his eyes to meet hers and gave her a mischievous grin, assuming that it would blow over and all would be okay.

Emma ruffled his hair and took his hand as they exited the train. "Granny's first?" she asked as they approached Faneuill Hall, a group of historic buildings close to the aquarium where Granny's was located.

"Of course," he directed her toward the proper door of the building, "and then after we finish at the aquarium, we can come for ice cream at Ghiradelli." He gave her a hopeful look as he pulled open the door and they were led to a booth.

"Good plan, kid. Now fill me in on what's been happening at school."

I did say you would meet Liam and start to learn about him, but your learning is just starting. Stay tuned for Chapter 13 to be posted next Wednesday.
Chapter 13

Chapter Summary

Liam's story finally comes out. Will it tear the brothers apart for good? And Emma and Henry spend a fun today together.

And here we are at the Chapter where you find out what Liam has been holding on to for so many years and why he is the way he is. Your reaction to this chapter will be curious. Read on...

Chapter 13

New York City

Liam rubbed his hands over his face and glanced over at Killian sitting on the sofa, wondering if he should tell him the whole contemptible story. Perhaps if he could show his brother that he did know what he was talking about, he would listen to him. He wanted nothing more than for Killian to move to New York City alone and for them to recapture the closeness they used to share. Here it goes, he thought, as he prepared to share his sordid secret for the first time.

He took a deep breath and started talking, "I met Lily in a pub one evening when we were on leave in Devon. Several of us wandered into The Lamb Inn that night and this beautiful woman with dark hair and dark eyes instantly captivated me. The fact that she ignored the enlisted men, yet couldn't seem to get enough information about me and my rank should have caused me concern but, alas, I was besotted. She spun a sad tale of how she had been raised in an orphanage in the States and after getting into a little trouble as a teen decided to start anew. I was so enamored by her sweet face that I didn't think to question her story. After a few more trips ashore and falling more in love with her upon each visit, I married her, not even telling our parents for several months. And before you ask why I married her so quickly and why I didn't tell our parents about her, I can't give you an answer. For months after she was no longer a part of my life, I asked myself the same question over and over again. But the sad answer is...I don't know. I've often wondered if it's because I worried that mum wouldn't have approved. But," he shook his head trying to clear the images that kept playing in front of his eyes, just like a picture show, "who really knows?" he finally continued. "The truth of the matter is that I loved her and I really wanted to believe that what I had with her was the same type of love that our parents shared. Does that make any sense to you?"

Killian hummed in agreement, "Aye, Liam I get that as I want the same thing. And I remember that night you called to tell our parents about your marriage. Mum was beside herself when she hung up after you broke the news. I don't believe I'd ever heard her use quite the vocabulary before." He grinned at the memory.

"Must be where we get our temper," Liam remarked before going on with his story. "Life was good, or so I thought. We found a small apartment and whenever I could get home life felt perfect. I thought we had it all and Lily, she made me feel like her king and we talked about everything as we planned our future. And then after a six months stint at sea, our parents were killed and I was granted leave, and when I returned unexpectedly I could see that our relationship was very different. The spark that had always been between us was missing. I was left feeling bereft, not just because I had
lost my parents, but because I had lost something special with the woman that I had thought was my future. I tried to find answers, but when none were forthcoming, eventually ended up making excuses and filed it as a cost of too much time apart. I also assumed that because of my grief for our parents, perhaps I was the one who was acting differently. And without solving anything I ended up back on the ship. At least there, I didn't have to make excuses or figure out situations that I couldn't control. Life had returned to a level of normalcy for me and then, eight weeks later, I received a surprise letter from her telling me she was pregnant."

He looked up and Killian could see tears swimming in his brother’s eyes and had to swallow hard to clear the lump in his own throat at seeing how reliving the past was tearing his larger than life brother apart piece by piece. "Go on," he encouraged.

"As you can imagine, I was thrilled, as when we had first gotten married we had talked of having a lot of children. I thought perhaps this was our second chance to really learn to be a family. It took a few days, maybe even a week, but I made plans. Without calling or writing her back, I took leave and rushed to her side to surprise her, but, well…the surprise was on me."

Killian watched Liam wipe his hand across his mouth as if there were a bad taste lurking behind, until he locked his fingers together as if trying to gather the courage to continue.

While Liam was telling his story, Killian noticed his body language and that the farther he got into it, the smaller he seemed to become. It was as if he were becoming that shell that had been inhabiting his brother's body. When Liam's knuckles turned white from being held together too tightly, Killian knew the next part was going to be bad and leaned forward to squeeze Liam's shoulder, silently giving him support.

After a moment to regroup, Liam began speaking again. "When I opened the door to the apartment, it was a mess. There were clothes strewn everywhere, empty containers littering the counters and dirty dishes stacked in the sink. I heard noises in the bedroom that I knew didn't belong to a sight that was meant for my eyes, but…I had to see, and," he closed his eyes but the pain on his face was real. He took another deep breath and swallowed before continuing, "I pushed open the door and all I saw were several others in the room, all without clothing. My eyes might have skimmed over the others, but all I saw was my wife in a compromising position with not one, but two men and without saying a word, I turned around and headed for the front door."

Killian's unconscious intake of air stopped the story long enough for Liam to look up at him with tortured eyes and a slight nod of agreement before finishing. "Somehow or other she saw me and caught me just as I reached the door. I remember pulling it open so hard that it bounced off the wall and all the time she was crying and screaming. While there were a lot of words coming from her mouth, nothing she said registered. Maybe I was in shock, I don't really know, but I remember that I didn't raise my voice, just simply told her that I was leaving, but that I loved our child and for her to expect to hear from my Counsel. I must have suspected something because I told her to expect paperwork requesting a paternity test as soon as possible." When he stopped talking, he buried his face in his hands and his shoulders heaved with grief, but somehow, he was able to get himself back under control. He walked over to a small desk in the corner and pulled a file from a drawer, holding it in front of him like a shield. "Eventually the test results were completed and, as I had suspected, the child wasn't even mine. She had been shagging others all along. But you know, Killian, that wasn't the worst thing I learned that day. I learned that if you can't trust the woman who holds your heart, who can you trust? She took my love and what could have been my child and basically just ground them to dust under her heel."

Killian wasn't sure what to say but settled for the obvious, "I'm so sorry, Liam. And what became of the child?"
"That's another part of this tragic love story. I had decided that I didn't care if the child were mine or not, that I would claim it and give it our name. I didn't realize how much I wanted that until I found out that the child had been stillborn. I had nothing left and so I buried myself in work until Nemo convinced me I needed a change. I moved here to try to put the past behind me, and also for you, Killian. I made a vow that I would do what I had to in order to protect you, because I didn't want you to become the same kind of man that I saw when I looked in the mirror each day. So, there you have it, little brother. There is the sordid truth about women like Lily and Emma, two peas in a pod, and why you should never marry a woman like her." He dropped the folder he had been holding onto the table in front of Killian. "I trust you will see yourself out," and then saying no more, he turned and disappeared down the stairs.

They say that you never truly understand a person's behavior until you walk in their shoes, but would he behave the same way if he were in Liam's place? He didn't believe that there was any way that Emma would behave in the same manner as Lily had. But if his heart were broken, would he become bitter like his brother? He didn't think so but he didn't really know. The loss of love affected people differently and while he didn't plan on making excuses for Liam, learning his story had been eye-opening, to say the least. At least now he understood where some of Liam's behavior stemmed from, however that still didn't explain it all.

His eyes were drawn to the folder that Liam had tossed on the table, wondering what it contained and if he should read it. He also wondered about Liam's insistence that Lily and Emma were the same, but how could he have known their backgrounds were so similar? He certainly hadn't shared her story with anyone, for as far as he was concerned, it was hers to share.

Hoping to get some answers, he hesitantly picked up the folder and opened it. One part of him expected what he saw, but looking at it still took his breath away, making him feel like he had been punched in the gut. He still had a difficult time believing his flesh and blood could be so vindictive, but after hearing the horrible secrets Liam had been keeping, he somewhat understood. He flipped through several papers at a time, not surprised by the report before him, starting with Emma's beginnings and leading up to a few reports of events they had attended as a couple. There was even a picture of Emma and Henry, and also one of himself and Henry with a note sticking to one picture that said, "Her love child perhaps?"

Boston, MA

Lunch was completed, and Henry and Emma continued their walk the rest of the way to the Boston Aquarium. Since they had started spending time with Henry, trips to the aquarium happened several times a month. Henry and Killian, being the competitive males they were, loved standing in front of the great tank and seeing who could name the most species of fish. What had been funny was that the first time they brought Henry, he had beaten Killian so soundly that Killian spent hours studying in preparation for the next trip. Now they were quite evenly matched and it was rare when one really outdid the other. She had decided to not even try to outdo either one of them, as the more they competed, the more it became 'their' thing. Secretly, she found it very cute when Henry did something accidentally that he had seen Killian do and when she pointed it out, Killian's ears turned red, endearing him to her even more.

"IMAX today?" She knew the answer before she even asked, and so his eye roll was expected. "You know you're getting quite good at that and you're not even a teen."

Henry smiled and shrugged a shoulder. "I've been told I'm preco, uhm, preco, uhm, precocious." He beamed with pride at coming up with the right word.

"Precocious. And where did you hear that?" Emma smiled down at him as they moved up in line.
"Galapagos or Great White?" she inserted quickly, as she knew he would have to think over his answer.

"Not both?" He raised both brows.

"Sorry, kid, not today. We don't have time." Her painting had taken more of the day than she had thought but the knowledge that her painting was going to be Killian's wedding present and would someday hang over his desk excited her. "Anyway, whom were you listening to who referred to you as precocious?"

Henry ducked his head and kicked the toe of his sneaker back and forth on the ground. "I heard Blue telling someone on the phone," he mumbled quietly.

"Henry," she put her hand on his shoulder to take the sting out of her words, "probably not a good habit to have."

"I know, Emma." He pressed against her side. "Next time I'll make more noise." Which he had when he came looking for her in Marion's office earlier in the day.

Emma's heart turned over at his show of affection and she had to swallow a couple of times before she felt her voice would come out normal. "Good idea." Once she had their tickets they entered the aquarium and bypassed several other exhibits as Henry was making his way directly to the shark and ray tank.

She sat down on a bench and watched Henry as he walked around the tank, periodically stopping to peer inside and then moving a little farther down. Eventually, she saw his face light up with a huge smile as he ran up to one of the workers and they started talking, using their hands and pointing toward the tank a few times. Emma's curiosity grew until she couldn't stand it any longer and she walked over to see what was causing all the interest. "Henry? What's so exciting?"

He and the girl stopped talking and immediately turned toward Emma. "Emma, this is Paige. The last time we were here, Killian and I noticed one of the rays behaving funny."

Paige turned them all toward the tank where she pointed at a large ray swimming languidly along the bottom close to the sand, and right next to it two tiny ones, obviously mother and children. "Henry was the one who noticed she was having difficulty the last time he was here. But thanks to him they are all happy and healthy. Good work, Henry."

She walked off leaving Emma and Henry standing there watching the three swim lazily around in the tank. "Look, Emma, they're just like a real family."

His words caused her to startle as she realized once the foster parent process was completed that's what they would be, a family. Not willing to say too much, she simply put her arm around his narrow shoulders. "That they are, Henry. That they are." She told him softly.

Saying goodbye to Paige, they moved into the IMAX Theater and found a seat. As soon as the lights went out and Henry became engrossed in the movie, Emma scooted down in her seat and leaned her head back, allowing her thoughts to float. Checking the time, she wondered if Killian and his brother were on speaking terms and if they had cleared the air. She couldn't wait until he was back home and in her arms once again.

Experiencing the Galapagos through Henry's eyes was a treat, no matter how many times they watched the same video. He loved the 3D aspect, which gave Emma a headache, and giggled when the fish swam toward him or the birds flew right at their heads. Emma enjoyed the fact that as the
film progressed, Henry never lost his enthusiasm. He loved the iguanas just as much as he loved the
tortoises, the sharks as much as the birds and the scenery as much as the wildlife. No one part was
more important than another and seeing life through his eyes was a new experience and a joy.

After the movie ended, they made their way out of the theater and over to the giant ocean tank so
they could see Myrtle, the giant loggerhead turtle, who was the star of the show and who had lived at
the aquarium for over forty years. She was always a sight to behold, swimming among the other
ocean animals. The ocean tank included eels, sharks, rays as well as just about every other colorful
reef fish imaginable, making it a truly relaxing place to sit and watch the world swim past.

"Henry," Emma called his name to get his attention, "ready for ice cream?" which was just about the
only thing that could tear him away from his current position.

A smile lit up his face and he bounced over, took her hand and pulled her to her feet. "Let's go. I'm
ready for some Rocky Road."

New York City

Killian blew out a breath and tossed the folder aside, causing the pictures inside to scatter across the
table. *What now*, he wondered just as his phone buzzed to announce the arrival of his ride to the
airport. He sent a quick text to the driver that he was on his way and, gathering the papers, sent them
through the shredder he found next to the desk. In his haste one of the pictures fluttered to the floor
and as the last of the file was fed into the shredder, he bent and picked it up. It was a picture of him
and Emma taken at the Faces Through Time Ball from the previous December. Unable to send it to
its demise, he tucked it into an inside pocket and took his leave. He had a fiancé waiting for him in
Boston.

On his way down in the elevator, Killian was still trying to wrap his head around the fact that his
brother had gone to such lengths under the auspices of protection. And now that he knew what was
done, he was between that rock and proverbial hard place and wasn't sure how it should be handled.
He didn't like keeping things from Emma, but neither did he see anything positive in causing her
pain. Could he trust that Liam had given him the only copy? Could he trust that Liam would keep
what he had learned to himself and not embarrass Emma when he came up for graduation? He hoped
that Liam's love for him would surpass Liam's hurt and bitterness over his past. Was there anything
that could be done?

As the car made its way across the Williamsburg Bridge, Killian watched a small sailboat flying
across the water, taking advantage of the breezy day. Several sizes of motorboats powered their way
also, reminding him of his promise to Henry to take him sailing this summer. Thoughts of Henry
brought back the images of them in the file and the question on the small piece of paper. No, not
Emma's love child at all, but if all went well before the end of the summer, a part of his family and
someone that Killian would take strong measures to protect. Another situation too unstable for his
comfort.

When he was dropped off at LaGuardia, he quickly checked in and made his way to the security
line. He still had a while before boarding and planned to grab a bite and contact Emma. If he knew
his girl, she would be watching Henry and friends play one of the games they loved so much. He
wished he were there with them, but by the look of the security line, it would be a bloody miracle if
he made his flight. "Bollocks," he muttered to himself just as the line started to move.

Boston, MA

Emma smiled at the sight of Henry and his friends playing a game of Guitar Hero on the PlayStation
4 that Killian had given to the Home not long ago. It had become a ritual for them that after she and
Killian spent the day with just Henry, they would pick up a couple of pizzas and hang around to eat and play games with the other kids, too. Emma wasn't sure if Killian bought the PS4 for himself or for them, as he seemed to enjoy playing it just as much as they did. And whenever they all descended on the Home to spend time with the kids, he and Robin were the biggest ones of all.

Feeling her phone vibrate, she knew who it was before she ever looked at the text.

**Killian**: Hello love. You hanging with Henry and friends?

**Emma**: Yes, but how did you know that?

**Killian**: I know my girl. I've boarded so I should be back home in a couple hours.

**Emma**: Good. Don't get lost.

**Killian**: No chance. I can't live without my heart.

**Emma**: Of course, you can't silly. It's in your chest.

**Killian**: Not that heart Emma; you. You're my heart.

Emma blinked rapidly to clear the mistiness that clouded her eyes whenever Killian was sweet and romantic.

**Emma**: Oh Killian. Hurry home. I'll be waiting.

**Killian**: Good. Be careful getting back home. I love you.

**Emma**: I love you too.

She clicked off the phone and pocketed it, turning toward Henry as she heard him call her name. "Emma," he never looked in her direction as his eyes were focused intently on the screen, "can you play drums for Wyatt while he goes to the bathroom?"

**Emma**: You know I suck at this game, right?"

"Yeah, I know," he lifted a shoulder, still not taking his eyes off the screen, "but it seems we don't have a choice."

"Gee kid, you really know to make a girl feel special."

He giggled. "I know. Come on"

Emma put her hands over Wyatt's, taking the drumsticks as he moved aside and ran down the hall. As the song *Rock and Roll All Night* by Kiss played and the colorful buttons sent her signals, she tried her best to keep the beat, only making a few mistakes before once again relinquishing the sticks to Henry's friend.

Once the boys were engrossed back in the game, Emma found herself at loose ends, wondering why she hadn't asked Killian about his meeting with Liam, and more importantly why he hadn't said anything to her. Absentmindedly, she picked up the empty pizza boxes and plates and carried everything to the kitchen where after spending so much time in the Home's kitchen, she knew her way around. Just as she was putting the last dish in the dishwasher, Blue walked in. "Emma, I didn't realize you were still here."
"I was just leaving," she told her as she dried off her hands and put the towel away. "Let me say goodbye to Henry and you can walk me out."

When they walked back into the front room, the boys had finished the game and were busy putting away all the instruments. Emma helped store the wires and switch the TV off the game mode and after a last look around, hugged Henry. "Killian and I will see you after graduation next week, right?"

Henry hugged her back and peeked around her at Blue, who nodded her head in agreement. "Yes! I can't wait. Thanks for everything and be sure to tell Killian hi and about the ray."

"I will. Night." She turned to Wyatt and George. "Night, boys." As soon as the boys had disappeared up the stairs, she turned to Blue. "You heard they won't do the family evaluation or home inspection until after we move to New York, right?"

The older woman put her arm around her shoulder as they walked to the door. "I heard about that, but it makes the most sense. You don't even have a place big enough here to fit all of you."

"I know," Emma heaved a sigh, "I just hate the idea that we have to go off without him. I don't want him to feel as if we deserted him."

"What does he know?" Blue asked her quietly, keeping an ear open for any sign there might be little listening ears, as Henry had shown a propensity for.

"He knows Killian and I are graduating and moving to New York, but I think in his mind he still assumes we will see him every Wednesday evening and spend Saturdays together." She looked toward the stairs thinking she heard a sound. "But he doesn't know we are getting married and going on a honeymoon, as that just happened and we want to tell him together."

"Congratulations on your engagement, by the way. I am thrilled with the news." She squeezed Emma's hand. "Henry will be fine and will be happy with the idea of being a part of your wedding and your family. Children are more resilient than we adults give them credit for sometimes. He knows that you love him and that Killian does also. I've never seen three people more deserving of being a family."

Emma wiped her eyes and hugged the woman who was partially responsible for making her the person she was today. "You always know exactly what I need to hear. I'd better run so I can beat Killian home." As she walked down the steps of the home, a gust of cool air blew her hair across her face causing her to shiver, and look into the shadows. In the past she would have wondered if it was an ominous sign, but tonight she shook it off, calling herself silly. What could go wrong anyway? Her life, for once, was perfect.

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Emma looked up from her sketch pad just as the door opened and Killian stepped through holding his hand over his forehead. "Killian? What happened?" She tossed the pad aside and grabbed a tissue on her way to the door.

He winced when she pulled his hand away. "Who's the bloody person who hung a torture device from that big tree out front, Swan?"

She gave him a lopsided grin and pressed the tissue against his head, where she could see a slight cut. "I'm not sure as it wasn't there when I left. Maybe Sarah?"

"Aye, that sounds like her. Waiting and watching for unsuspecting souls to shed a bit of blood."
"Oh, stop." She removed the tissue and tossed it in the trash. "There, I think you'll live. Need anything else?"

Without giving her time to think, he pulled her flush against his body and covered her lips with his. Emma went up on her toes and wrapped both arms around his neck, holding him close and giving him what she had been thinking about before he walked in the door.

His hands cascaded down her back in long, smooth strokes bringing her skin alive beneath his touch. He pushed up the long t-shirt she was wearing and cupped her behind in both hands, using them to pull her hips against his, creating a friction that had Emma's thoughts taking off in other directions, and making her hope his hunger could be slacked with something other than food. She moaned in appreciation. "When you kiss me like that, I forget what I was going to say."

"Then don't say anything," he sighed against her lips, covering them with his once again.

His mouth moved over hers, sensuously, pulling her further and further under his spell. His lips caressed her, catching at her upper lip, pulling it outward, then sucking it farther into his mouth before releasing it and moving to the corner of her mouth. The feel and smell of him consumed her until she wanted nothing more than for him to carry her to the bedroom and love her, but she shouldn't be selfish, thinking only of her needs. She framed his jaw with her hands, creating just enough distance to utter, "Do you want something to eat while you tell me about your day?"

His lips trailed along her cheek to her neck where he sucked gently, then used his tongue to remove the sting before moving to another spot and repeating the process. "No," he murmured, "later. Right now, you are all I want." His voice was husky, the low growl making her knees weak. He pushed her hair off her shoulder and nipped at her earlobe as his thumbs made lazy circles up and down her sides.

She sighed and melted into him, lifting her chin to give him better access, and wanting to feel man instead of leather, pushed his jacket off his shoulders, when he suddenly stiffened and backed away from her. "Killian?" She wavered, disoriented at the sudden shift in his mood and had only a few seconds to wonder what was wrong before he reached into his pocket, pulling out a black velvet box.

His eyes bore into hers, sending chills up and down her spine and when he pushed the lid of the box up so she could see the sparkling diamond ring inside, she felt her eyes go wide. Never taking his gaze off her, she watched him take the ring out of the box, holding it up so the diamond shone brilliantly. Emma swallowed hard, feeling the tears already welling up in her eyes. "There's something I feel I've been waiting my whole life to do, and then," he winked and gave her that sexy grin that made her lock her knees to keep from falling, "you may continue with your ministrations."

She nodded her head, telling him without words that, yes, he could continue what he was doing and, yes, she would go back to what she was doing because standing there staring into his blue eyes with such love in them was completely taking her breath away. Feeling a fine tremor work its way through her body, she reached out to him for support but found that he was shaking just as much as she. This moment in time was something she had been waiting for her whole life and now that it was here, the feeling so overwhelming that no words would present themselves.

Killian held the ring, using it to emphasize his words, "Swan, I know there are parts of our immediate future that are uncertain, but I want you to be sure of one thing. And that is, I will always, always be by your side. And so, Emma Swan," he knelt down on one knee just like in all the greatest romance novels and movies and held the ring up toward her, "what do you say? Will you marry me?" His voice trailed off as he stayed on his knee, already knowing her answer but the look on his face said that he wasn't taking anything for granted.
He looked at her with so much love that her fine tremors took on a life of their own and her legs no longer holding her, she knelt down in front of him, meeting him head-on. Putting her hands on his shoulders, she answered simply, "Yes."

The little giggle he gave when she said yes would have melted her heart if it hadn't already been a puddle. She watched him as he slipped the ring on her finger and, unable to hold back any longer, she reached for him, sliding her hands up over his shoulders. Her fingers inched toward his neck until one hand cupped his nape and tugged him closer, hips against hips, chest against chest. She nibbled at his lips until he couldn't take the teasing and tugged her even closer, sealing their lips in a kiss that was both tender and sweet and sexy and so very romantic that Emma was convinced that if she opened her eyes there would be fireworks exploding over their heads. Her heart was beating fast and her breathing shallow, and although they had made love hundreds of times something told her that with the ring on her finger making their engagement official, it would feel like the first time. When their lips parted, and she looked into his eyes, she didn't have to say anything, as their bodies were communicating in a language all their own. His slight nod told her all that she needed to know, and keeping her arms locked around his neck, she held on for the ride.

Killian gazed at her shining eyes and thought she was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. Her face shone with love and the light from the room surrounded her blonde head giving her an angelic glow. She was his everything and he didn't know how he had gotten so lucky to find her, but he was going to do everything in his power to keep her happy and safe. She was his angel, his heart and his life and his goal for now and always was to fulfill her heart's every desire.

The pride he felt as he slid the ring on her finger was unlike anything he'd experienced before and looking at her made him feel like he was Captain Bloody Marvel, who could accomplish anything. He wanted to take on the world with her by his side and the joy and love inside of him felt so grand that had her hand not anchored him, he wasn't sure if his feet would have stayed on the ground.

Killian pulled her to her feet, his lips never far from hers. She tasted so good that if it were the only thing he could have, he would have been content to go on kissing her forever, but her sexy moans, swollen lips and wandering hands were setting his body on fire. Holding her in his arms and sliding his hands up and down her side, her barely-there T-shirt and tiny panties were the only things between him and the woman beneath, and he wanted her now. When she went up on her toes and tightened her arms around his neck, pressing her breasts against his chest, he was done waiting.

He groaned softly and with a sweep of one hand down over her behind, lifted her against him. Her legs parted around his hips fitting her heat right over his hardness and when she moaned with pleasure, he grabbed her hips and pressed them harder against his hot length. As he carried her toward the bedroom, he crushed her mouth in a ravaging kiss. Lost in the sensation of holding her, he felt nothing, heard nothing and thought of nothing except the woman who was his entire world.

When his knees came in contact with the bed, he let her slowly slide down his body until her feet touched the floor. "I love you, Swan." he whispered softly as his hands skimmed over her rump, bringing with it the tail of her shirt, which he pulled over her head, tossing it on the floor behind him. She lifted a brow and looked down at herself where she was standing in front of him wearing only tiny panties while he was still fully clothed. Her reply was to reach for the buttons on his shirt, pushing it off his shoulders, so she could smooth her hands through the light covering of hair on his chest. When she leaned forward and placed a tender kiss in the middle of his torso, sending a slight shiver through him, he tugged the side bows on her panties until they slid down to pool at her feet.

He ran his hands over her shoulders and down her back, cupping her arse, allowing his fingers to dip between her legs, where she was warm and wet and wanting. Not lingering in any one place for
long, his hands moved around her hips, up over her stomach, his fingers grazing her firm breasts, his thumbs caressing the hardened tips. Taking a fistful of hair in one hand, he guided her head back so that he could latch onto her neck, needing to taste her and mark her as his. A seductive moan escaped her mouth and unable to resist, he captured her lips in a heated open-mouth kiss, exploring, tasting, and showing her with the movement of his tongue what he was desperately craving with his body. Emma moved closer, straddling his leg, and as the kiss continued, the steady motion from her body pushed his to the limit.

Releasing her lips, he lifted her onto the bed. "Hold on, love," he murmured as he lit a few candles they kept close to the bed. Not ready for their lovemaking to be over, he toed off his boots, leaving his jeans on. The image of her body awash in candlelight halted his breath as his gaze moved restlessly from the tips of her pink painted toenails, to her tightly clenched thighs, over her taut stomach to her breasts with their tightly pebbled tips begging for his kiss.

"You have too many clothes on, my love." Emma's hands reached for his hips, pulling them closer so she could bury her face against his hard body, almost changing his mind about taking things slow and steady.

Killian cupped Emma's head as she blew a hot stream of air that caused him to harden more than he thought possible. With a knee on the bed, he covered her mouth with his, stretching them out on the bed, his hands plucking, playing and strumming her body as if it were his guitar and he was playing a love song. As if she were his love song and he was going to play her all-night long.

He shifted her onto her back and slid down her body to capture one sweet bud in his mouth. For endless minutes he tugged on the tips, laving them gently with his tongue then sucking harder, before licking them all over again. He hummed in appreciation as he was loving her and felt goosebumps raise and her body shiver. As her nipples became harder and her movements more erratic, she fist her hands in his hair attempting to get him to move lower. Smiling internally, Killian continued his worshipping of her breasts as her body started to tremble and her hips began rocking in a steady motion. He slipped a knee between her legs, allowing her to ride while he maintained a steady suction, moving from tip to tip, never allowing one side to go too long before it was treated to the same service. Sucking, licking, nipping, creating a relentless hunger in him that he knew she was reciprocating, but this one was for her and her alone. She was panting, her hips moving faster against him. "Let go, Swan. I've got you," he whispered, until finally she found her release and rode the wave before relaxing against his naked chest.

As she once again regained control of her breathing, Killian pushed himself up and smiled down at her. Allowing herself to get lost in his blue eyes, Emma cupped his cheek, running her thumb back and forth along his scruff, "That was..."

He arched a brow and smirked, "I know." His voice was decidedly smug.

"But you didn't," she hesitated a moment, "or did you?" She squinted at him, trying to read his mind.

Both of his brows went up this time as he exclaimed, "I'm not a bloody teen, Swan. That was my choice."

"Oh, well," she began, running her fingers up and down his chest, each time getting a little closer to the waistband of his pants that were barely containing his straining flesh. "Do I get to do something for 'just you' now?" She asked, as this time her fingers glided across the tip, that even through denim it felt so good eliciting a quick inhalation as he closed his eyes, his body shuddering with the need to hold back.

"Later," he promised. "But…," his voice dropped an extra pitch, "I need you now."
Emma popped the button on his jeans and lifted the tab, but before she could slide it down, Killian put his hand over hers, "wait here."

He pushed off the bed and carefully unzipped his jeans, leaving them hanging open so she could see his boxer briefs that said, "Here lies a pirate's booty." He was so hard that the normally snug fit was even more pronounced as they stretched across the front.

Emma stretched out her leg and ran her bare foot and slightly contracted her toes across the cotton material that covered his hard, but very delicate flesh. "Do I have to wait?" she pouted. "What if I'm not in the mood to wait?" Killian's eyes widened when her voice came out sounding more breathless than normal and a predatory grin lit his face, causing a shiver to run through her body.

He didn't move away, but pushed his hardness against her foot. Emma inserted a single toe inside the placket, hitting warm flesh that was soft and silky and was growing harder by the second. As her toe continued its journey up and down his hard flesh, his pupils grew larger, and his nostrils flared as he struggled to maintain control. "Help me out here, Swan."

She pushed herself up on her knees and, hooking her hands in the waistband of his boxer briefs, pushed them down over his firm behind. She wrapped her hand around his hard flesh, sliding it down slowly and leaned in, opening her mouth for a taste when he broke.

"No more, Emma. I'm dying here." He ground out before his lips were on hers and he was kissing her as if she were the only thing between him and death. Her heart raced and his hands and lips on her were the sweetest treat she could have been given. Every sweep of his mouth brought new heat and new need. She arched against him, begging for more, and the more he tasted and touched her body, the greater her anticipation.

Feeling him shudder with need, Emma knew that no matter what he might say, her man was holding on to his willpower by a thread and that it was unraveling, ready to combust, and when it did she wanted, nothing more than for them to do it together. Bringing their bodies flush and sealing their lips, the kiss consumed them both, sending their hearts skyrocketing.

Emma kept her hands busy stroking, touching, squeezing her way up and down Killian's body, pushing his willpower to the limit. His moans and periodic shudders showed her what he liked and where she might need to pay extra attention. Over and over she licked, sucked, nipped and loved until she couldn't push him any further.

"Emma," Killian's shudders came closer together, "I don't know," he was almost panting now, and Emma couldn't make either of them wait any longer.

"Where do you want me, Killian?"

He growled low in his throat, "You know bloody well where I want you."

She slid up his body and leaned down, placing a soft kiss upon his lips and gently started lowering her body onto his, but Killian's patience was gone and with one strong push, they were joined, locked together in a dance as old as time, his yin to her yang, his push to her pull, his ebb to her flow. Together they moved, faster and faster, both reaching for the culmination and wanting to reach the place together; their movements intense, their breathing quick, their heartbeats in accord until a slight shudder went through Killian and Emma let go, pulsing around him, which was all it took for him to follow.

Unsure how long it took for him to regain his equilibrium, Killian wrapped his arms around Emma and rolled them over to their sides. The room was starting to cool and he could feel the breeze from
the ceiling fan blowing across their bodies. A fleeting thought of his conversation with Liam floated through his mind, but unwilling to allow anything to interfere with this moment, he pushed it aside. "You okay Swan?"

She hummed in agreement, "Perfect. You are perfect. We are perfect. Shall I go on?"

He smiled and hugged her a bit tighter, but suddenly something made him feel the need to be serious for a moment, "Emma?"

She must have heard something in his voice because she pushed back and looked up at him with not only concern in her eyes but a frown between her brows. "Killian, what is it?"

"Emma, I just," he swallowed overcome with emotion, "I just want you to know that I love you." He kissed her quickly, but thoroughly, before continuing, "Just remember that there is nothing that we can't overcome together."

She cupped his face. "I love you too, Killian. I cannot wait to be your wife." Their kiss was sweet and romantic, a meeting of lips and minds and feelings.

As their lips parted, Killian felt Emma's body relaxing into sleep. They rearranged themselves slipping under the bedding, and Killian pulled her back snug against him, tucking his chin against her ear, surrounding her with his warmth, protecting her with his arms. "Sleep, Swan." As he concentrated on the rhythmic cadence of Emma's breathing while she drifted to sleep, and the soft whirling noise coming from the ceiling fan, Killian drifted off.

So what did you think? Surprised? Or had you guessed? Stay tuned for Chapter 14 next week. I believe that your emotions will run the gamut as you read it.
Chapter 14

Chapter Summary

Expect to have your emotions all over the place on this chapter.

Chapter 14

Monday, Third Week in May

Early Morning

Killian stood under the flower bedecked arbor in front of all their friends and gazed out at the group of people who had come to share the day with him and the woman he couldn't wait to make his wife. They were an eclectic group, their friends; from the faculty they had become close with here at Harvard to the group of ragtag children they had met through Henry. They were surrounded by people who were happy to share the day that he and Emma had been moving toward for nearly two years.

As the music swelled, a set of double doors opened and Emma appeared in the back of the group. She was a vision of white, wearing a long flowing dress fit for a princess and floating ethereally to him as if her feet were no longer touching the ground. When she reached him and put her hand in his, he held it firmly, giving it a gentle squeeze as they turned toward the clergyman who opened his book and began to speak.

Killian smiled down at Emma and heard, "Emma and Killian have come before us this day," before hearing BAM BAM, in rapid succession. He turned toward the back of the room where a set of double doors had been so forcefully pushed open that they hit the walls with a sound that reverberated throughout. When Killian saw what the cause of the commotion was, his eyes immediately went to his Nemo, who was sitting in the front row, and lifted his brows in question. The shock on Nemo's face as Liam strode down the aisle was no less than the one on his own.

"Little brother," Liam bellowed, using the voice that he employed to get attention as a Captain in the Royal Navy. "Just what do you think you're doing marrying this twit?"

Killian looked over at Robin and with an unspoken message, they moved in front of Emma, providing a protective shield. "Leave us, Liam. You made it clear you would not support our marriage and as much as it pains me to choose, I'll not let you tear us apart."

"Pah, what do you know of love? She's just like Lily. If you allow it, she will break your heart." Liam had reached the front of the aisle and made to push Killian aside to get to Emma when Emma's friend, Elsa, stepped into his path and gently laid her hand onto his shoulder. She hadn't uttered a word, but with only her touch and Liam stopped, giving her his full attention.

Killian tried once again to reason with his brother because he really wanted them all to be a family. "Liam, she's nothing like Lily. We are both sorry you are hurting, but just like our mother chose our father over her family, I choose Emma. I'll not let you hurt her. If you know anything about me, you should know that, just as you do, I too will go to great lengths to protect those I love."
"Me... hurt her? Don't you know that I would never hurt you intentionally? I am just trying to protect you, just as I have done for as long as I can remember. She will bring you pain. That's what women like her do. She will crush your spirit and then she will crush your heart until you wake one day and feel that you are only a shell of yourself. That life has passed you by and that the only thing that is good and right in your life is your brother." His voice cracked and, quieting, he looked back at Elsa, but then it was as if another wave of anger took hold and he yelled again, "I will not allow it Killian, do you hear me? I will protect you if it's the last thing I ever do."

Startling awake, Killian tossed off the blanket and sat up on the side of the bed, running his hands over his face and head before looking at the time. Only 3:00 a.m. but he knew there was no way he would get back to sleep with that nightmare running through his mind. Assuring himself Emma was still asleep, he padded into the small bathroom, shut the door and turned on the shower.

Killian stepped under the hot water and pressed both palms against the front tile, allowing the spray to stream down over his bent head and the back of his neck, hoping it would wash away some of the tension residing there. In here, alone with his thoughts, he could admit that the dream had scared the hell out of him. Liam, his own brother, taking extreme measures to ensure that he and Emma didn't get their happy ending. And now awake, he could think of several regrets that the dream brought to the front of his mind. In a way, he regretted taking the position with Nemo's company, because he was going to be forced to work closely with Liam, and if there was no changing Liam's mind, it would be difficult on all of them. He regretted even telling him about the wedding, because strife on their wedding day was not something that either of them wanted. But even with the difficulties that lie ahead of them, there was one thing that he could never regret and that was loving Emma Swan. He couldn't wait to make her his wife and was even more anxious to be her husband. Emma and Henry were his family and they were his priority. And after that nightmare he needed to decide what to do about the problem with Liam and to come up with a solution where all would be happy.

An overwhelming sadness came over him as the more he thought about it, the more he realized that with the things Liam had said and the steps he had taken to invade his and Emma's privacy meant there might be no going back. As the child who had followed his older brother around from a very young age, annoying him but always idolizing him, he ached with sadness. Liam's experience with the woman he loved taking his heart and squeezing the very life from it was not something that any human should have to endure. That treatment alone would be enough to cause a person to become bitter and look at love as something that caused pain and not joy. And then adding to that the entire situation with the child, the agony one would feel was on an entirely different level. But as much as he hurt for Liam, that didn't excuse the fact that it had been years, and not once had his brother come to him to explain where his pain was coming from. Not once had he turned to him for help, which was another big regret. Families were supposed to rely on one another in times of pain, much more so than in times of happiness.

Hearing the curtain slide back, he turned to see her standing there, the light highlighting the blonde hair that flowed around her head and down her back. She was gorgeous, his Emma, and he could have been strong, telling her he wasn't fit for company now, but bloody hell, he needed her.

She stood there in all her naked glory, allowing him to look his fill at her slim toned legs; softly flaring hips, trim waist and breasts that fit perfectly in his hands, the look on her face not vulnerable, but determined, as if she were on a mission and there was no way she would allow him to resist her. He could have played this several ways, but he did the only thing his heart would allow.

He held out his hand and when she took it, dragged her toward him, burying his hands in the wild tangles of her hair and lowering his mouth to hers in a kiss that threatened to consume both of them,
wrapping them in a haze so tightly that it was impossible to see where one ended and the other began. He backed her against the shower wall, skimmed his hands down her sides, around her waist and using his lips, teeth, tongue and body showed how much he loved her, telling her she was his everything.

She encouraged him with her throaty groans, her open-mouth kisses and her possessive hands that skated over his shoulders, down his back, then lower to his hips, where she squeezed and urged him along with the rock of her hips against his. Her slick body rocking against his brought him higher and higher until there was no holding back. Everything that he was feeling at that moment in time came pouring out and without stopping, he lifted her higher against the wall so that her softness fit against his hardness and with one more thrust of his hips, he buried himself inside the warm, wet heat that was only her. The comfort he had been needing since he had opened his eyes following the nightmare, he had found. Home, with her he was home.

When he came back to himself, he had his face buried in her neck and her body pinned against the cold hard tile wall and immediately felt nothing but shame at his behavior. She didn't deserve to be treated any way but with love and respect. As he stood there calling himself every name in the book and trying to think of how to apologize for his behavior, he realized she was trying to get his attention.

"Killian, don't." She must have seen something in his eyes because she immediately continued, "Not that, you, big ninny! Don't feel ashamed. If you can't get your head out of your ass long enough to see that I was just as much involved in our lovemaking as you were than we DO have a problem.

Her words sent his heart soaring and giving her a cocky grin, he pushed his hips back against her where, even though he had just loved her like there was no tomorrow, her words were waking him all over again. "You liked it?" He asked, hoping that his initial thoughts were completely wrong.

"Duh. What's not to like?" She gave him a sexy smile. "It was hot, and yes please, I want to do it again and maybe even again, but first," she released her legs from around his waist, "you need to talk to me. What brought that on?" Her gaze pleaded with him to open up and let her in.

When he finally met her eyes, he allowed her to see what he was feeling, which was one of the most difficult things he had ever done. "Fair enough. But not here." Keeping their hands to themselves, they quickly finished their shower and turning off the water, Killian reached for a towel and dried his hair before securing it around his waist.

"And now you." He pulled one of Emma's towels off the warmer and wrapped it turban style around her head. Taking another off the warmer, he rubbed it over her body paying extra attention to any crevices he encountered.

"Watch it there, big boy," she quipped, "unless," her fingers roamed through his chest hair on their way to the tuck that was keeping his towel secure. "you have other things in mind."

She had just given him a way out if he really wasn't ready to talk, but a quick peek at his feelings made him realize that he wanted to tell her at least some of what he was feeling. Hanging up the towel, he wrapped her in her robe, tying the belt around her trim waist. "Maybe later, but now..." he left the thought hanging and, tossing the towel toward the shower rod, responded to her other comment. "I was just being thorough." She giggled and rolled her eyes at him as he opened the door to the bathroom, indicating she precede him. Before following, he picked up her wide tooth comb and after plumping the pillows against the headboard, tossed his towel onto the floor, settled on the bed and encouraged her to sit between his legs.

Once Emma was situated, Killian gently towel dried her hair, before tossing it on the floor and
running the comb through her blonde locks. After the first pass through, she looked over her shoulder, giving him a look that spoke volumes. "Don't you think you've stalled long enough?"

He grinned at her, knowing it didn't quite reach his eyes. "It's not pretty."

"Pain never is, my love. Talk to me."

She turned back and after a few more passes through her wet hair, he started talking. He told her about meeting with Liam and about Liam's Lily. He went on to explain that Lily had grown up in an orphanage in the United States and how after setting her sights on his brother, she had gotten her wish. She had married a man, who was both an officer and a gentleman, who had fallen in love and married her with the intentions of giving her the world. Sadly though, she'd had a different definition of forever, far from what the Jones brothers had grown up believing it to mean.

"She started life the same way that I did," Emma responded solemnly. "Did you share with Liam about my youth?"

Killian knew he needed to tread carefully with what came out of his mouth from here on out because he had no desire to hurt her, yet he wanted to share as much of the story as possible. Setting the comb on the bedside table, he pulled her more firmly against his chest, and pressed his jaw against the side of her head. "I never told Liam you were an orphan, Swan. I told him you were beautiful. I told him you were kind and caring. I told him you were from Boston and that after one look into your green eyes, I knew you were the woman I wanted to marry."

Emma snorted out a laugh, "I'm sure that went over well."

"Well considering that I hadn't even met you when I told him that, I thought it went over as well as could be expected."

"What else, Killian? There has to be more to the story. I can hear that you are holding something back from me."

He sighed, "Aye, love, there is." Killian went on to tell her about Liam catching his then wife with several men after he had received the letter that told him she was pregnant. His heart broke again for his brother when he had to explain that the paternity tests had shown that the child had not been his and then, after everything, the child had not lived to see the light of day. The death certificate had listed cause of death as stillborn, but really what did that mean? It meant that Lily had not been given a reason as to why the babe had been born dead and all that was left were the parents who would have loved it, and now were only left to mourn.

Emma squeezed his thighs. "You know, in a way I understand a little bit more about Liam and his state of mind. I even understand why he feels he needs to protect you from being hurt, but I guess I don't understand why he wasn't willing to meet me. Why he wasn't willing to see us together and see how happy we are together before making up his mind?"

Killian's chin dropped onto her shoulder. "That's very thoughtful of you, love. I'm not sure I could be so forgiving if it were one of your friends behaving in the manner as my brother. And as far as Liam jumping to conclusions before hearing the entire story, well," he cleared his throat not sure if he really wanted to admit the rest of what he was thinking, "we Jones men are a stubborn lot."

Emma hummed softly, "You may be stubborn, but I've never known you to be unreasonable. However," She grabbed his head and kissed it, "you've never felt pain over losing a woman, either. I guess we never know exactly how we would behave until we truly walk in another person's shoes."
"No, we never do." He mumbled.

"But Killian, even though I'm sorry to hear about all of this, I feel that it was something else that brought about that..." she waved her hand toward the bathroom.

"Aye, you're right." He sighed, not wanting to upset her too much. "It was a nightmare that caused the fear that led to that behavior."

She turned in his arms. "A nightmare? About me or about Liam?"

He leaned his forehead against hers and sighed, "Both really."

She leaned back and looked up at him. "Tell me?"

He rubbed his knuckles up and down her cheek while trying to decide how much he wanted to share about his dream. Needing to settle himself a little, he leaned in for a kiss and before it got out of hand, took a deep breath and began, "It was our wedding day, Emma, and we were so happy. And you... you looked so beautiful you nearly took my breath away. We were standing in front of the clergyman and just as he was ready to marry us, there was a loud sound in the back of the room and Liam burst through these doors and started ranting like a madman."

"Keep going," she whispered.

"He was running toward us and shouting and saying I couldn't marry you because you would break my heart. He wouldn't shut up. He just kept saying the same things over and over again."

"What were you doing? Trying to stop him?"

He shook his head slowly before continuing on with his story, "Aye. I moved in front of you to shield you from his behavior and, as always, Robin had my back."

"And Liam, did he keep coming up to where we were standing?" She asked quietly.

"No, that's the odd thing. He was stopped before he reached the front of the aisle." His voice trailed off into nothingness as he thought once again about the exchange between Elsa and his brother, two people who had never met and most likely never would. Yet, in his dream there had been a connection.

Emma didn't respond for a few minutes, but he could tell she was contemplating what he had said. "What was holding Liam back?" She finally asked him.

Killian turned her, so he could look into her eyes. "It was Elsa. She stopped him just by laying her hand on his shoulder." He gathered what he wanted to say and then continued, "Every few minutes he would look at her and for a split second there was a connection there, almost as if he loved her, but then something happened and the bitter Liam that I've come to expect the last few years was once again inhabiting his body. It's like he was a real-life Jekyll and Hyde."

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Listening to Killian tell her about Liam and his nightmare and hearing the pain in his voice made her heart hurt. She knew he was trying to watch what he said because he wanted to protect her, but that's what she wanted to do for him. How could she help him? Holding his hand, a little tighter, she asked the question that she wasn't sure she wanted to know the answer to. "What happened then?"

"I don't know, Emma," he whispered brokenly. "I woke up and couldn't catch my breath, it hurt so
much inside. The pain from the nightmare and from feeling as though Liam had betrayed me, but mostly from the void I was feeling. I don't know how to explain it, but when I woke up, I was convinced you were gone. Something or someone had taken you from me. I couldn't bear for that to happen."

Emma turned completely in his arms and pulled his face to hers. "Nothing can take me from you. I am yours and I will always be yours."

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He kissed her tenderly, but didn't move far before whispering, "And I promise to always be where you need me and to never, ever say goodbye." He closed his eyes, wanting to say more but not knowing exactly how to put his thoughts into words. Finally, the words coalesced in his head, "And Emma, just know that if we were ever separated, I would go to the ends of the earth for you." After kissing her again, Killian knew what he wanted…no…what he needed to do. "Emma, will you marry me?"

She frowned at him. "Killian, you already asked me to marry you and I said yes, did you forget?"

"I meant today. Let's get Robin and drive to Atlantic City. We can be there in six hours or so, spend a night or two, and be home before graduation. Will you? Will you be my bride today?" He tried to contain his anxiety but something inside was telling him that this was the answer. This was the way to make her his wife and keep her from any potential harm that his brother, or anyone else, might have in store for them. Once they were married, then they would find a way to bridge the divide with Liam, together.

She stared at him for so long, he wasn't sure what she would say, but when she smiled and said yes, he grabbed her in a hug that said he never intended letting her go and peppered her face with kisses. "Can we leave within the hour? I'll text Robin."

Killian, it's 4:00 in the morning, and there's been a development in the Robin and Regina relationship that makes me wonder if he'll even want to go."

His eyebrows went up at hearing the news. "Oh? I knew he was taking her to dinner and wondered how it went. But," he sent her a cheeky grin, "when I returned from my trip I had other things on my mind."

He got out of bed and, taking his phone from his jacket pocket, said confidently as he sent a text, "He'll want to be there. He knows I would do the same for him." Moving back to the bed where she still sat, he leaned over and kissed her leisurely and very thoroughly. "Maybe if we hurry we can drive by our new apartment in New York City. Get a move on, Mrs. Jones." He pulled her to her feet and palmed her behind as she sashayed off to get dressed and pack. Once she was out of sight, he continued his conversation with Robin and pulled up places to get married and stay in Atlantic City. If luck stayed on their side, they would be married by sundown and he could spend the night loving her as he had never loved her before.

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They had been lucky that Robin had been sleeping alone in the apartment he still shared with Killian, although Killian was rarely there. Once Killian had taken him aside and briefly told him what had gone down with Liam, Robin, behaving as a best mate should, had grabbed a bag, tossed in a few clothes and climbed in the back seat only complaining about needing caffeine this bloody early in the morning.
"Quit your grousing, we'll get you some caffeine. Maybe it will put you in a better frame of mind." Killian drove into a Starbucks, ordered and parked while he handed out the offerings. "Robin, here is your cappuccino and blueberry scone and plenty of napkins." And when he added, "Don't make a mess in my car." an eyeroll was his payment. Once he had handed Emma her hot chocolate with whipped cream and cinnamon and a cinnamon morning bun, and kept his caramel macchiato and cranberry orange scone, they were on their way.

Driving out of the parking lot, Killian pushed the button for the classic rock station on the satellite radio and took a sip of his drink, ending up with a caramel and whipped cream mustache.

"Let me." Emma reached over and wiped her thumb across his lip before licking her thumb clean.

Swallowing hard, Killian watched the little minx tease him, knowing he was in a situation where he couldn't give her a dose of her own medicine. With difficulty, he pulled his eyes away from her mouth and back to the road, winding his way through the city streets until they were able to move onto the I-90 heading toward New York City via the George Washington Bridge. Once in the city, his plan was to detour by their new neighborhood, so he could show his future wife where they would be living once they had moved. From there they could easily pick up the Garden State Parkway on their way toward Atlantic City.

After they had finished their pastries and caffeine, Robin started to sing along with Aerosmith's *Sweet Emotion* as it played on the radio. When that song was followed by Journey's *Don't Stop Believin',* Killian took over and sang lead and Robin easily harmonized as if he had done it for years. As the singing continued with ZZ Top's *Sharp Dressed Man,* Emma laughed so hard at the way they competitively tried to outdo each other that she had tears running down her face. The next few songs didn't make them feel like singing and just before they changed stations, the opening bars to *Somebody to Love* started and before it was over, all three were singing in harmony.

When the station once again played a few songs that had Emma rolling her eyes and both Killian and Robin groaning, Emma pushed scan and let the dial slide along until she found one that she liked and hit the button again, stopping it. She had only sung a few lines to Train's *Hey, Soul Sister* when Killian changed the station.

"You have to be barmy to like that band, Swan. Their music is rubbish." He stopped the music on another rock station and tapped his thumbs on the steering wheel along with the beat.

"Oh, I don't know that it's rubbish, Killian." She ran her hand along his thigh. "I'm pretty sure if you were to sing one of their songs, you might get lucky."

He cut his eyes to her. "And which song would that be?"

"Hmm, I can think of a couple."

"Hey, I'm still here," Robin groused from the back. "Give a man a break."

"Sorry, Robin." Emma covered her mouth as a yawn snuck up on her.

Giving her a little grin, Killian squeezed her hand. "Tired, love?"

"A bit. Somebody woke me up really early." She yawned again.

"Hey, you two, I don't need to be privy to all the gory details." Robin handed Emma one of Killian's jackets that seemed to always be in the back seat. "Here, this should cushion your head if you want to have a sleep."
Emma smiled her thanks and took the jacket. "Don't let me sleep longer than an hour, okay?"

Killian nodded and hoped that hour would remove the dark patches under her eyes. "If you say so."

As she leaned her head on the jacket, she was surrounded by Killian's smell, and when Eric Clapton started singing *Wonderful Tonight* and Killian and Robin sang softly along with him, she drifted peacefully to sleep.

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After several more songs had played, Robin leaned forward from the back seat and whispered, "She asleep?"

"Aye, she seems to be," Killian answered just as quietly with a quick glance at his future wife.

"Good." Robin met Killian's eyes in the rearview mirror. "Now, tell me about your visit with Liam. Was it bad?"

Meeting Robin's eyes, Killian tipped his chin slightly. "Aye, it was bad. Not only the real story about Lily, but what has happened to him since we last saw him." He winced as if retelling the story were physically painful. "Remember how Liam looked when he was in the Royal Navy?"

"All proper and polished?" laughed Robin.

"Precisely," Killian continued, "Now he's the exact opposite of proper and polished. He's as disheveled as a lorry after a hurricane."

This time it was Robin's turn to wince. "That's bad."

"Sadly. And the man he's become," he shook his head, "he scares me Robin. To think my own brother had the woman I love investigated and someone followed us taking pictures," he grunted, "it makes me want to punch some sense into him."

Robin was quiet for a while before simply saying, "I've got your back."

"I know you do and I," he smiled over Emma's way, "we appreciate it."

"You two talking about me behind my back?" Emma stretched in the seat as best as she could. "Can we stop at the next place, babe? I need to stretch my legs."

Killian pulled off the Pike at the next turnoff and they spent a few minutes walking around and enjoying the beauty of the sun as it peered over the horizon. Disappearing into the lady's room, Emma took the opportunity and splashed cold water on her face and brushed and braided her hair. Once she had tossed her brush in her purse, she smoothed lotion on her arms and hands and tossed the tube in her bag before walking out the door, right into the arms of her fiancé. "How did you know I would be the one walking out just now?" She squinted up at him.

"ESP?" He grinned before leaning in to take a sniff of her neck. "You smell good. Is that for my benefit?"

Humming in agreement, she leaned her head against his chest. "Maybe, but Killian," she tapped her finger against his chest, "aren't you going to allow Robin to drive for some of the trip?"

He gave her a pained look. "Emma, I love Robin like a brother, but he's not quite got the hang of driving on the wrong side of the road. I'd rather we get there in one piece."
"If you're sure," she finally said. "I just don't want you driving if you're too tired."

"Relax, Swan." He kissed her lightly and turned them back toward the parking lot. "I'll be fine, as will you and our best man. Come, we have a wedding to get to."

"And I can't wait." She took his hand as they walked the rest of the way to the car. "Robin, do you want to ride in front for a while? There's a little more leg room."

Killian gave her a long-suffering sigh. "He's not as nice to have in the front, Swan. I won't be able to hold your hand or put my hand on your leg if you're in the back."

She patted him on the chest. "You could let Robin drive and ride in the back with me."

"Hold up, you two." Robin pushed them apart. "I'm not playing the chauffeur while you two spend time doing who knows what in the back seat."

Emma grinned at him. "Missing Regina?" He blushed and smiled shyly, totally out of character for Robin. "I think it's about time you share the new development with us, don't you?"

"I swear, you two or worse than the couple of old biddies that lived next door to my mum and pop growing up," he groused at them. "Fine, get in and I'll talk."

As it turned out, Robin ended up in the back seat again, claiming he didn't need Killian mooning over Emma being so far away, so with him in the back he started his story.

"Well you know that I've been terribly patient waiting for an opportunity to be with her, right?" he asked, almost as if he were expecting a medal for his patience.

Emma looked over the seat at Robin. "Well, duh. I'm pretty sure every time I've seen you since January, you've made a comment or two or three or…"

"Exactly. But she wouldn't give me the time of day." He pretended to pout but his smile couldn't be contained for too long, which had been a long time coming.

"I'm not sure I remember it exactly that way," Emma told him, wryly expecting a witty response from the back seat.

When he was quiet for too long, she looked over her shoulder to see what he was doing and caught him staring at the screen on his phone with a decidedly smitten smile on his face. "Robin?" He glanced up but she wasn't sure if he saw her or not. "Go on."

Finally, he continued, "You know what I remember about that first day? She walked into class wearing a tight red dress and black heels and when she gazed out at the class with her dark eyes, I swear ever tiny head in the classroom stood up and took note except mine."

Emma snorted out a laugh, "TMI Robin. I don't need to know about your tiny head."

"Here here, mate. I don't think I care for the idea of Emma thinking about your tiny head either. But," he glanced over his shoulder, "I'm not believing yours didn't have some say in the matter."

"Well," Robin stammered, "maybe a little, but mainly my friend, it was like that night at The Burren all over again. You said one look was all it took for you to know Emma was the one and, well," he paused to take a deep breath, "one look and I knew she held my heart."

"But she handed it to you on a platter, didn't she?" taunted Killian.
"I wouldn't go that far," muttered Robin. "She was my instructor for a semester and once I realized there was no getting around that I backed off. But, bloody hell, it was hard." He hadn't paid close enough attention to his words until his last statement earned him a snicker from the front seat.

Emma kept the conversation flowing forward instead of allowing it to stay in the gutter, "The last time I saw you two, the barrier," she cleared her throat to keep from giggling, "appeared to have been removed."

He shrugged his shoulder and quirked one corner of his mouth causing his dimple to pop. "I took my exam and when I finished and put it on her desk, she handed me a note." His grin got even broader. "Said I should meet her in her office to discuss dinner."

Emma smiled over at Killian. " That was the day we drove up to Portland, wasn't it?"

"Aye, love. And it was also the day you said you would marry me for the first time." Killian, who was holding her hand, picked it up, kissing her fingertips.

"Hey this is my story," Robin interrupted. "Shall I continue with my story or do you want to moon at each other some more?"

Killian met Robin's eyes in the mirror and smirked. "Carry on by all means."

"Why, thank you." He cleared his throat as if preparing to give a great speech and continued with his story.

They learned that when he had arrived at her office, she handed him both his paper and exam, asking if he were completely done with his obligations as a student. His response to her had been that he had just left his last professor's meeting and that his responsibilities as a student were complete. Once Regina heard that, she had given him her killer smile and that was when the real fun started for them.

"I was standing there feeling like a complete arse, but also worried that I not sound like a blathering idiot when, finally, she got to the point." He hesitated for effect. "She said that if I asked her out for dinner, she would be more than happy to say yes. Needless to say, I got right to it and after I said my piece, we ended up eating in a small Italian place not far from The Burren, where we shared a bottle of wine, had a lovely dinner and talked quite freely."

"And the fact that I saw you two canoodling a couple days later with her wearing the same clothing that I had seen her leave in on Friday morning meant that you must have wooed her back to your apartment." Emma shook her head. "I do hope you had cleaned the place up."

"It was alright, as were we. But a gent never kisses and tells."

Killian glanced sideways at Emma. "Guess he didn't require our help after all."

"Question is, will he screw it up?" She answered back.

"Hey, I'm right here," Robin popped in with from the back, "and I don't intend to make a mess of this. It's the real deal for me."

Once they exited the Pike onto the 84, the traffic increased and the conversation in the car decreased so Killian could pay close attention to where they were going. As they neared the George Washington Bridge, traffic was stop and go and the use of horns became more prevalent, with every car jostling for position. "Why the bloody hell are they honking at me?" Killian groused.

Emma looked around at all the cars. "Is it always this crazy?" she whispered in awe.
"Probably." Killian sighed as he slammed on the brakes when a car darted in front of him. "This traffic is bloody awful, which is my own damn fault because of the time, but I was in such a hurry…” he trailed off thinking about his dream and why he had been in such a rush.

Emma squeezed his thigh. "It's okay babe, I was anxious too."

He gave her a small grin and turned his attention to the traffic moving haphazardly around them.

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Driving into the city, Emma found her face plastered against the passenger's side window staring up at the buildings surrounding them. Growing up in Boston she was used to big cities, tall buildings and populated areas but nothing could have prepared her for the sheer enormity of Manhattan. Buildings so tall they almost blocked the sun, streets so packed traffic was stop and go and so many people bustling around that if you weren't going in the correct direction, you were run over. Could she get used to it?

"This place is wild!" Emma grinned over at Killian. "You're moving here too, right Robin?"

He gnawed on his lower lip as he contemplated his answer, "That was the plan and I know my pops would love it, but there's Regina to consider."

"You know what they say, 'If it's meant to be, it will be.' You should talk to her when we get home." They drove on in silence for a while longer. "Oh, I didn't tell you," she looked at Killian, " guess who else is moving here later this summer?"

"Henry?" He grinned at her.

"Well, of course Henry, but no… Elsa! She takes the bar in July and hopes to be able to find a job quickly and move into the apartment that her parents kept for when they had business in the city. Isn't that wonderful?"

Killian thought back to his dream and how in it Elsa was the one who seemed to have some effect on Liam's behavior. Was there more to his dream then he knew?

Driving through the city, he played tour guide and pointed out Marco's jewelry store, The Hidden Gems, showed Emma where their apartment was and drove by Central Park. Anxious to get on their way, he turned a corner and followed his GPS back to the turnpike, mentally crossing his fingers that the rest of the journey would be uneventful.

As soon as they left the city, it started raining, just enough to make the streets wet and make using the wipers a necessity, even if they were only on low. However, even with the streets becoming wetter and the visibility decreasing, it wasn't enough to slow the speed of the traffic. As Killian drove, the dream still lingered in the back of his mind, but now that some distance had been put between himself and that initial feeling of fear, there was no doubt in his mind that as much as Liam might think that Emma was not the woman for his brother, there was no way he would ever physically harm her. Their mother had brought both of them up in the same manner and respecting women was something she stressed from the time they were lads. And if catching his wife in a compromising situation didn't spur him to violence, then nothing would.

But as much as he believed that Liam would never resort to physical violence, that didn't mean that he was ready to excuse his brother's behavior. Killian's goal and main concern was in making sure that Emma was protected, no matter what came their way throughout their lives together. With Emma as his wife, he could show her that being by her side, protecting her as his father had always
protected their mother, was where he planned to be.

Seeing a sign indicating that the exit to the Garden State Parkway was still a few miles away, he couldn't help but wish the bloody trucks would get out of his way. It seemed they were on the road in full force and between those, and the buses and the cars switching lanes so rapidly, the highway was one big accident waiting to happen. A quick glance at Emma assured him her seatbelt was snug across her chest, and wanting to move around the truck laden with utility poles in front of him, as it made visibility damn near impossible, he flipped his signal and moved into the left lane. As soon as he had rounded the rear of the truck, the realization of what it had prevented him from seeing caused his eyes grow large and his heart rate to go through the roof. "Oh shite," he grunted, tightening his hold on the steering wheel.

He was seeing what might have been the last view his parents had ever seen and what had become his very own nightmare for months after their deaths. Ahead of him and on the other side of the median, a semi-truck had jackknifed, gone into a skid and broken through the barrier that separated the highway. Because of its high speed, the wet road and the weight of the truck, it was still moving, and its momentum was carrying it into the traffic on his side of the highway. Within the blink of an eye, it had rammed into a large SUV, pinning it against the guardrail lining the road to Killian's right. But while that stopped the cab of the large truck, it was no match for the size and speed of the rotating trailer as it circled around to plow into a large bus with enough force to flip it onto its side.

With the slick roads providing a smooth surface, the fallen bus was sent into a skid, careening directly into the path of his car as well as the truck he was passing. With only a heartbeat of time to think, Killian wrenched the wheel hard to the left. What he hadn't anticipated was that the utility truck's driver would stomp on his brakes. Unfortunately, the slick streets provided no resistance for the weight of the trailer, and when the bus hit the truck broadside, it angled the truck just enough for its trailer to catch the back bumper of Killian's Subaru. Killian's car spun, flipping over and coming to rest on its passenger side, facing in the opposite direction. His breath stopped as he saw a utility pole break free from its confinement, barreling directly toward his front windshield.

Emma had been angled toward the back seat talking with Robin when she heard Killian's yell. Surprised by the fear in his voice, she whipped her head back toward the front just in time to see the jackknifed truck hit the bus, sending the bus flying toward them. As Killian wrenched the wheel to the left, Emma's head was thrown back against the seat and bracing her arm against the dash, she prepared for impact from the front, but when it came from the back, throwing her forward, a scream was ripped from deep inside her soul.

She was violently tossed around as the car simultaneously flipped and spun 180 degrees, causing the airbags to deploy and knocking her hand and arm into the side glass window so hard, they immediately went numb. The view when she opened her eyes felt like that of death as a large utility pole was hurtling their direction with nothing to save them. As another scream was torn from her throat, she covered her face with both hands just as the impact ripped through the car. With the sound of breaking glass in her ears and hundreds of shards of glass raining down over her, her body was tossed around until the pain became so intense, she welcomed the blackness.

Robin's thoughts had been of Regina and contacting her again when he heard Killian's yell, sending a sliver of fear racing up his spine. His head came up and as the bus skidded toward their car, he dropped his phone and grabbed onto the back of the seats in front of him. It was too late to put his seatbelt back on and as Killian jerked the wheel to the left, his hold on the seats loosened so that
when the trailer hit them from the rear, he wasn't prepared. He bounced off the roof, jarring his head before sliding down behind the passenger seat and crumpling against the window. In the few seconds when the car settled on its side, he had just started to move when there was a horrible crunch and something flew through the car, pinning his legs in place and sending pain shooting throughout his body. With screams reverberating in his head, he was pulled into unconsciousness.

The force with which Killian's airbag deployed knocked the wind out of him but kept him from being crushed by the steering wheel. His head, however, hadn't had that luxury and it bounced between the window and the headrest, instantly suffused with throbbing pain, causing him to see stars. The finality came when the utility pole crashed through the car bringing with it a shower of glass…and then he only knew agony and screams ringing inside his head.

He wasn't sure how long it took for his pain to recede, but when it did, Killian experienced a feeling of peace unlike anything he had ever known. His body felt weightless and free as if he were floating on a giant cloud or riding on a gentle wave. Unwilling to open his eyes, he allowed himself to be carried along and listened carefully to the sounds around him. Sounds that triggered some sense of fear deep inside, that he wasn't yet ready to acknowledge.

Slowly, he opened his eyes to see that the world had changed so significantly that he had to blink several times to assure himself that his vision was true. The color was gone and it was as though each picture that appeared in his brain had become a part of a slide show. Except now as he viewed the slide show, it wasn't with the vibrancy and color of life, but the negative of it. His world was no longer colorful, but shades of gray.

He was carried along on the cloud in his pain-free place, able to see the carnage around him, discovering that his view was from above. Over one truck a man hovered for a brief second before disappearing from sight. A woman had risen above the bus and appeared to be waiting for someone to tell her where to go until she smiled such a beautiful smile that Killian felt his eyes tear up and a chill run through his body when she floated toward a man who was waiting. When no one was waiting for him, he had an instant feeling of regret but when he realized that going with them meant leaving Emma behind. That was not something he could do…ever.

As the destruction around him became too much to bear, he closed his eyes and absorbed the chaos around him, hearing the sounds of grief and pain as they competed with those of joy and happiness. A cacophony of noise bombarding his very essence until he could no longer stand to listen to it and looked for someplace to go to get away from them. Rubbing his hands through his hair, he covered his ears, and tried to shut out the noises that reminded him of a bloody jackhammer, but it was useless. He was powerless to stop them.

The racket went on and on until he wanted to scream STOP, and little by little the pain snuck in, but every time it did, he shied away. He could see firemen and other emergency personnel surrounding his vehicle, working open the door of his car. His body could be seen suspended from where he had been tossed during the crash, now being held in place by the seatbelt. The large pole separated him from where Emma and Robin had been sitting, preventing them from bringing either to safety. He needed to help, but control of his own body no longer belonged to him.

When his body was removed from the destroyed vehicle, he could see blood on his face, head and legs, but feeling no pain, he couldn't tell the extent of his injuries. He was placed on a stretcher, fitted with a brace around his neck and buckled securely on the bed preventing any movement, giving him some indication that his injuries were not as simple as those he'd had as a young lad many years ago.

As Killian watched them work, he didn't know what happened but the pace with which they were
working increased tenfold and suddenly one of the paramedics yelled to the others, "We're losing him…start CPR, NOW!" and then climbed on the gurney to rhythmically push on his chest. The other paramedic yelled, "Where's the defibrillator?" before he too stepped in to help.

As two of the men worked over his body, two others climbed down into the opening they had created, and with the help of several others outside the car, began to remove the large pole. Killian willed them to hurry, needing to see Emma and know that she was okay. As the pole slowly started to move he could see her slumped against her door. His normally exuberant Swan lay still…so still he couldn't tell if she was alive or, god help him, already gone. They were moving too slowly and he needed to scream…HURRY…. until finally…they moved and when he looked in her direction, expecting to see her beautiful eyes and strong chin looking back at him, there was nothing but blood! Emma, he screamed over and over in his mind.

Don't kill me. I was going for the same shock value I felt when we found out that Hook was the Dark One. Did I succeed? Let me know what you think and how many names you called me as you read. And stay tuned for Wednesday, November 15 for Chapter 15 ..
Chapter 15

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 14, Emma, Killian and Robin were involved in a horrible motor vehicle accident. Find out what happened to them in this chapter.

Time is going to slow down in the story and semantics is going to be very important.

Chapter 15

Hospital for Special Surgery
New York City, NY
Monday Mid-Morning

Robin was aware of pain unlike any he had ever experienced. His head hurt, and his chest and his legs, one of which felt like someone had shot him with an arrow and pulled it through the other side. He could hear voices as they talked about the best way to move him out of the car, and once they started jostling him, the pain quickly became so severe it pulled him under.

When he came to, he could hear the whirring of the air flying past and ascertained they must be in a helicopter on their way to a hospital. He tried to remember where they had been on the Turnpike when the accident occurred, but with his limited knowledge of the area he couldn't do much more than make an educated guess. Remembering the screams from Killian and Emma, his thoughts went to whether they had already been transported to the hospital. Unable to gather the strength to open his eyes and turn his thoughts into words, he focused his injuries. When the chopper bounced on an air pocket, the pain once again spiked and he was pulled back into oblivion.

Later, when he managed to surface again, he knew he was in a hospital as he could hear the announcements over the intercom system and then he felt a chill as someone unwrapped the warm blankets covering his body. When he started to shiver uncontrollably he thought he groaned but couldn't be sure, as there was a tugging sensation on the legs of his jeans. "Get me those scissors so I can get these jeans off," was barked by someone as the tugging on his pants continued. After only hearing a few cuts, the table was bumped and the darkness claimed him once more.

When he woke again, the sounds around him caused him to think they were in the x-ray department. He hadn't thought it possible, but it was even colder and the table he was lying on was harder than the previous one. While he still couldn't manage to find the strength to get his eyes to open, he could hear the whirring of a machine as he was gently pushed closer to it. As his body shivered violently, the words, "Get him another blanket," were like music to his ears and when the blessed warmth drifted down over him, landing on his leg with a jolt, once again he knew no more.

His next ascent into awareness came as he was being wheeled to a third, or was it a fourth place. A voice commented, "He's clear for surgery," and then someone else answered, "They're waiting in OR 4," and he was pushed through a set of doors. His head was hurting from all the clanging of metal hitting metal, as if someone were picking tools up and setting them down none too gently, as well as the shuffling sound of several sets of feet scurrying around the room. Yet again, he was moved from his warm table to another not-so-warm one, and the pain threatened to pull him under
again, but this time he used his remaining strength to fight off the journey to the wasteland.

He was so cold, and his body was trembling so hard that he was surprised he wasn't jumping off the table. Here I am, he thought, lying on a table harder than the floor in a room colder than an icebox and being turned into a popsicle. A snicker threatened to escape as he wondered if the ever prim and proper Regina Mills would be willing to thaw certain parts, but before he could delve too far into that way of thinking, he felt a prick and heard someone say, "You will start to feel drowsy. We'll be right here." And this time he let himself float, as the darkness that called to him was not of the same type as before. This time, he was being pulled gently into sleep. Just as the sounds around him were fading to nothing, he heard, "Doctor, we got his phone working. His name is Robin Locksley and his wife Regina is on her way."

**Harvard Campus**
Boston, Massachusetts
**Monday, Early Afternoon**

Hanging up the phone, Regina spun her chair a full 360 degrees and had to bite her tongue to keep from shouting with happiness. She had gotten the position with *Nemo's Innovative Designs*, an architectural and engineering firm, which she had been coveting since last fall. The company's reputation was stellar and rapidly growing throughout the East Coast with its unique approach to construction. The possibility of being a part of its expansion across the continent was exciting, possibly leading into career-defining moments; a new challenge for her professionally and something completely different from being an adjunct professor for a semester. The fear that Robin wouldn't feel that their connection was strong enough to continue once they left Boston served to create a sliver of caution inside of her. And while she knew of his plans to move to New York City, she hadn't mentioned that she would be moving back there also, afraid that he might think she was pushing too much too fast. After their nights together and constantly communicating since, she thought he would be happy, but didn't want to presume anything. Only time would tell.

Wanting to share her news with him, she picked up her phone to give him a call and realized she hadn't heard from him since early morning. The fact that they had not gone more than a few minutes without texting since their dinner date, and yet it had been hours since she'd heard anything, was very unusual and gave her a feeling that something was off. Checking the time of his last call, she noted that he had tried to call her about 9:30 that morning when she was attending her last faculty meeting and when she hadn't answered, he had left her a sweet message.

*Regina, it's Robin. Riding with these two lovebirds makes me miss you even more. When I return, I'd like to take you away for a few days. You – me – sand – bikinis? Call me when you can.*

Later, once her meeting was over, she had tried to call him back, and it had gone straight to his voice mail. Yet another situation that just didn't feel right to her. Now here it was early afternoon and she had heard nothing for hours.

Robin had been a welcome distraction, addition, surprise – so many words to describe what his coming into her life meant to her, yet none of the words felt adequate. Unable to just sit still, she swiveled her chair around to stare out the window and let her mind sort through the events of the past semester and how a chance meeting had turned into a courtship for them, whether they anticipated it or not. And now she could admit that she was completely smitten with Robin Locksley and had been for much longer than she was willing to admit. Since the first day when she had walked into the lecture hall ready to take on a class which she assumed would be full of mid-20 something cocky engineering students, and instead a lone man, closer to her age than the rest of the group, had given her an endearing grin, and just like that, all her bravado had gone out the window.
His sandy hair, eyes that always held a mischievous glint, dimples like craters and sexy British accent had captured her attention and it hadn't taken much before she knew she was in deep trouble. After finally breaking free from her mother's domineering ways, she had wanted to take this time away from both her mother and New York, to focus on herself and her decisions. She was tired of living her life to please her mother and always being concerned about what others thought. Yet with the encouragement of her 'just trying to help friends,' Elsa and Emma, she had put herself out there, exposing her vulnerabilities to a man she wanted but couldn't have right away. They had danced around each other for months, yet as the semester wore on, she felt more and more that he was a spider who had been slowly but surely weaving a web around her until she had been so tightly caught that there was no escape, and most importantly, she had no desire to escape.

When he had mentioned an exhibit that was being held at a local museum, she had declined attending with him, but the invitation had morphed into a date of sorts anyway, all thanks to her friend, Elsa. Not realizing that Elsa and Robin were good friends, Regina had agreed to attend the event with Elsa, who had invited Robin along. They had spent the afternoon strolling from exhibit to exhibit together, as if it had been planned that way. As they walked, Robin had regaled them with his many stories of growing up in England as an only child of older parents, of his mother's death and his father's subsequent move to the states. As he spoke, Regina found herself sharing bits and pieces of her life, and the more he opened his mouth and that smooth as butter British accent caressed the words, the more smitten with him she had become. He had started his spell weaving the moment their eyes met across that crowded classroom and now, months later, he was still pulling her closer than she could ever remember being to a man before. What surprised her was that she was allowing it, even reveling in it.

The second time it happened, she had been lecturing about symmetry and nature and using the surroundings that a building is set in to encourage flow and balance between what is natural and what is man-made. After his success at the museum, he had gotten a bit bolder, and this time he had stayed after class to ask her to take a drive along the northeastern shoreline, ostensibly so he could show her some of the places that he felt her lesson had completely described. She had smiled at him but before she could say anything further, they had been interrupted by one of the other professors and the moment had been lost. And then a few weeks later, Elsa and Emma had taken her to The Burren and she had watched him up on stage singing, and his last song of the night had been sung just for her. As he sang the words to *Waiting for a Girl Like You* by Foreigner, with each word he was telling her how long he had been looking for her and how she made him feel alive, and that night she knew they were inevitable, and that she had been waiting for him, too. When she had hurried from the bar, she wasn't running from her feelings but from the timing of her feelings. When he caught her at the train station and their lips met for the first time, she hadn't regretted it for a moment. When she finally gave him what they both wanted and told him they had two weeks of class before anything could happen, it was as if the foreplay had started right then, because since then their feelings had only grown.

Unable to sit still any longer she pushed up from the chair and walked back and forth in front of the desk. She couldn't believe it had only been three days since he had taken his exam and no longer was considered her student, as it felt like she had known him forever, not just a few months. When they had gone to dinner, it hadn't been a date between strangers spending time together for the first time, but one of friends who had been moving toward each other forever. And after dinner, when he had invited her back to his apartment, she knew they were going to end up between the sheets and it was going to be a life changing experience, before she even said yes. And she hadn't been wrong, either. Her life had changed, and she hoped it was only the beginning.

When he had cupped her face and…. Her phone vibrated in her hand and a quick glance told her it was the man she had been waiting on. "Robin?" she said nervously.
"No, I'm sorry," she heard a stranger say, "my name is Chip Pots. I'm calling from Robin's phone"

Regina frowned, and her concern went to full fledge panic as she heard an intercom in the background paging a doctor to ER. Her heart jumped in her throat and so by the time she answered, her voice shook with fear. "Yes, Robin Locksley. What are you doing with Robin's phone? Is he alright?"

"I'm sorry, but I'm looking for Mr. Locksley's next of kin. Are you his wife?"

Without even considering any repercussions, Regina blurted, "Yes, he's my husband. Tell me what's happening." She felt like she was going to hyperventilate at any moment, her breathing so fast.

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Locksley," the concerned voice said, "but your husband has been in a serious traffic accident and is currently in surgery. Can you come to the hospital immediately?"

"Ugh," she fell back against her desk. "When? Where? What about our friends?" Her hands were shaking so hard that she was surprised she hadn't dropped her phone.

"I'm sorry but I have no knowledge of anyone else in the car, but maybe the police can help you with that. Right now, your husband needs you."

He went on to tell her which hospital Robin was in and, as she had already submitted her last grade, she turned off her computer, grabbed her bag and checked the airlines for the next available flight. With little time to think, she stopped by her apartment, packed and was out the door on her way to the airport before she realized she hadn't told Elsa or Anna about the wreck. Time for that later, she decided as her thoughts turned back to the man she had grown to love.

University Hospital
Newark, New Jersey
Monday, Early Afternoon

Emma fought through the pain using every bit of the strength she had gained growing up as a lost girl in a world where her only family included other misfits. Combined with the knowledge and strength she had gained from loving Killian, she fought hard to stay awake. She knew she had lost some time while still trapped in the car but once she became conscious of being moved, she thought she had managed to stay awake as she rode to the hospital and they wheeled her into the emergency room. Her thoughts hadn't been of herself and her own injuries, but of Killian and his. Several times, she had tried to open her mouth to ask but her tongue had felt swollen, almost disconnected, and refused to cooperate, and she couldn't seem to move her mouth. Her ears worked fine, though, so as she lay on the gurney, first in the ambulance and then in the emergency room, she listened for clues. It seemed to be her best option.

Bright lights, quick moving, fast paced individuals and cold attacked her senses as she lay on the stretcher watching the nurse gently move a piece of gauze back and forth across her face. Seeing the cloth come away smeared with blood made her heart race and the pain she was feeling and had been fighting threatened to overtake her. The nurse must have seen the fear in her eyes because, finally, she explained that she was in the process of removing all the tiny shards of glass from her face and that was where the blood was from. She went on to let Emma know what would happen next, which would be x-rays, and assured her that there would be something for her pain soon. As she said that another nurse came into view and a new bag was attached to the IV pole, already littered with several bags of various sizes. As the pain medication seeped into her system, the stress of the day finally overwhelmed her and, letting herself float, she slept.
When she woke, the first thing she noticed was the steady beep of her heart rate accompanied by a clicking sound, which she figured was her IV machine. But while both were noticeable, there was also a slightly muted quality to the noises. Her own breath seemed excessively loud, almost as if she were swimming underwater. She could hear a constant barrage of information being emitted, as is the case in any hospital, yet the way she was hearing it seemed more of a background noise that came from far away, and outside of her room.

The smell of antiseptic hung in the air, clung to her hair and surrounded the bedding around her. The metallic taste in her mouth told her that the soft tissues inside had been cut, possibly multiple times, as they came into contact with sharper objects, most likely her teeth. When she tried to run her tongue along her teeth around the sides, she met resistance, however, when she reached the center, there was no resistance at all. How many teeth have I lost?

The medication that continued to drip into her system held the pain at bay, but for how long? That she wasn't feeling pain should have been a good thing, but when she focused on her body she realized she wasn't feeling much of anything. Deciding to take it one body part at a time, she focused on her right arm and attempted to reach forward with it, yet came up short, as it was heavy, enclosed in a plaster cast and held in place with a sling. Her hands became the next part of her focus, and wanting to use her fingers to tacitly explore, she couldn't as both hands were wrapped in gauze mittens. The question was why, but with no one to ask, she moved to her face. She lifted her left hand and extended it hesitantly toward her head, somehow knowing that what she was going to feel was not what she wanted to feel. When her hand was brought up short by what certainly didn't feel like her skin, but rather more bandages she could only ask herself…why?

Sitting in the darkened room, her face and hands covered in bandages, and her vision impaired, she felt lost again. The covering around her head so tight and thick that her only view was a small window immediately in front of her. Not only because of her gloomy surroundings, but also because of the restricted movement from the bandages, she felt the helplessness begin to well up inside and she was almost powerless to stop it. The closest analogy she could come up with was that she felt almost as if she was in a box that kept getting smaller and smaller, causing her heart to race and her breathing to become shallower. She tried to peek around the edges to see what was waiting for her, who was waiting for her, but there wasn't anything to see. Nothing…no one. Unable to hold them back any longer, the tears finally filled her eyes and the sense of vulnerability that had been tapping at the edges of her consciousness all day threatened to consume her, until approaching footsteps caught her attention.

Nemo's Innovative Designs
New York City, NY
Monday, Early Afternoon

Liam leaned back in his chair and stared out at the Manhattan skyline, thinking about his conversation with Killian the prior day. He hoped that his little brother listened and learned from his experience as, unless another opportunity presented itself, it was the best he could do. Sighing because it had to be like this, he took a drink of his lukewarm coffee, looking up just as Nemo walked into the room. "Off to a meeting?"

"No, just a charity function." Nemo leaned against the door frame. "We also need to discuss our trip to Boston for Killian's graduation and his wedding to Emma."

Liam grunted and made a face, "Must we?"

"Liam," Nemo quietly spoke, "your brother is a grown man. It is not your job to live his life for him, but for you to support him."
"I'm just trying to protect him. Isn't that what families do?"

"We protect those that aren't able to protect themselves, Liam," he stopped to clear his throat. "I'm afraid if you continue to push him, Killian will walk away. Is that what you want?"

"You know it's not what I want." Liam looked up with tortured eyes and put his hand over his heart, rubbing back and forth. "It's as if she pulled out my heart and crushed it. It hurts so damn bad." His voice trailed off and, unable to meet the dark mesmerizing eyes of the man who meant so much to him any longer, he lowered his gaze.

Nemo walked over and laid his hand on Liam's shoulder. "I know it hurts, son. This is when we come together as a family, and perhaps if we meet her halfway, Emma will save all of us just like she seems to have saved your brother. Your parents," he stopped to gather his thoughts, but then changed directions in the conversation, "What is it you have against Emma exactly, Liam?"

Liam sighed, "She's just like Lily. She will use Killian and then hurt him." Talking about Lily still angered him to the point where both hands were balled into fists and there was a noticeable tic in his jaw from gritting his teeth.

"But how can you say that, Liam, when you've never met the girl?" Nemo moved to lean back against the desk, giving the impression he had all the time in the world.

"She grew up in an orphanage, just like Lily. What does she know about love and saving someone?"

Liam's voice remained bitter, but he felt that he owed it to Nemo to stay and listen to what was being said, as he would have done had he been listening to his own father. "Are you saying people who grow up as orphans don't know how to love, son? You remember that both your father and I grew up on our own, don't you?"

Liam didn't respond immediately but looked up at Nemo as he realized the trap that he had walked right into and his shoulders slumped in defeat. "I'm sorry, that came out all wrong. I meant," but he couldn't continue because he wasn't really sure what he had meant. His father had loved his mother and quite obviously loved his boys. Nemo had once loved and lost, and, so far, he had never found another woman to live up to the memory of his wife. The man cared for him and Killian as if they were his sons. "Maybe I need to do some rethinking on things."

Nemo stood and patted him on the back. "I think that's a good idea. Don't ignore the pain, Liam, as that helps make you the man you are supposed to become, but trust your brother. If he says one look and he knew Emma was the one for him, just as, may I remind you, your father did, then perhaps you are not giving him credit to know his own mind." He waited until Liam had looked up and acknowledged what he had said, before continuing, "Now I am off," before walking out the door.

Liam watched him go, and while the rational side of his brain admitted the truth behind his statements, the emotional part of his brain didn't want to have to sort through all the pain in order to come out on the other side. The bitterness had been his shield for years now and he wasn't sure if he could let it go. Since he was at a point of self-reflection anyway, he opened his memories to take them out and examine them when his phone buzzed, interrupting his thoughts. Locating it on his desk took so long he was afraid he would miss the call, but when he found it and didn't recognize the number, he almost let it go to voice mail. On the last ring, he couldn't stand it any longer and grabbed the phone, pushing the button. "This is Liam Jones; can I help you?" What he heard on the other end caused his blood to chill and he was grabbing his keys and out the door before the person had finished talking.

University Hospital
Newark, New Jersey  
Monday, Mid-Afternoon

Since that machine had zapped him back into his body, the way Killian was feeling could only be explained with extreme descriptions. His head felt as if a million snare drums were beating out a cadence and his chest felt like a 500-pound man was sitting on it, making his breathing painful and shallow. His shoulder felt as if it had almost been pulled out of the socket and his knee had been stomped on by someone dancing the mamba. He knew he wasn't dead because he hurt too bloody much.

Squinting through the pain, he looked around the brightly lit room trying to find someone that could give him information about Emma and Robin. He needed to know where they were and how they were. He finally caught the eye of a lass who was walking around the room with a clipboard, periodically flipping through pages and, he hoped, checking through names. As she came closer, Killian tried to breathe through the pain.

"Good afternoon, sir." She flipped a page on her clipboard. "I'm Aurora and am in the process of gathering information on all the crash victims. Your name?"

Taking a quick breath, Killian groaned. "Jones," he finally pushed out. "Killian Jones."

She looked through the pages on her board until apparently finding what he assumed was something about him. "Two other passengers in a black Subaru?"

His pulse sped up with hope that he might truly find out some more information. "Yes, any news on my fiancé and friend?"

She looked down, frowned, and then back up. "Let me go check," she muttered before taking off to talk to an officer standing across the room.

Killian kept his eye on her trying to decipher what kind of information she was receiving, but he was unable to tell based on her body language if the information was good or bad. After she nodded her head several more times, she finally turned and came over to his stretcher. "I found out your friend Robin was taken to the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York City, as that is the best place for orthopedics. The young woman was brought to this hospital and taken to surgery but that's all the information I have."

Telling her a quiet thank you, Killian turned away from the bright lights and closed his eyes. He wished he were standing and healthy because he really needed to yell and kick something. Emma was supposed to be his wife, and after a small celebration with Robin they should have been able to return to their room for a much more private celebration. A tear, something he shouldn't be shedding on his wedding day, trickled from the corner of his eye, running down his cheek and getting caught in his scruff. Fate had been kind to him when he met Emma, yet fate had kept them apart for several months before their paths had crossed again. "Please," he prayed silently, "keep watch over Emma." Something told him help was going to be needed and soon.

**Hospital for Special Surgery**  
New York City, NY  
Monday, Late Afternoon

Having arrived in New York City, Regina didn't take the time to call her mother but just took a cab straight to the hospital. She knew that, at the very least, it would earn her a look that told her how very much she had yet again disappointed her mother, but found that she didn't care. She had learned a lot about herself during the past five months she spent in Boston, and right now she had someone
that needed her. Robin needed her and getting to him as quickly as possible was her goal.

When she walked into the Hospital for Special Surgery, Regina felt a brief moment of guilt for the pretense, but if it got her into see him quicker, she would do it again. He was important to her and he needed to know that. "I'm Regina Mills…Locksley," she told the person at the desk using her no-nonsense voice, "looking for Chip Pots."

Thankfully, no questions had been asked, and as soon as Chip arrived he quickly took her to Robin's room. As he pushed open the door and she was able to get her first look of Robin lying so still in the bed, she had covered her mouth to quiet the sob threatening to escape and the tears that sprang to her eyes. "Oh, Robin," she whispered rushing to his side, but unsure where to stand and what she could touch. "There's just so much," she looked back at Chip who had followed her into the room, "How..." she swallowed and tried again, "how is he, really?"

Chip walked closer and took her hand. "He's stable." He gave her a sympathetic smile. "I know it looks bad but he's young and you're here. Doctor Johns will be able to give you more specific details, but both of his legs are broken and his collarbone is bruised. I suggest staying on the left side, up by his shoulder."

Regina looked at the metal hardware surrounding Robin's left leg, and then at the big bulky cast that encompassed his right leg from his groin to the floor. She wondered how was he supposed to get around and how much time would it take for him to heal. "Oh Robin," she murmured, again laying her hand on his forehead.

Chip quickly checked Robin's vitals and looked over his IV bags, making sure they were flowing smoothly. "He should be fine, Mrs. Locksley," he grinned at her. "Might just need a little extra tender loving care for a few months."

Regina smiled at the nurse before glancing back down at Robin. "I'm not going anywhere."

"Good. Let me know if you need anything further."

He left the room and she was alone with Robin for the first time in a day, but this time she was masquerading as his wife and he was in the hospital fighting for his life. Not wanting to jostle him too much, she put her bag in the small closet and pulled a chair close to his left side, but before she sat down, she leaned over and very gently kissed him on the lips. They were warm and soft, and even knowing it was an unrealistic dream, she had hoped that when her lips met his, he would kiss her back, but not this time. Inhaling softly, she brushed the hair off his forehead and sat down close to the side of the bed. Taking his hand between hers, she used it to cup her cheek and waited for him to open his eyes.

Robin knew before he even opened his eyes that Regina was sitting next to his bed. Not only could he sense her presence, but he could also smell her; that spicy, mysterious scent that was uniquely her and called to him whenever she was near.

He heard her whisper his name and wanted so badly to open his eyes, to see her smile that smile he imagined she saved just for him - the one that told him she was thinking of him and knew that he, too, was thinking of her. Her broken whispers and the gentle way she had brushed back his hair had tugged at his heartstrings and he wanted nothing more than to drown in her dark eyes.

When she had leaned in and kissed his lips it had been both heaven and his own personal hell, for he hadn't been able to reciprocate. His body's movements not under his control and being given kisses that he couldn't return hardly seemed fair.
As Regina sat next to him, murmuring nonsensical things softly, the memory of someone saying, 'Regina, his wife is on her way,' flashed through his mind. He didn't think he had forgotten having a wife, but just as soon as he got enough strength to open his eyes, there were a lot of questions that he would ask.

**University Hospital**
Newark, New Jersey
**Monday, Late Afternoon**
**Emma's Room**

Even though it was difficult, Emma looked up, then had to look up some more, to see the face of the person who had just walked into her room. His great height caused fear to blossom in her heart until he opened his mouth and the gentleness of his voice calmed her. "Good evening, Emma. I'm Anton, your physician's assistant and am sure you have many questions, am I right?"

*Of course, you're right you big idiot,* thought Emma as she lay there unable to say anything and barely able to make a sound. And with one hand wrapped and the other in a sling, writing or using her fingers to communicate was also difficult. And even though she was screaming internally, she merely nodded her head.

He smiled down at her as if he knew exactly what she was thinking and moved a chair close to the head of her bed. "Let's see if I can answer some of the questions you have, okay?"

She watched him as he made himself comfortable and, as he leaned toward her, she noticed for the first time he was holding several items.

He held up a whiteboard and a large black marker. "Are you right-handed?" Emma indicated she was before he continued, "Your right arm has a clean break, just below your elbow, so you will be doing things with your left hand for a while. Writing on one of these things." He put the marker in her hand and held the whiteboard up in front of her. She had difficulty holding the marker, as her hand was wrapped with gauze and she couldn't bend her hand very easily. Holding it out toward him, she silently asked him, why?

Anton tapped on the back of her hand. "You want to know why this hand is wrapped? There were multiple cuts along the back of it, including between your fingers. They shouldn't take too much time to heal but until then it's as if you have a baseball mitt. Here, try it."

It took a few misses before she figured out that to get the marker to appear as she had to push the end against the board and then turn the marker back around to write. Once she started, it truly was like writing with a mitten on her hand, and while her letters were not precise, nor were they small, they were legible. When she had finished and moved her hand away, she had written only one word, "Killian?"

Anton told her that he was aware there were others in the car but that he didn't know any specifics, however, he promised to see what he could find out. Since her options at the moment were limited, she wrote, "Face?"

He heaved a sigh, as if he weren't comfortable with the information he was about to impart. "It's a lot to take in, Emma," he told her kindly. "Are you sure you're ready?" When she nodded her head once, he started talking.

Emma knew that the damage done to her face during the accident was extensive but until Anton started giving her all the details, she hadn't been aware of just how extensive. As she listened to him list her injuries the fear that she had felt since waking up in the hospital alone threatened to consume
her. What was in store for her, as well as anyone else in her life, and how was she going to be able to handle it kept reverberating around inside her head. And the more he spoke, the louder the noise became making it harder to listen to what he had to say.

"The good news is that even with the multiple breaks on and around your face, your eyes and your nose are fine." He took the whiteboard from her and drew a rudimentary picture of the bones of her face, "You have two relatively simple breaks in your jawbone," he pointed on each side of her face just behind her back teeth, "and your cheekbones." He pointed at the area just below the corners of each eye. "Your jaw has been wired together and will stay that way for 6-8 weeks. Once healing has taken place you will need plastic surgery to replace your cheekbones and have new teeth implanted."

Realizing she had been right about her teeth, but not sure of the extent of the damage, she lifted her wrapped hand and touched the tip of it to the front of her mouth.

Anton once again seemed to read her mind and pointed at the picture he had drawn on the whiteboard. "You lost four upper teeth and two lower ones, and as long as your jaw is wired shut you will be getting all of your nutritional needs through a straw. The good news is you won't have to worry about having a feeding tube, and as soon as your face is healed, implants are quick and easy."

Emma thought about what he had said regarding her broken jaw, lost teeth and broken cheekbones but that didn't help her understand why her head was encased in bandages like a freaking mummy. Touching both cheeks, then her chin and head she held her palm up as if to ask why?

"Glass," he said simply. "Your face was covered in glass and once removed small open wounds were left behind. The bandages shouldn't be on long, but while the wounds are open, this will help prevent infection."

She tilted her head at him, took the board and marked a large "$" on it.

He nodded his head. "Several surgeries that could very well take two to three months and that is with no complications. You have insurance?"

Shrugging, Emma wrote on the board, "Some."

Anton gently patted her on her good shoulder. "Things will work out, Emma. They always do." He stood up and made sure the bedside table, cup of water and whiteboard and marker were close to her. "I'm going to go see if I can get any information for you about your friends. Push this button if you need anything." He tied the call button loosely to the railing on her bed and just as quickly as he had appeared, he was gone.

After he left, Emma's emotions were in turmoil. To say she was scared was an understatement, but there was so much more that she wasn't sure where to start. Her life had taught her that there was only one person who never let you down, and that was yourself. As long as you depended on yourself, no matter what the questions were, you would always find the answers. But life was not perfect and sometimes bad things happened to good people, and when the question 'why' was asked, no sufficient answers were given.

From the moment that her eyes had locked with Killian's and their connection had been forged, their relationship had become the most important thing in her life as well as the very best thing that had ever happened to her. Their relationship was built on mutual respect and equality, with neither of them bringing more to it than the other. In their own ways, they had both been damaged, yet together they made each other better. Together they were two parts of a whole, and for a short while, life had been perfect.
But this was real life, not some fantasy where her happy ending was just dropped into her lap and easily given. This was real life and to get that happy ending, it had to be earned, and so it seemed that she had more work to do to earn hers. Surgeries, rehabilitation on her hand and arm and, while she knew looks weren't important, hers might never be the same. How could she put Killian through whatever hell was waiting for her? Was he willing to wait for her bandages to come off and her surgeries to be complete before he moved on to the next phase in his life?

Killian's Hospital Room

Killian lay in his bed in a room somewhere in bloody University Hospital in bloody Newark, New Jersey alone! How was that for karma? He had thought to change his future by running in a direction no one expected and what happened? It wasn't Liam who had been the one to hurt Emma at all. No, that responsibility fell directly in his lap and there was no getting around it. The last, albeit fleeting, vision of her had been just after the crash and she had been so still and there had been so much blood. How would she ever forgive him? And if something happened to her, how would he ever forgive himself?

He wondered if they would let him go find her but after looking at the hardware attached to his body, he thought not. With his left side practically useless and a marching band still clamoring for attention in his head, he doubted they would let him get very far for a few days. He was aware that he was feeling sorry for himself, and with no one to answer any of his questions, he finally gave in and let the pain medication take hold and pull him into slumber.

Liam strode into the hospital and made his way to Killian's room, fear taking up permanent residence in his veins that the last conversation with his brother might be one of hate and anger. No matter what Killian thought, he did love his brother and wanted what, and who, was best for him, but his experience with Lily had taken his rose-colored glasses about love and tarnished them so dark that he wasn't sure they could ever be cleaned. He was willing to admit, though, that after listening and finally hearing what Nemo had said, he needed to step back and try to look at things from a different angle. Nemo, of course, was right, about the fact that both Lily and his father had started their lives as orphans, yet both took decidedly different paths. Lily grew up alone and selfish and used people for her own gains, while always looking for greener pastures. His father, on the other hand, had loved his mother almost to the point of obsession, and loved his boys, of that there was no denying. Was it possible that the path Emma Swan was following was more like his father's and not that of his ex-wife?

When he pushed open the door to Killian's room, he was taken aback by the stillness of his brother in the bed. He had his left arm in a sling, his left knee in a brace and small cuts were scattered all over his face, the red standing out starkly against his pale complexion. Liam moved closer to the bed and laid his hand gently on Killian's good shoulder. "Brother?" Liam whispered quietly, the fear that Killian wouldn't open his eyes rising up inside and competing with fear that he would, but not welcome his presence by his side.

When Killian turned his head in his direction and opened his eyes, not with hate but with love, Liam sighed in relief. Once Killian's eyes had cleared and he realized who was standing next to his bed, it was as though his whole body relaxed and he gazed at him with an expression that was almost gratitude. "Liam, what are you doing here?"

"Where else would I be, Killian? You're hurt. Why are you this far away from Boston, anyway?"

Through a series of stops and starts, Killian explained where they had been going and what had happened. When he was finished there were tears running down his face and Liam could see that his brother was truly enamored with his Emma, just as he had been with Lily.
With some difficulty, Killian reached and grabbed his arm. "Liam, I need you to do something for me." The fear he was feeling was evident by the tightness of his grip and the anxiety in his voice.

"Anything, brother, you know that."

Once Killian heard that, he relaxed back against the pillows. "Find Emma. She's here somewhere and all alone. Find her and make sure she gets the best care possible. Will you do that for me?"

Maybe this would be his opportunity to meet Killian's woman and make sure her intentions were honorable. "Aye, Killian. I'll take care of your Emma."

So do we have a change of heart for Liam? What will he think of Emma? Stay tuned to find out next in Chapter 16 which will be posted next Wednesday. Drop me a line with your thoughts. Thanks for reading.
Chapter 16

Chapter Summary

Liam told Killian he would 'take care of Emma' but what exactly does that mean?

I feel I should give a bit of a warning... you might need a tissue, but then again, maybe not...
Here we go.

Chapter 16

Hospital for Special Surgery
New York City, NY
Monday, Late Afternoon

Robin opened his eyes to long shadows in the room coming through the lone window. From the lack of light, he guessed it was nearing sunset, which meant he had lost an entire day. "Bugger that," he whispered, his throat scratchy from lack of use.

Turning away from the window, he saw what had to be the most beautiful sight he could imagine. Regina was stretched out on the recliner that the hospital provided for family members, her shoes off, hands tucked under her cheek, sound asleep. Her acerbic, yet somehow sexy tongue quiet, her face unguarded in repose, both layers of the many-faceted woman who had captured his heart when she had first uttered the words, "Good morning, class."

As he continued to stare, her eyes gradually opened, her dark irises met his green ones. "Robin," his name came out breathy but she sounded relieved. "Finally, you're awake." Unfolding herself from the recliner, she leaned in and gave him a kiss; just a simple meeting of lips but one that told him how happy she was he was alive. "How are you feeling?"

"Better now for seeing you." He took her hand and kissed her fingertips.

Tilting her head, she smiled at him sweetly and whispered, "Still a smooth talker, I see," before laying her hand over his forehead, as if checking for fever in a small child or, better yet, needing to touch him to assure herself that he was really alive.

Robin watched the expression in her eyes transform from amused acceptance of his playful banter to rising panic as the realization of what had happened and how significant his injuries were, and as the tears pooled in her eyes, her chin trembled slightly. "I'm alright, Regina. I don't think anything is broken that can't be fixed." He looked down at his body. "What exactly is broken, anyway?"

Regina opened her mouth to answer, but the door opened and a rather large man entered. "Glad to see you're awake. I'm Doctor Johns." Pulling on a pair of gloves, he began making a cursory examination of Robin's leg, explaining to them his injuries. "You have a compound fracture in your lower left leg and that was surgically cleaned earlier today. You will require another surgery to put the bone back together and cast the leg, if all signs stay the same, tomorrow. Your right leg is broken in two places, one above the knee and one below, which is why the cast encompasses your entire leg. Your right arm is in a sling because you have a bruise on your clavicle, or collarbone, and we want to limit the movement for a few days while it heals. I know it sounds daunting, but you're
young and healthy and your body will recover in a few months, and with rehabilitation you will be back on your feet once again." As he finished, he asked, "On a scale of 1 to 10, what's your pain level?"

Robin looked at the doctor and then at Regina. "Five or so, but manageable for now."

He pulled off the gloves and tossed them into the trashcan. "Good, we'll leave you on the current medications for now and in surgery tomorrow we'll insert screws into the bone." He wrote a few notes in the chart that was hanging on the foot of the bed and turned to leave. "Unless you have any further questions, I will leave you and your wife alone."

Once he was gone, Robin looked up at Regina and raised a brow, "Wife? Not that I'm complaining, but marrying you is one thing I don't intend to forget."

She ducked her head, a shy smile playing along her lips. "Sorry?" She pulled the chair closer to the bed so she could keep touching him. "When I got the call about the accident and your next of kin I panicked." She didn't say anything for a few minutes but sat there nibbling her bottom lip. "Are you mad?" she finally asked him quietly.

He found he wasn't able to move very easily with one leg in a heavy cast, the other suspended, and his right arm in a sling. Every time he stretched too far any direction, sharp pains would go through his shoulder, but because he needed to touch her, he settled for squeezing her fingers. "Not at all, more thankful you didn't run the other direction. I am worried about my father, though. Perhaps I should contact him."

He watched a contrite look cross her face and before she could apologize again, sidetracked her with asking her to get him some juice from the nurse and if he could use her phone to contact his father. While she was gone, he called Marco, who happened to be working at the jewelry store, and left him with two requests. The first, bring him some gym clothes so he wouldn't have to wear a bloody dress where his arse hung out, and the second was for him to see what he could find out about Killian and Emma. He was injured but that didn't mean he had to be out of the loop.

University Hospital
Newark, New Jersey
Monday, Late Afternoon

After Liam left, Killian thought back over their conversation and hoped he had made the right choice in asking his brother for help. The man before him today sounded more like the brother he had always known and less like the bitter shell that he had spoken to… was it just yesterday? He couldn't help but wonder what happened in the interim to bring about the change. He also couldn't help but worry that it might not last.

These were just a few of the questions he kept asking himself as he worried if sending Liam to take care of Emma was the right thing to do. Not only were Liam's emotions volatile, but his fiancé wasn't one who liked to ask for help. She was fiercely independent and proud of that fact, and while he appreciated that she could take care of herself, he was concerned about her. Since he couldn't go, his brother was his only option. While he had learned to love Emma, he accepted that she often had to work through situations on her own. Liam didn't know that and as he was a stubborn mule. If he pushed too hard, there was no telling what might happen. His hope was that ultimately the right choices were made, and Liam would return with good news and this would be the start of working their way back to being a family.

Killian was also worried about Robin. It was his fault that his best friend had been in the car with him, and he couldn't let go of the fact that he had been driving the car. However, once Liam
returned, he would task him with finding out what he could about Robin's condition.

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As soon as he had walked away from Killian's room, Liam had second and even third thoughts about what he was getting ready to do. But then he told himself that while there were several different options he could put into play, whether he actually followed through on any of those options was yet to be seen. Choices were still in front of him and just because Killian had sent him on a mission with a specific purpose, the interpretation of that message could be taken many ways. That was really the beauty of the English language.

After he told Killian that he would find Emma, the logistics of locating her had proven difficult and it had taken a little detective work before he had been successful. Once he had the information and was standing outside her room, he found himself pacing back and forth, worrying his thumbnail. He hadn't really thought through what he wanted to say to her or what not to say. He also didn't even know for sure if she would listen to him. The thought that Killian had told her about their conversation and the file he had gathered on her caused him a bit of concern. However, when all was said and done, at this very moment in time, his ultimate goal was to make sure that Killian was protected, no matter what the cost. If that meant Emma Swan was the best thing for his brother, then perhaps he was alright with it. Only time would tell how everything would play out.

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Helpless. Something she hadn't felt in a very, very long time and now it was the prevailing emotion that wouldn't let her go. Eyesight impaired. Her hands essentially useless. The two senses that an artist depends on to give them life. Hers, temporarily out of commission.

Alone. Another feeling she hadn't experienced in a long time, as she had accepted that her parents had given her up for their own reasons and those were not her fault. And friends were not something in short supply for she had more good friends than she had ever expected. And then there was Killian, the man who made her smile, filled her days with laughter and her nights with love and who was so close, yet so very far away. She needed to see him to assure herself he was okay after the accident. With no way to release her frustration, it kept bubbling higher and higher until she felt she might explode. But they weren't alone. They were joined by screams...hers...Robin's...Killian's, all combined...getting louder every second until-? That, she didn't know, and that was what scared her most of all.

Wondering if they had removed her bag from the car when they brought her to the hospital, she tried to turn her head enough to look at the side tables, but couldn't see anything. She really wanted her phone, as maybe...it would bring her some answers. More importantly, it would give her a kind voice, someone to give her comfort. She didn't care if she only talked to one person or several but hearing Ruby or Ashley or Elsa tell her that everything was going to be alright might make the next twenty-four hours more bearable.

There were also her injuries. Yes, the gentle giant had explained them to her and explained them well, yet she needed to read for herself that what he said was true. She gently reached up and palpated all around her face with her bandaged hands, wondering what she would see once the dressing had been removed. And her hands. Anton had said they wouldn't have to be wrapped long, but how long? If they were minor cuts as he said, then perhaps tomorrow? Or better yet, later today? With her hands wrapped like mittens, what had become of her ring? Was it still on her finger, under the mitten? Or had they removed it? Would she ever see it again? The look on Killian's face as he had slipped it onto her finger and the way that she had felt while they made love would forever
be burned in her brain.

Anton had said it could take a few months before she was herself again, but how would that affect her future with Killian and their plans? When her thoughts only brought about more questions he and not the answers, she could no longer keep the frustration at bay and it bubbled to the surface. She tried to scream and let out every bit of what she was feeling inside but she couldn't even open her mouth sufficiently, as the tiny wires holding her jaw together...they defeated her. With a weary sigh, she rolled onto her left side, hugged a pillow to her chest and wept.

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Liam pushed open the door to Emma's room and was taken aback by the sight before him. She wasn't a monster, nor the vision of Lily that was always in his head, but rather a small, indistinct figure huddled in the bed, hugging a pillow to her chest. The room was silent, but as he approached her, he could hear something that sounded like a wounded animal. Her shoulders moved, and he realized the sound was coming from her. "Lass, are you Emma?" He moved closer to the side of the bed she was facing. "Are you Emma Swan?"

Emma wasn't sure how she knew, but the moment the new visitor opened his mouth and she heard his accent, she realized she was finally going to meet Liam Jones. There was something about his vocabulary, the tone of his voice and the cadence of his speech that told her this was Killian's brother. The one whose wife had treated him so poorly that he had turned into a bitter man. And the one who had given Killian a nightmare because of what he had said. But, also, the brother who had sheltered Killian while he was growing up and whom Killian had once worshipped. Which Liam was she about to meet?

When she looked at him, his expression frightened her, not because it was one of anger or hate, but rather one of sorrow and empathy. She felt like she needed to take a few minutes to process his reaction, so she just gave him a quick affirmative bob of her head, since her whiteboard wasn't close. The extent of his emotions shocked him, as he hadn't experienced some of those feelings in years, but they only served to strengthen his resolve to find out just who the real Emma Swan was. He cleared his throat and took a deep breath before saying proceeding. "I'm Liam Jones. Killian sent me." He watched as she processed that information before rolling onto her back and reaching onto the bedside table to pick up a whiteboard and marker.

Emma breathed a sigh of relief on hearing that Killian had sent Liam to check on her. It meant that he was alive, somewhere in this hospital and could actually speak with others. She picked up her current means of communication and wrote on the board, "Killian?"

*Her hands were wrapped like mittens, her arm was broken and her face was completely covered in bandages,* thought Liam and she wrote asking about Killian. He hated to admit it but the fact that she was thinking of his brother first was telling him something. Was he ready to be proven wrong? "You want to know about Killian?"

Once again, she gave a quick affirmative bob of her head.

"Killian has a dislocated shoulder, a twisted knee, some broken ribs and a concussion, but should be fine." He swallowed the lump that had suddenly appeared in his throat. "When I went to his room, you, Emma Swan, were all he could think about. He's worried about you, lass." When he listed Killian's injuries, he wished he could see more than just her eyes, because what he could glimpse was tortured and, if it were true that your eyes were windows to your soul, then she was nothing like his Lily. *Was Nemo right,* flitted through his brain. Could Emma Swan be the savior for both of the Jones boys?
Cleaning off the whiteboard, she wrote, "Robin?"

Liam frowned at the news that Robin had been in the car too, as that was new information to him. "I'll find about Robin as soon as I can. I promise."

He tried once again to see past the bandages covering her head, and then moved on to her arm and hands. "And you, Emma, how are you?"

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Emma searched his face. The man standing in front of her asking her how she felt was not the man who had been such a jerk to Killian. Who is he, she couldn't help but wonder. How could he seem so genuine and willing to help after he had spent most of the last year shutting them out? She hoped Liam wasn't pretending, as she knew that Killian really wanted him to be a part of their lives. But she was pragmatic enough to realize that with her numerous injuries and with Killian also injured, they would need someone who was on their side. Just as she started to write, "Ask Doctor," she looked up to see someone new walking into her room.

He unhooked her chart from the foot of the bed and flipped it open to read the new notes. "Good afternoon, Emma. I'm Doctor James Nolan, your oral surgeon. Earlier today, my team and I were the ones who performed the surgery to repair your jaw. Do you have any questions for me while I'm here?"

As Dr. Nolan explained the road to her recovery, Emma found herself becoming more and more overwhelmed. Two to three more surgeries on her face and then therapy for her arm once the cast was removed, and that was barring any complications. Long periods of time where she would be dependent on others, unable to work, unable to paint. What kind of life was that? What kind of life would it be for others having to take care of her? And the cost hadn't even become a factor yet. That opened up more questions and concerns, most she wasn't even ready to think about.

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Liam listened to the doctor explain her injuries and the long road toward recovery that lay ahead for her, as well as for all those who were a part of her life. If she was the person that Killian seemed to think she was, he would move heaven and hell to help her and make sure she had everything that she needed to complete the journey in the easiest and most painless way possible.

As he continued to watch and listen, he could tell when the amount of knowledge that she was receiving had surpassed the amount that she could handle. He found himself doing exactly what his brother would have been doing, had he been here, taking over the questions and encouraging elaborations of specific answers when needed. Once he could no longer think of anything to ask, he stepped into the hallway while she was being examined. She hadn't minded his being there while they were talking but he didn't think she was ready to allow him to see her when she was at her most vulnerable. And if he were honest with himself, he wasn't ready for the feelings that the removal of the bandages might expose.

Hospital for Special Surgery
New York City, NY
Monday, Late Afternoon

Robin listened as the phone he was calling rang, and counted three times before it was answered.

"Hidden Gems, this is Marco," his father said. "How can I be of assistance?"
"Papa?" Robin's throat still felt scratchy from misuse and he had to pump his tongue a few times to try to get enough liquid in there to soften his tongue.

"Robin?" Marco's voice rose in concern. "What's wrong, son? And this is your usual phone number. Did you get a new one?"

Robin took a deep breath as he knew what he had to tell his father wouldn't be easy to hear. "There's been an accident." He gave Marco as much information about his injuries as possible and explained that he was going to need another surgery on his leg, currently scheduled for the next day.

Marco listened quietly until Robin finished speaking. "Were you alone?" he asked his son quietly.

"No, papa. I was with Killian and Emma. We were driving to Atlantic City where they were planning on marrying, but since the accident we've been separated. I'm concerned, as I've heard nothing about them since earlier today. Can you help?" He could feel his body tiring the more he spoke.

"Do not worry, my son. I will contact Nemo and find out about your friends. You should worry about you right now. Where are you so I can come to you?"

Robin thought his father sounded tired and decided that tomorrow would be soon enough for him to come to the hospital. "You can come tomorrow when I have surgery. Regina is here with me now."

"Regina?" His father's voice suddenly sounded less tired and very curious. "The woman whose phone you are using?"

He had to grin at how his father was being careful not asking him a lot of questions about Regina, almost as if he were biting his tongue to stay quiet. The fact that he wasn't being bombarded with questions was impressive. "One and the same." He grinned at his neutral response knowing that it would make his father wonder even more.

"And who exactly is Regina to you, Robin?"

"She's," he hesitated as the door opened and the woman in question entered, "someone special." he shared. Giving his father the name of the hospital and once again reminding him to find out what he could about Killian and Emma, he hung up the phone, allowing his arm to drop tiredly onto the bed.

"Someone special, huh?" She raised one pencil thin brow and a pink hue tinted her cheeks as she strolled toward the bed.

He dimpled and said simply in a husky voice, "Very special."

Her dark eyes locked with his light ones, exchanging emotions simmering between them that had developed quickly despite their unusual courtship. Breaking free from the web, Regina busied herself with pouring his juice. "The nurse, Glinda I think her name is, should be here in a few minutes to change your dressing." She helped him take a few sips and then set the cup on the table just as the nurse walked in. "I'm going to go get a coffee while she's here, if that's alright." He smiled at her and after kissing him gently, she left the room.

Watching her walk out, Robin was taken aback at how much being with her brought to his life. She made him feel alive and gave him a warm and fuzzy feeling, as ridiculous as it sounded. And when she was gone, she took a little sunshine with her. Your drugs are making you fanciful, he thought as the pain in his leg while the nurse was changing the bandages pulled his attention back to less pleasant things.
As soon as Liam left the room and she was alone with the doctor, Emma thought back to his reaction to her facial bandages. If that type of response was elicited when her face was covered, what would it be like once they were removed? Did she look like a monster with her lopsided face, no teeth and who knew what kind or how many scars? She had never been vain, but her looks were tied to her identity. If they changed too much, would the person inside change too?

Once the bandages were unwrapped and Dr. Nolan started examining her, she watched his face to see if she could get some idea of how severe her wounds were. The only small indication she noticed was when he touched a place along the right side of her jaw and she had winced. Was one of the possible complications that Anton had mentioned already coming into play?

After he left she wondered if Liam would come back in to see her again or if he would go back to Killian's room. She couldn't help but wish that they would allow her out of her hospital bed and into a wheelchair so he could take her with him, but maybe there were rules to prohibit that so soon after surgery. In hindsight she wished she would have asked, but having to write your all your thoughts made it rather disconcerting to communicate. Like you were being looked at differently. Like what you had to say no longer mattered.

She found her feelings bouncing back and forth, never staying in one place for long, but moving from one place to another with no rhyme nor reason. One minute she was still Emma Swan lying here in this bed and then next minute she felt like she had disappeared and the person in the bed was only a shell. As if her body was being used by another person and she was fighting to get out. There was a disconnect and she really needed Killian before the crevice became a chasm that might take months to repair.

Liam leaned against the wall outside of Emma's room, trying to assemble his thoughts, so he could correlate the woman he had built in his head with the helpless, almost broken creature in there. The connection wouldn't fit, almost oppositional, if he were honest with himself. Could he have been so wrong? Could he have let his bitterness over his past cloud his judgment so significantly that he hadn't listened to his brother's characterization of her. Was he that far gone?

As he waited for the doctor to finish the examination, he found that for the first time in months he actually wanted to be wrong. He found himself hoping that Nemo was correct and that Emma would be the one to save them all. Thinking that it might be a possibility didn't seem to be as unrealistic as it had seemed a few hours ago.

When the doctor opened the door signaling the end of his exam, Liam was waiting with questions. "How is she?" he asked quickly as he got a good look at the doctor's worried expression.

"I'm a little concerned about an infection on the right side of her face, but other than that, she's as good as can be expected. Does she have a strong support system at home?"

Liam wasn't sure how to answer that question because he had been such an arse to his brother that he really had no idea. "She is engaged to my brother, but I'm not sure about their plans. What does she need?"
Dr. Nolan started listing the specialists on his fingers, "She'll need an oral surgeon, plastic surgeon, possibly an endodontist, a prosthodontist, a dermatologist, occupational therapist, orthopedist and I would recommend a psychologist or a psychiatrist, and that's only if nothing else goes wrong. If it does, well..." His voice trailed off as he noticed the frown on Liam's face.

Liam shook his head at the situation that had landed at his feet. He could help and be considered a hero or he could hinder and be a douchebag. There really was no option. "Dr. Nolan, if this were your family, could she get the best treatment here, or would she need to go elsewhere?"

The doctor didn't hesitate for a second, his face breaking into a huge smile, "That's easy. While she could get excellent care here at my hospital, if she were my family, there's only one place I would send her and that is to Seattle Grace Hospital, in Seattle, Washington. My brother, David Nolan, is head of the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Department and, while I might be a little partial, he is one of the top oral surgeons in the country, even better than I, much to my dismay and his joy. And in addition, his wife, Doctor Mary Margaret Blanchard, is the head of the Psychology Department, and helping accident victims is one of her specialties. You would not have to worry that she wouldn't come away more beautiful than ever, both on the inside and out."

"Then consider it done. My brother won't like that she's so far away, but he would want her to have the best, and once he is well he can travel to be with her." As the doctor started to walk away, Liam thought of one more thing to ask. "How quickly can this be arranged and how long do you anticipate her recovery taking?"

The doctor looked at his watch. "If you have connections for a charter flight and a nurse to fly with her, she can be on her way in a couple hours. As for recovery time," he rubbed his hand through his hair as if he were tired, "two to three months should be plenty of time for her to heal completely. It all really depends on her mental and physical well-being, but she's young and healthy and should bounce back relatively quickly. I'll be in touch once I've spoken to David," was his parting shot.

Well, Liam thought, I've now committed to help her. What will Killian say when he finds out she's so far away? She will be getting the best care possible, all in one place and this was the recommendation.

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When Liam stepped back into the room, Emma was still sitting on the bed holding her communication board, but she appeared smaller, as if she had shrunk into herself even more. It was evident that the bandages around her face had been changed as they were cleaner than before, white instead of a dingy yellow from that rust colored antiseptic used to clean wounds. This time, they didn't appear to be wrapped as heavily. When he stepped closer to the bed, he could see her eyes clearly. They were a pretty green with flecks of gold and glassy from the sheen of unshed tears. Her composure after the hell she must have gone through today impressed him, making him wonder what other sides there were to Emma Swan that he had yet to meet.

When she looked up at him there was a haunted quality to her gaze, as if she were on an island all alone and was waiting for rescue, but only wanted to be rescued by someone of her choice. As he moved closer to her, he hoped she would be happy that he had taken care of everything needed for her treatment. That she would be able to get everything she needed and that as soon as Killian was out of the hospital, he could come to her. But what was the best way to bring up the subject? And how would she react? Would she appreciate that he had made the difficult decisions regarding her treatment options or would she resent his interference in her life, especially in light of his past behavior?

When she hadn't said anything for several minutes, Liam decided that with time being of the essence,
he needed to initiate the conversation. "Emma? What's the matter, lass? Did the doctor give you bad news?"

She looked up at him and shrugged her shoulders, and then wrote on the board. "Thinking about wedding."

Her answer surprised him, making him curious as to her thought process. "Really? Why?"

Using her gauze palm, Emma erased the board. "It was to be our Happy Beginning."

He looked at what she had written and it was if a fog had lifted from his brain, releasing memories of verbal exchanges best left forgotten. He turned his head sharply in her direction and it was if all of the positive thoughts he'd been having that day, dissipated into thin air. He sneered, "That's exactly what Lily said."

When his face changed instantly after he read what she had written on the board, the fear that had begun to dispel returned in full force. It seemed she had unknowingly pulled a trigger that brought out his Mr. Hyde personality, and he was a force to be reckoned with; reasoning not an option. She didn't say anything more, for she had no idea what she could say and was worried that another trigger might bring about something worse.

Liam couldn't believe he had been so gullible. He had been ready to trust, but with just seven written words, the bitterness had returned full force. Thinking of them again, he was sucked right back into that headspace when he had walked into his apartment to surprise his pregnant wife and he was the one mighty surprised. Riding one guy as if he were her horse while using her talented fingers to jack off another, her tits bouncing up and down, and several others in the room clapping and cheering. When he had turned to run, she had caught him at the door, slipping into the diaphanous robe he had given her for a wedding gift, its color and cut doing nothing to detract from her beauty, but only enhancing it.

"Don't go, Liam," she had screamed. "They mean nothing to me. Just a way to have fun and pass time while you're away at sea. It's only you, lover. You know that to be true."

He had looked at her with disgust in his eyes. "Right, Lily, tell me another one.

And then the piece de resistance and she had uttered, "The baby can be our Happy Beginning."

He had tossed out to her that his attorney would be in contact and hadn't hung around any longer, leaving as quickly as he had arrived, his heart in shambles and his life in tatters. Now he was smarter. His heart was in pieces and the only thing that he could truly count on was himself and the only person that he could truly care for was Killian. He wasn't going to completely back down from his agreement with the doctor, however he was going to do what was necessary to make sure that Killian was protected. If she made the right choice, she could have it all. However, if she made the wrong one, well...

The fog dissipated from his brain leaving him thinking more clearly than he had in years. Getting right to the point, he explained, "Emma, I've made arrangements for you to go somewhere to get the treatment you need with all of your physicians in the same place. However, there is a compromise that you must make, and once I have your promise, I'll make sure you're able to have everything you need during your treatment."

Emma looked up at him, his eyes not quite as manic as before but still almost dead looking, so much so that she got chills from staring into them. She looked across the room thinking about what he had said. What could he have in mind? "What compromise?" She finally wrote.
He started pacing back and forth next to her bed, his movements agitated and jerky. "You have to promise me that you will go to this place and you will not contact Killian or any of your old friends while your rehabilitation is occurring."

Emma frowned at him. Not contact Killian or any of her friends? "What kind of deal is this?" she wrote angrily on the board.

"I can't take the chance that I'm wrong about you, Miss Swan. I do not wish to see my brother treated as I was treated by some orphan twit who knows nothing of love."

Emma thought about what this man was saying and realized she knew more about what love was from growing up in a Home and from the short time she had spent with his brother then he had learned being born in a home full of love with parents and a sibling. What should she do? Should she take a chance on Killian and the hope that the expense and pain of her the treatment wouldn't tear them apart, or take a chance that the promise they had made to each other would play a hand in bringing them back together?

She never wanted to feel that she was a burden to Killian. She also had no idea what she would look like once her bandages were removed and didn't want to worry that Killian was staying with her out of obligation. She wanted him to be with her because he loved her, and it was his choice. What should she do? Thinking about what she had said to him when she buried her beads made her wonder if she'd had some idea that things were too perfect and that something would mar that perfection. She had said to him, "I believe when two souls are destined to meet, when they become one, nothing can pull them apart. Today, with these beads, I thee wed for as long as this rock, this earth, this sea and the sky shall live. And I promise you that I will never forget these beads and our promise to each other and what they stand for." And then his promise had been, "And I promise to always be where you need me and to never, ever say goodbye to you. I love you Emma." But then when he asked her to marry him the second time, he had followed that up with, "And Emma, just know that if we were ever separated, I would go to the ends of the earth for you." Had he suspected his brother would try to separate them? Knowing she needed to give Liam an answer, she finally wrote, "Killian comes to me?"

Liam looked her over for a minute, and thought, That took gumption. "If Killian contacts you, then you were meant to be. Do we have a deal?"

She remembered a quote that Sister Blue had said to her, Ruby and Ashley many times when they were growing up, 'If you love something, set it free. If it comes back to you, it's yours. If not, it wasn't meant to be.' She believed she was doing the right thing. She did not want to be a burden to Killian or any of their friends. She also very much wanted to trust in their love and that somehow their paths would lead them back to each other. Looking directly into Liam's blue eyes, she nodded her head once and the deal was made.

**Killian's Room**  
**Monday, Late Evening**

Liam had been gone for hours, giving Killian slight cause for concern, but since he was stuck on his arse unable to do anything about it, his only choice was to wait. He had passed time by watching the nurse change his IV bags and check his vitals and he was currently waiting for a doctor to get a complete breakdown of his injuries and, most importantly, how long he would have to be stuck in this place.

"Mr. Jones," he heard his name being called and turned to see an older gentleman wearing a white coat and a stethoscope around his neck enter the room. "I'm Dr. Gold, Chief of Orthopedics here at
He poked and prodded at Killian's knee, shoulder and ribs causing so much pain, Killian felt he was going to pass out. *Not much of a bedside manner,* he thought as he gritted his teeth and waited for the imbecile to finish. "Bloody hell, Doctor, that hurts!"

"What's the problem, Dearie? I'm just making sure your brace is snug, but not too snug, and your shoulder and chest are immobilized as well." He pulled off his latex gloves and tossed them toward the trashcan. "Everything seems to be in order. I'll just write an order for your pain medication and if all goes well you should be up and around in the next day or so.

He left the room just as quickly as he had entered and another nurse came in, removed one bag from his IV stack and then added another. "This will probably make you drowsy, Mr. Jones. Don't fight it. Your body was pretty banged up. Let it heal. Let your mind heal too." As she cleaned up and then left the room, Killian could already feel his body becoming lethargic from the medication. Following her directive, he closed his eyes and succumbed to sleep.

cs~cs~cs

Liam's footsteps alerted Killian that he was back from seeing Emma, but with the medication running through his system, his eyes were too heavy for him to do anything but continue to drift. Expecting to hear chattering from his brother about how he had been wrong about Emma and what a lovely girl she was, the deafening silence caused his senses to heighten. It wasn't until Liam cleared his throat, a sound he had made millions of times when they were growing up, that he let his body relax, ignoring the fear that was blooming inside.

As he drifted along safely with the medication, he realized that Liam had resorted to pacing back and forth, and since Liam always paced when he had a problem that needed to be solved, his senses went on full alert. Was there a problem with Emma? And if so, what was it? Killian continued to listen to the repetitive movement of his pacing and realized that Liam was muttering under his breath, a definite sign of agitation. When he heard what sounded like, "It was the best choice," his initial thought had been that something good had occurred, but then something in Liam's voice raised Killian's internal alarm and his limbic system sent out signals with his need for flight surpassing his need to fight. The question was where was this coming from and why?

The muttering soon stopped and blessed silence filled the room, which was good, as he still had the drums periodically playing in his head. He could tell that Liam was drinking something, hearing liquid moving around inside a container, as well as the crinkle of a wrapper from, if he knew his brother, a bar of chocolate. Wondering if he could guess what Liam was eating, he tried to determine if there was a pattern in the way that Liam was chewing that would give him some indication. The next sound he heard gave him his answer as his brother was nothing if not predictable. Chocolate and almonds, his brother's go-to snack. But was he eating because he was hungry or was he eating because he was worried?

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Liam tossed the Hershey's with almonds wrapper in the garbage and drained the last of his Starbucks Frappuccino, recapped it and set it on the bedside table to deal with later. Had he done the right thing by offering Emma options? He knew that Killian was going to be hurt in the short run, but better he should learn what kind of person she was now than when he was married to her. The way he saw it, he had given her that 'happy beginning' she so desperately wanted. She would get her face back and Killian could get on with leading the life he was meant to live. Since he had returned from her room, though, everything that had happened kept twisting through his mind, making him question his decision one minute, but then justify it the next. Standing there looking down at his sleeping brother,
the only thing he could think of was Killian, and what to say to him. "How am I going to explain to Killian what happened to Emma," he worried, just as his phone buzzed and he had to leave the room to go authorize the transfer of money to take care of Emma's expenses.

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Killian heard the breathless words from his brother's mouth, and his soul wrenched in agony. He had lost her without ever having the chance to make her his wife. How was he going to go on? They were meant to spend eternity together, weren't they? To be with Emma forever was what he wanted more than anything.

As the drums once again picked up their cadence inside of his head and his heart raced forward in fear and loss, he sensed his mind reaching for some undefinable place. One with no pain and no commotion. A place to heal and be healed and to find a way to move forward alone.

When he opened his eyes, he could see that he was once again standing on his own two feet, with no slings, no braces and most importantly, no pain. The ground beneath his feet felt solid and real...yet, he was unable to see anything below them, just as there appeared to be no walls, as if the room had no beginning and no ending. It went on and on, forever...just as his love for Emma was supposed to do. His surroundings were ethereal, many shades of grey that ranged from the lightest off-white to the darkest charcoal and every shade in between. Slowly, he turned in a circle, taking in everything around him and when he still had questions with no answers, he started walking.

"Killian!"

He heard Emma calling his name and quickly turned looking for her. "Emma, where are you?" He sounded panicked even to his own ears.

"Killian, I'm waiting. Where are you?"

The fear in her voice sent a chill through him. She needed him, and she needed him now. Wanting to find her quickly, he started running, looking from side to side, trying to find the woman who held his very heart and whom he did not want to live without. "Emma, I'm here," he called over and over again, so many times that his throat began to feel raw.

Suddenly, ahead of him, he saw a brighter grey area, its mist waving up and down as if it were a large body of smoky water. Walking faster, he soon reached the spot and, using both hands, pushed aside the smoke, sensing that if he could just get to the other side, Emma would be there waiting for him. Finally, just as his body was fatiguing, he could see light, almost as if it were at the end of a long tunnel and knowing without a shadow of a doubt that she was there, adrenaline shot through his system, and he ran. Quickly, surely, his feet took him closer and closer to the opening, until finally he broke through the curtain and...

There she stood.

"Emma," he cried, his voice trembling. "Emma." And with his heart in his throat, he pulled her toward him, covering her lips with his mouth. Unable to keep his hands still, he explored her body, trying to convince himself that she was real, and he was really holding her in his arms. He pulled her hips tighter to his, showing her with his body and his mouth how much he missed her and needed her. Ultimately, the need for air won out and allowing only a tiny bit of distance between them, he had to ask, "Why? Why did you leave me, Emma?" His voice broke as he tilted his head toward hers unwilling to be separated, and waited to hear her answer, knowing that when he did, it might break his heart.
She caressed his face. "I had to, Killian. I didn't want to be a burden to you," she cried as the tears finally broke free from where they had been pooling in her eyes and flowed down her face.

He swallowed the lump stuck in his throat and gripped both sides of her face, pulling her closer. "Never, Emma. You could never be a burden. You have to believe me when I say that."

She looked up, as if she were being called by someone above them, and after giving a little sigh, started pulling away. "They're calling me, Killian. I have to go."

"No, Emma," he cried, "I'm not ready to say goodbye." He gave her another kiss, this one hard and meant to leave an impression. He wanted to leave the taste and feel of his lips on her so that she would never forget him, just like he would never forget her.

She heaved another sigh as if she couldn't find the energy to push the words out, "Then don't say goodbye. Just remember your promise, Killian." Her body started floating upward as if she were on an elevator that was rising, leaving him behind.

He grabbed her hand with both of his to keep her in place, and kissed it longingly, trying desperately to keep her near him but it was slipping away. Before he lost her, he needed to tell her he loved her, one more time, and kissing her hand three times, repeating I love you after each kiss, both with actions and words, one last time before her hand slipped from his. "I'll remember, Emma. I won't ever forget my promise to you." As the tears silently made tracks down his face, she faded from sight, and he was left alone.

Okay, don't kill me, please. But do let me know what you thought. There's totally a method to my madness and I really hope you will enjoy the journey as much as I have enjoyed creating it. Stay tuned for Chapter 17 preview on Sunday and then Chapter 17 will be posted next Wednesday morning.
Chapter 17

Chapter Summary

The journey of Liam, Killian, Emma, Regina and Robin continues.

Just a shout out to those of you who leave me comments. I love reading them and am enjoying your predictions for what you think will happen next. So grab a tissue and see if you were right in any of your predictions...

Chapter 17

Hospital for Special Surgery
New York City, New York
Tuesday Morning

"How much longer do you think he'll be out?" he heard being asked by a decidedly familiar voice.

"I don't know," he heard her respond, "but I wish he would wake up."

There was worry in both voices but even though he tried, his eyes were still too heavy to obey his command to open.

No words were spoken for a few minutes, making him wonder what was going on, until he got a whiff of her perfume and felt her cool palm against his forehead. "We're here waiting for you, Robin," she whispered.

"I know," he tried to say, but just like his eyes, neither his lips nor his tongue seemed to be obeying his brain.

"Regina?" Marco sounded unsure and Robin hated that he hadn't been strong enough to stand next to her and introduce her to his father. He hated that he hadn't even really had a chance to tell his father very much about her and what they were to each other. But what they were was so new, there hadn't been time to share. That would come, though, because he knew how he felt, and thought that perhaps she felt the same.

"Yes, Marco?" She was nervous and unsure what his father was going to say, that he could tell from her voice.

"I never really got a chance to tell you," his father began, "but I'm very happy that you were here for my boy."

The slight hitch in her breath surprised him as Regina wasn't one to allow herself to be vulnerable, especially around strangers. "Thank you, Marco," she told him softly. "There's no place I'd rather be."

His father didn't say anything right away, but Robin knew if he were looking at him, he would be smiling. "You care for my boy?" He asked her gently.
"Very much. I just wish he would open his eyes." Her reply was wistful as if she weren't used to having her wishes come true.

Wanting to grant her wish, Robin forced his eyes open. "Regina." His voice came out sounding more like a bullfrog than his usual debonair self but she didn't seem to mind as the smile she bestowed on him warmed his heart.

"Robin!" His name on her lips lightened the pain. "Would you like a drink?"

He nodded his head and while she was reaching for the cup, smiled at his father, hovering nearby. "I'm okay, Papa."

"My son," Marco brushed his hair back just like he had always done when he was a boy, "you worried me."

Before he could answer, Regina held the cup for him to take some water. "The nurse said just a small sip at first or it might make you sick."

Once he had a little moisture in his mouth, he tried again, "I'm sorry, Papa." He took another small drink, enjoying the coolness against his parched throat. "Were you able to find out about Killian and Emma?"

Marco nodded his head. "They are both at University Hospital in New Jersey. I left word for Dakkar to call when he can. Now I will tell the nurses you are awake."

Robin watched him leave the room and turned his attention back to Regina. "Have you been here all day?"

She leaned closer and cupped his face. "I'm where I want to be, unless," she hesitated, her expression unsure, "you don't want me here."

Since his right arm was in a sling and his left hand had IV's attached to it, extra care was required for him to grasp Regina's hand. "I do want you here, very much." His eyes pleaded with her to understand.

"I'm glad," she said quietly, just as the door opened and Marco returned.

"The doctor will be here shortly to examine you," he told Robin, "and then we can find out how long you will have to stay in this place."

"I'm not sure I want to know," Robin groaned. "I'm also not sure how I'm supposed to get around with both legs broken and this arm here," he waved at his right one, "useless."

"I think that's part of what we'll learn from the doctor." Regina smiled teasingly, "Were you always a terrible patient?"

Opening his mouth to answer, Robin was surprised when his father answered first. "Yes," Marco affirmed, "he's always been a poor patient.

"I resent that," Robin piped in, his voice turning into a groan as he tried to scoot around in the bed and jostled his right arm.

"Robin, be careful," cautioned Regina, "I'd hate for you to hurt yourself any further."

"Is that even possible?" He complained to her and his father, "because from where I'm lying it's
pretty bad.

The look on her face made him instantly feel contrite for his outburst. "I'm sorry, Regina, Papa. "I fear I'm not very good company right now."

They exchanged looks before Marco took the initiative, "I believe you have every right to be feeling out of sorts."

"Your father is right, Robin. You've been dealt a tough hand, but you'll handle it in the same way you always do. With courage and strength." She finished her impassioned speech with a tender smile.

"Listen to your girl, Robin. She's a keeper." Marco smiled at Robin before sending a grateful look Regina's way.

Robin couldn't have been happier about the camaraderie between his father and Regina. They were getting along and that fact made him very happy.

"Robin," Regina interjected, "if you don't mind, I'm going to go to my apartment and shower while your father is here. Is that okay?" She had posed the question to Robin but her look encompassed both.

"Go, get changed," Marco answered. "I will stay with Robin while you are gone."

When she laid her dark eyes on him, he could see the fatigue that she was trying hard to hide. "Take your time. I'll see you when you return, okay?"

Kissing him quickly, she took her bag from the closet and disappeared out the door. He watched her go through the door, and once it closed behind her he sighed, for it was as if some of the oxygen had been removed from the space around him.

"You found your soulmate, haven't you my son?"

"I believe I have, Pops. I believe I have." His eyelids felt heavy and, having a hard time keeping them open, he gave his father a self-conscious smile. "Do you mind if I rest a little while we wait for the doctor?"

"Sleep, Robin. I'll be here when you wake."

Robin closed his eyes and drifted to sleep, his dreams of walks through the streets of New York City with Regina by his side.

**University Hospital**
Newark, New Jersey
Tuesday Morning

Liam had spent the last twelve plus hours sitting beside Killian's hospital bed, willing him to wake up. He pushed himself out of the recliner where he had spent much of the night and, needing to stretch his legs, moved to the window to watch the busy street below. His sleep had been fitful and though he was more tired than he could remember being in many years, he thought the new day might revive his spirit. But as he stood there feeling raw, watching people moving in various directions as if they didn't have a care in the world, he turned away from the window and moved back to Killian's side.

Wearily, he drained the last of the coffee one of the nurses brought him, and dropped the cup in the
trash can. His actions of the previous day weighed heavily on his mind and they continually rolled around inside his head, as if they were on a loop. He felt a little like he was Jekyll and Hyde, with a sliver of his subconscious telling him he behaved like an arsehole and if Killian ever found out there would be hell to pay. But the other side, which happened to currently be the stronger one, reminded him that everything he had done, he had done for Killian. With how it had turned out, Emma would have the care she needed, Killian would have the life he was meant to have, and he would have performed his duties as the older brother.

As the hours continued to pass, and Killian's eyes remained closed, he began watching the door. Every time it opened, he hoped it was the doctor so he could ask him questions about Killian's recovery. He knew the generalities of his injuries but the fact that he had been asleep for so long was beginning to be worrisome. Standing next to his bed, Liam was taken aback by the pallor of his brother's skin, looking even more pale against his darker hair. And after watching him lay there for a few minutes, he had to look away because seeing his brother so unnaturally still was almost unbearable. He couldn't help but ask himself if he was being punished.

Just as he was about to give up and go down to the cafeteria, the door opened and Doctor Gold entered the room. "Mr. Jones," he greeted, "have you been here all night?"

"Aye, Doctor Gold. I'm happy to see you. I have some questions about Killian."

Liam watched the doctor select and slip into a pair of latex gloves and begin his examination of Killian's injuries. "Has he woken up since you've been here?" The doctor asked him as he checked his pupils with a small light.

Liam thought back to when he had arrived at the hospital and his last conversation with Killian. "I believe it was around 5:00 yesterday afternoon, and while he has groaned a few times as if he's in pain, he's not opened his eyes since."

"I'm going to consult with Doctor Hopper, who is a neurologist, and he will probably order some tests. I'll be in touch." Tossing his used gloves in the trash, he picked up Killian's chart and left as quickly as he had arrived.

Liam watched Doctor Gold leave the room, feeling despair deep inside his bones. What had he done? Was there any way for him to make things right? Did he even want to try? He decided that a trip to the hospital cafeteria for something to eat might help him find the answers.

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Seattle Grace Hospital
Seattle, WA
Tuesday Morning

"Emma! Emma! Time to wake up." She heard the voice calling but no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't get her eyes to open. The truth was, she really didn't want to open them and wake up from the place she had found. In here, it was peaceful and pain-free. And when she found herself feeling scared, somehow the eyes showed up to give her strength. They were the bluest eyes she had ever seen, surrounded by dark lashes, and they looked at her with such love, she was immediately comforted. Would she have to give them up if she were to wake?

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"She hasn't woken up yet?" Doctor David Nolan asked of his surgical nurse, Belle French.

"No, Doctor," she told him quietly. "She's mumbled in her sleep a few times, but every time I think she's about to wake, it's as if she's forcibly rejecting the idea."
David pulled on a pair of gloves and carefully examined Emma Swan's jaw for any further sign of infection. He had a feeling when his new patient woke she might be a little disoriented, as she had been when she had arrived, her face had been encased in bandages and running a high fever. Feeling confident that he had taken care of the problem, he mentally made a list of physicians that would be needed to help her once again be whole.

After he completed his exam and tossed his gloves in the trash, he contemplated whether or not she would continue to need gauze bandages wrapped around her entire face, but decided against it. The cuts she had sustained from the many shards of glass were healing and, while they might leave scars, those could be easily removed with a chemical peel. However, that would be the last step. Prior to that, they needed to heal her jaw and perform plastic surgery to repair her zygomatic arches as well as install implants. In eight to twelve weeks, he ascertained, she should be good as new.

She reminded him of pictures he had seen of his mother in her younger days. He wondered if James had realized that as he worked to repair her broken body. She had a long road ahead, he knew. He hoped she was strong mentally as well as physically because it would take both to help her recover, but he and his staff would make sure she had everything she needed.

He handed her chart to Belle. "Please, page me when she's awake." Checking on her one more time, he noticed she was experiencing rapid eye movement and wondered where she had gone to while she had been in surgery and, more importantly, when she would return.

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She could hear people talking in hushed voices to each other, and even periodically to her. She could hear the rustle of papers, the squeak of shoes or of a cart being wheeled across the floor. She could even hear the rhythmic sounds made by medical machines but since no one seemed to be calling for her, she sank back down into her dream world. "Hello," she called, "anyone here?"

On and on she continued to walk, constantly calling for someone, anyone to come help her. She had just about given up when she rounded a corner and there they were, the eyes. "I'm here," they seemed to say. "I'm here."

Safe, she thought. Now I am safe.

**Group Home**
Boston, MA
Tuesday Afternoon

Henry ran home from school, crashed through the door and straight to Blue's office, sliding around the corner.

"Henry!" she laughed. "Slow down. Where's the fire?"

His breathing rapid, Henry took a few minutes before blurting, "Have you heard from Emma and Killian? Something's wrong!" Henry, feeling panicky, couldn't stay still and continually moved around the room, bouncing up and down. "Please, Blue," he pleaded to her, "send them a text."

Blue contemplated him for a few moments before she nodded her head, picked up her phone and sent a quick message to Emma and Killian. "There, Henry. Let's get you a snack while we wait."

**University Hospital**
Newark, New Jersey
Tuesday Afternoon
After losing hold of Emma's hand, Killian wandered aimlessly for what felt like hours, trying to find where she had gone. Unable to locate her, the despair finally became so heavy he sank to the ground and, knees bent, laid his head on his crossed arms and wept.

It could have been minutes or even hours later when he heard what he thought was Emma's voice calling hello, but standing had become difficult. His knees felt stiff and when he pushed up, his left knee buckled, the pain so severe it took his breath away. Gritting his teeth, he eased up again, this time a little slower, using his left arm to help himself balance. Once he was up, he began his search again, hoping he would be successful and she would be just around the next corner.

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Liam had gotten as far as the elevator but then changed his mind about going down to the cafeteria. They were taking Killian for testing to find out why he wasn't awake and he wanted to be around when they returned. He knew Nemo deserved an update but until he had some definitive information about Killian's health, he had decided to wait.

He found himself pacing back and forth in front of the elevator, waiting for the return of his brother. When after a few hours and Killian still hadn't returned, he couldn't stand it any longer and went to the nursing station looking for answers. Thankfully, a nurse he recognized was working. "Please, tell me you've heard something about my brother."

"I'm sorry, Mr. Jones," she said, "but I haven't heard anything. It shouldn't be too much longer."

"That's what I was told before he left," Liam groused. "What's taking so bloody long?" His patience was wearing thin and he wasn't sure how much more he could handle.

She finally took pity on him and gave him a gentle smile. "Let me see what I can find out." He watched her make a call but couldn't tell by her expression if she was getting any information or not. Finally, after nodding her head a few times, she hung up the phone. "He's on his way back to his room and once his doctor has the results, he will let you know."

"Thank you." His mother had been a stickler about manners and even if he weren't completely pleased with the information, he appreciated her efforts to help. But on his way back to wait for Killian, his subconscious tapped loudly, if you're so mannerly, then why did you corner Emma into that deal? Why not just help her like Killian asked you to?

He pushed open the door to the men's room so hard it bounced loudly against the wall, but his thoughts were so muddled he didn't even notice. Going straight to the sink, he splashed water on his face, trying to erase the fog. "You want to know why?" he told the person looking back at him. "I don't want my brother to ever feel what I have felt at the hands of a woman. My job is to protect him."

His resolve returned, he dried his face and left the room, walking out just as Killian's doctor and a bespectacled red haired gent got off the elevator. "Doctor Gold, any news about my brother?" Liam called before they had gotten very far.

"Oh, Mr. Jones, there you are. This is Doctor Hopper, the neurologist who is consulting on your brother's case.

Liam shook hands with the newcomer, whose face somehow instilled a calmness that he shouldn't be feeling. "Doctor." He tipped his chin, "Any news?"

Doctor Hopper smiled at him, "Let me do one more exam and read over all the results, and then I
will speak with you."

Sighing, Liam nodded his head. "Fine. I'll be in the waiting room when you're done."

Watching them walk toward Killian's room, he couldn't help but feel that somehow what Killian was going through was his fault. But if that were the case, could it be fixed? And if so, how did one go about it?

**Hospital for Special Surgery**  
New York City, NY  
Tuesday Late Afternoon

By the time Regina made it back to the HSS, she was annoyed. With her car still parked in Boston and not wanting to have to transfer to a bus, she had taken a cab, powered by the worst driver in NYC. Not only had he honked at anything that moved, he took the slowest route to the hospital and the headache she had just gotten rid of was back again in full force. She should have known it wouldn't be a good day after starting off with texts from her mother, all fifteen of them, sent in the span of just a few hours and all with the same message, although not verbatim.

*Regina, Dear. Call me as I have news.*

Nothing about how she, Regina, was doing or when was she returning home; just what was important to Cora, her news.

She pushed the button to the elevator and while waiting took several deep breaths, trying to calm herself. She didn't want Robin to see that she was out of sorts as all of his energy needed to be focused on getting well and not worrying about her. As her headache started to recede, she couldn't help but smile at the thought that he was like a balm that soothed her soul. He made her feel different, more like the girl she was when her father had been alive. She liked herself with him and couldn't wait to see where their relationship would go.

Headache temporarily abated, she rode the elevator up to the seventh floor, stepping off into a lingering cloud of the same perfume preferred by her mother. *Someone has expensive taste,* she thought as she headed toward the wing where Robin's room was located, periodically getting whiffs of the same scent. The whiffs were so frequent that she found herself looking in rooms, just to make sure her mother wasn't lurking around corners. "It's your guilty conscience," she muttered, knowing she should have told her about her new job and about Robin, but those two events in her life were new and she wanted to hold them close for just a while longer. Then, she promised herself, she would share.

Arriving at Robin's room, she was surprised to hear laughter coming from inside, as she knew Marco had left to go back to his store and she didn't think anyone else knew about the accident. Curious as to who was inside, she pushed the door open slowly...what she saw surprised her, as there were two visitors inside standing next to the bed, and very obviously...together. "Mother!" Her gaze was drawn to the tall, dark, bald man standing next to her, his hand casually running up and down her mother's back. "Nemo!" Her confused eyes settled on Robin, who returned her gaze in question, but the ever-present twinkle in his eyes was in place.

Cora had turned toward her upon hearing her voice, but when she had said the name of the man standing next to her, she had turned perplexed eyes in his direction. He gave her a rather sheepish smile before turning to Regina and greeting her in his booming voice, "Regina. I didn't realize you were in town. Come in, come in." He waved her into the room. "Cora, sweetheart, did you tell Regina where she could find us?"
Cora finally snapped out of whatever trance she had been in and sidled closer to Regina. "Hello, dear. It's so good to see you, but I thought you would call me back and not show up here at the hospital."

The tone of her voice took Regina aback for a second, as it sounded nothing like her mother's normally acerbic way of speaking. It was pleasant…friendly, even. Regina met her halfway and kissed her on the cheek. "Hello, mother. I'm surprised to see you. I didn't realize you knew, Nemo, or," her eyes met those of the man in the bed, "Robin."

Cora laughed, almost girlishly, and hooked her arm through Regina's bringing them both toward the men. "Oh, well…we do have much to catch up on." She moved from Regina's side to Nemo's, who immediately wrapped an arm around her. "Regina," she hesitated and looked up at Nemo, "Dakkar and I," she swallowed, before blurtng, "are getting married!" She held her hand up, showing off a beautiful engagement ring.

Regina had to forcibly clench her teeth to keep her mouth from falling open. She cut her eyes to Robin before looking into the smiling faces of her mother, her new boss, and, apparently, her soon to be stepfather. "Wow, congratulations, you two. I'm..." she waved her hand at a loss for words before changing directions with her line of questioning, "when did you two meet?"

Almost talking over each other, Dakkar, as her mother referred to him, had been on the board of one of the many charities that her mother was a part of and they had met at a dinner the past November. Immediately, they had connected and had been seeing each other since. Dakkar had spirited her away for a romantic weekend in the Bahamas and surprised her with the beautiful ring.

"But..." Regina realized that her mother had been dating Nemo when she had interviewed for the job with his company, yet he had said nothing. Was that why she had gotten the job?

Nemo must have anticipated where her thought processes were taking her because he jumped in before she could finish her thought, "No, Regina," he smiled at her, "you got the job because you were the most qualified. Not," he smiled down at her mother in what could only be described as loving, "because I was enamored with your mother."

"Wait," Robin jumped in looking straight at Regina, "you're going to work for Nemo?"

Regina felt her face heat up as that secret of whom she was going to be working for in the City hadn't been shared with him yet. Moving closer to the bed, she squeezed the fingers of his good hand. "Yes, I got the call right before they contacted me about the accident. Is that alright?" Her dark eyes locked with his light ones, trying to read his thoughts.

"It depends." His gaze moved to Nemo. "Are there company rules about fraternization among employees?"

Nemo's face broke out in a huge smile. "Regina is the woman you've been smitten with for months?"

Regina noticed Robin's cheeks pinken before he flashed her those dimples. "I'm not even going to ask how you knew that, but yes," his voice softened as he gave her fingers an extra squeeze, "Regina holds my heart."

"Never fear, you two," Nemo looked from one to the other, "there are no such rules at NID, and, as it happens, you will be working on the same team, so it's a good thing you like each other."

Robin held her gaze a moment longer, making her wonder what he was going to say next, and when he opened his mouth, she wasn't disappointed. "Oh, I more than like her," he murmured quietly,
giving her a tender smile.

"We should get out of here and leave you two alone." Cora hugged her goodbye. "I like your young man." She whispered, surprising Regina yet again with the change in her personality.

"Thanks, Mother," she whispered back, "I like him too." As Cora and Nemo moved toward the door to leave, she remembered her manners. "And congratulations again on your engagement."

"Thank you," they answered in unison, before Nemo took her mother's hand and shut the door behind him.

Regina turned back to Robin still feeling a bit stunned by the events. Deciding to put it aside to deal with later, she grinned down at the dear man in the bed. "And you," she leaned closer, "how are you feeling?"

He puckered his lips, and unable to resist, she leaned in and kissed him, still getting a thrill that she could do that whenever she wanted. "Better now."

"Sweet talker, you," she teased before sharing another tender kiss. "Perhaps we should talk about our jobs."

"Good idea," he agreed. "Pull up a chair."

**Group Home**
Boston, MA
Tuesday, Late Afternoon

After a few hours had passed and Blue hadn't heard from Emma or Killian, she picked up some of Henry's anxiety. It wasn't like Emma to ignore a text, especially one that was about Henry, and any other time it happened, there was always a good reason. Deciding to broaden her scope, she sent another message, this time to not only Emma and Killian, but also Ruby, Ashley and Elsa. If Emma hadn't contacted her, surely, she had left word with someone. Within minutes she was receiving responses:

**Ruby:** Haven't heard from either of them. But with finals over they may be catching up, ;-) ;-), if you know what I mean.

**Ashley:** Haven't heard from them, but Emma did mention she was looking forward to not having school hanging over their heads.

**Elsa:** Haven't been out of the apartment, let me check if she left a note.

Once Blue read Elsa's text she relaxed a little bit thinking that finally they might get some answers. Shortly another ping indicated an incoming text,

**Elsa:** She left a note. Going to send a picture.

_Elsa,_

*Killian asked me to elope and I said yes. We are going to Atlantic City and will return in time for graduation. Robin is going with us but because of the new development between him and Regina, I wouldn't be surprised if he doesn't spirit her away when he returns.*

*See you Saturday,*
Emma

PS. Don't tell Henry. Killian and I want to tell him ourselves.

When Blue finished reading the note from Emma, she couldn't keep the smile off her face. She was a little disappointed that she wouldn't get to be present when they exchanged vows, but Emma deserved to be happy and that was all that she cared about. Deciding to just tell Henry that Emma and Killian had gone away for a mini vacation, she went searching for him.

University Hospital
Newark, NJ
Tuesday, Late Afternoon

Killian wasn't sure how long he had been searching but knew he was tired, his heart felt like it was shattering in a million pieces, and...he wanted Emma. After passing what appeared to be the same place for the second, or it could have been even the third time, he needed to sit down and see if he could come up with a plan. He had been walking in circles, and that helped no one, least of all Emma.

As his steps slowed, he could hear a voice, its words indecipherable because he was too far away. He moved a little closer and listened again, realizing that someone was calling his name, but the person wasn't Emma. "Mr. Jones," he heard, "Mr. Killian Jones." His name was repeated several times, making him need to move closer still to try to hear them more clearly. But no matter how hard he tried, the words remained elusive, as though the person who was calling his name were underwater. "Killian. Can you hear me?"

He felt as if he were in a deep pool and it didn't seem to matter how hard he tried, he couldn't get his head above the water. When he heard his name, he tried to answer the questions but was never sure if what he was saying made any sense. Once the voice stopped, the pain started, in his legs, his arms, from one side of his body...to the other...and try as he might, he couldn't seem to move far enough away to make it stop. And then as suddenly as the pain in various parts of his body had started, it receded and the pain in his head returned; a full marching band, complete with multiple bass drums and cymbals playing all at the same time. Too much, he thought. Way too much, until finally...when he could no longer handle everything that was coming at him, he dove to the bottom...where there was no pain...and he could think about Emma and the promises they had made to each other.

That day had been one of the very best days of his life. They had been so close to having it all, and now the promises were reverberating over and over in his head.

Emma had whispered, "Today, with these beads, I thee wed for as long as this rock, this earth, this sea and the sky shall live. And I promise you that I will never forget these beads and our promise to each other and what they stand for. I love you, Killian."

And as his heart expanded with all the love that he felt for her, he had stared into her eyes and promised her everything he had to give. "And I promise to always be there when you need me and to never, ever say goodbye to you. I love you, Emma."

In her arms, his future was full of light and everything that was good, but now he felt alone and the light had turned to darkness and pain...a pain so severe that all he wanted...was for it...to stop.

University Hospital
Newark, NJ
Waiting Room, Late Afternoon
Liam had been sitting, waiting for Doctor Hopper to come out of Killian's room for more than an hour and during that time he had stood up then sat down, unable to find a comfortable place to land. His wish was that the doctor would emerge with a huge smile on his face and declare that Kilian was awake. Then, and only then, would he relax.

When he heard someone coming, he held his breath in anticipation, but it wasn't the doctor he needed and so he resumed pacing. He knew exactly how many steps he could take from one place to another before he was forced to turn around and do it all over again. Ten steps, that's it...that's all it took. Ten steps to the left, turn and then ten steps to the right. Back and forth, ten times...twenty...possibly ...fifty or a hundred. Over and over he repeated the same movement until...finally, he turned...and there he was, Doctor Hopper.

"Mr. Jones." He came into the room and since no one else was around, pointed toward one of the chairs. "Shall we?"

Liam tried to read his facial expression and had to admit that the somber visage staring back at him was frightening. "Tell me about Killian," he pleaded with the man sitting next to him.

"We ran several tests on Killian to see if there was an injury to his brain that we were unaware of, as can be the case when a patient doesn't immediately wake up."

"And?" Liam had been waiting somewhat impatiently and he needed answers, but the doctor's speech pattern was so slow that he wanted to scream, just spit it out. He hoped once he had answers, they would be able to move forward with...whatever was next.

"And," Doctor Hopper continued, "the good news is, there is no neurological reason for your brother's unconsciousness. No brain bleed, no blood clot, and the study we did on the electrical activity of his brain shows that everything appears to be working as it was meant to." He sat there for a minute or two allowing everything he had said to be processed before going on. "While your brother responds to pain and even has made attempts at speech, he has lapsed into a coma."

Liam frowned at the doctor. "Coma?" He thought back over what the doctor had said and compared that to what he knew about comas, mostly from movies he had seen. "But wait," he swallowed with some difficulty, "you said that all the tests showed everything is fine."

"Yes," Doctor Hopper agreed.

"But, when a patient 'lapses,'" he made air quotes with his fingers, knowing he sounded rather snide but really not caring, "into a coma, isn't that the epitome of a brain injury?"

"Not necessarily..."

Liam interrupted before he could continue. "Not necessarily!" Unable to sit still any longer, he popped out of his seat. "Bloody hell, Doctor. You're telling me my brother is in a coma, but you can't give me any good reason as to why he is in such a state. Am I correct?"

The doctor remained seated, calmly folding one leg over the other. "I'm sorry, Mr. Jones, but sometimes in medicine...we just don't know."

Liam's mind was racing so quickly and in so many directions that he was having difficulty formulating coherent questions. "So, best guess, Doctor - will my brother come out of this and be alright?"

Doctor Hopper studied him for several seconds before responding, "In my experience, I have seen patients whose brain activity appeared as normal as your brother's remain in a coma for months. I
have also seen patients with less brain activity than your brother…especially those who are young and healthy…wake up and you can't tell there was ever anything wrong."

When he didn't elaborate further, Liam asked for the answer he was afraid to hear. "What do you believe makes the difference in waking versus not?"

"I believe," Doctor Hopper told him quietly, "it's that undefinable will to live. Question is, Mr. Jones, does your brother have a strong will to live?"

Liam's first inclination was to shout hell yes, but then flashes of conversations with Killian over the last year plus ran through his mind and there had been a common theme in them all. Emma. "I hope so, Doctor. I bloody well hope so."

"I'm going to order some physical therapy to keep his muscles strong and will check back with you in the next day or so." He stood to leave. "Please let me know if you have any further questions."

Liam nodded his head and watched as Killian's doctor left the waiting room, and then on autopilot traversed the hallway making his way back into Killian's room.

Killian was in the exact same position as earlier in the day, but every few minutes his hands would ball into fists or his legs would move under the thin sheet. Liam watched as his facial features changed, even seeing a fleeting smile before it was gone just as quickly as it had arrived. "Fight, Killian. Fight," he whispered as he brushed a lock of hair off his baby brother's forehead just like he had done so many times when he was young…wondering, for the millionth time it seemed…how life could have gotten so screwed up.

Killian muttered something in his sleep what sounded like a name, causing him to lean a little closer. "Killian, I'm here."

Killian's softly uttered, "Emma," caused Liam to stand straight up and, needing to do something, he left the room searching for answers he might not find.

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"Emma," Killian murmured again, "just Emma." He smiled down at the woman who held his heart and right this very minute was laying with her head in his lap, while they watched Henry building a sand castle not far away.

Emma grinned up at him. "That is my name," she teased as he combed his fingers through her blonde locks.

"And a fine name it is, Ms. Swan," he teased her back running his finger down her cheek, to stop at the dimple in her chin.

"What?" She asked when he continued to stare at her.

"I'm just happy." He kissed her quickly. "After all it took to find you, it still surprises me sometimes."

"Me too, babe." She pushed up, wrapping her arms around his shoulders, snuggling against his neck.

Holding her in his arms was heavenly, but with her lithe body in its unclothed state, he was getting ideas he shouldn't be having in public. "This bikini of yours is quite distracting, Swan." He adjusted her body, giving himself a little comfort. "If we were anywhere else..."

She giggled and kissed the underside of his chin. "I know. Perhaps after we take Henry back you
"Definitely," he nuzzled her ear, "but now..." moving her aside, he jumped up, picking her up and running toward the water, "we need to cool off." Just before the wave knocked them over they were joined by Henry, and all three spent joyous moments in the waves.

The memory felt so real that when it was over, Killian could almost smell the sunscreen and hear the waves as they rushed toward the shore. He wanted more moments like that, but for that to happen he needed to heal and then he would fight to return to his family. After all, a man unwilling to fight for what he wants...deserves what he gets.

cs~cs~cs

Liam ran out of Killian's room without any destination in mind and found himself moving mindlessly from one side of the hospital to the other. Up a floor, back down, he walked until it was almost like he ran out of steam and needed to stop and regroup and so... He stopped to lean against the closest wall.

He wasn't sure how long he had been leaning there, working on getting his erratic breathing under control or his heart rate to return to normal, when he realized that he was getting some rather concerned looks. A quick look around confirmed what he had suspected, that he had returned to the scene of the crime, so to speak. Was it too late to make things right?

Pushing off the wall, he stepped inside the room where a little over 24 hours ago, he had met with Killian's Emma. Instead of coming out the hero, his bitterness had led him down the path of destruction and now he was being punished and could very well lose the only real family he had left. If that happened could he live with himself?

His exact words to her were hazy, but the longer he stood beside the very bed she had been lying in, the clearer those words became.

"You have to promise me that you will go to this place and you will not contact Killian or any of your old friends while your rehabilitation is occurring."

And then finishing it off with, "I can't take the chance that I'm wrong about you Miss Swan. I do not wish to see my brother treated as I was treated by some orphan twit who knows nothing of love."

"Oh, God," he whispered, "what have I done?" With no one to lead him in the right direction, he rushed from the room and ran right into the very doctor who had inadvertently helped him push Emma away.

"Whoa," Doctor Nolan steadied him, "where's the fire?"

Liam took a deep breath, trying to get himself under some semblance of control. "I'm sorry, Doctor. I was..." What could he say that didn't make him sound like a bigger idiot than he was, finally deciding on a partial truth, "I was having second thoughts about the young lady being so far away from my brother, that's all."

The doctor's blue eyes bore into his as if to disagree with him but he didn't say anything like that. Instead he indicated a direction and as he started walking tossed, "Follow me," over his shoulder.

Liam felt a little like a lamb being led to slaughter but followed along meekly, surprised when he was led into the doctor's office and given a chair to sit down.
Doctor Nolan leaned against his desk, crossing his arms in front of him. "Mr. Jones," he began, "you asked me what I would do if that were my family and I gave you my honest answer. Yes, it's far away, but as soon as your brother has healed, he can fly out to be with her, in fact they usually encourage it. The young woman will get the very best care and return to her friends looking good as new. By providing a generous amount of money, you have given her a chance to be whole again. Your family should be thanking you."

Every word that came out of the doctor's mouth ripped through Liam as if they were darts being embedded in a board; the ache so deep that he couldn't breathe, and he felt that he might keel over at any moment.

Doctor Nolan walked behind his desk and pulled open a couple of drawers. "I do have something for you, though." He shut and then opened another drawer before he found what he was looking for, pulling out a bag and handing it across the desk. "These are Ms. Swan's belongings. I thought you might get them back to her."

As if in a trance, Liam reached out for the bag, drawing it close. With nothing else to say, he thanked the doctor, made his way back to his apartment and dropped down onto the very sofa that just a few days ago he had been sitting on when he confided his morbid story to Killian.

"Oh, Killian," Liam sighed, as tears filled his eyes and he looked down at the bag that he had been given. When his gaze landed on a bright and shiny diamond ring, he bowed his head and cried as if there were no tomorrow.

Seattle Grace Hospital
Seattle, WA
Wednesday Morning

Doctor David Nolan, Chief of the Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Department at Seattle Grace Memorial Hospital, had worked hard to become the man he was today. An identical twin, he and James had been born to parents who owned a small farm in the middle of nowhere, USA. Growing up, the boys had been fiercely competitive, both knowing from an early age that they wanted to be doctors but realizing that going to the same medical school would not be a very good idea. As such, James had gone east, graduating from John's Hopkins Medical school and David had moved west, graduating from Stanford. That they had ended up with the same specialty was just one of those fluky twin occurrences, but because they didn't live nor work in the same area of the country, it had never been a problem. James recommended patients to David who lived in the west, just as he recommended patients to James who lived in the east. This however was the first time his brother had ever sent a patient who was originally from his side of the country, which, if he were honest with himself, was very flattering. "Finally admitted I'm the best," he smiled as he organized the file in front of him.

"Who finally realized you're the best?" he heard, as he looked up and greeted his Chief of Psychology, Doctor Mary Margaret Blanchard, and the love of his life. She sauntered close and, foregoing a chair, came around the desk to give him a kiss hello. "Well, I'm waiting," she asked again. "Who realized you're the best?"

He gave her a look that said she shouldn't have been eavesdropping before answering in a self-deprecating fashion, "My brother."

"Ahh, that explains it. So, what did he do?" She hitched a hip up on the desk and waited for the full story.
David went on to tell her about the new case and how the woman had sustained significant injuries in a motor vehicle accident and that their job was going to be to put her back together.

"Sad," Mary Margaret murmured, "does she have a family?"

He flipped through several pages in front of him. "She has a fiancé, who was injured in the accident, and his brother is the one who paid upfront for the care and her living expenses for a year."

"Very generous of him," she vocalized what he had been thinking.

"Agreed," David hummed, "but as soon as she arrived, she was rushed back into surgery and she's yet to wake, and it's been hours." He looked at the clock on the wall thinking a full day had passed.

"Well, if you need me to consult, let me know. I just stopped to tell you I would be late as I have a group at Anita's Place tonight."

"I'll let you know." He kissed her goodbye and watched her leave the room and then started making notes and calls to pull his team together. So far, he had requested a consult with Mark Sloan, Plastic Surgery and Eva Prince, Orthopedics. Knowing that Eva would bring her own Occupational Therapist, he checked that off the list, and Mary Margaret, who was available if needed, completed another box. Deciding that anyone else would be added on as needed, he shut the chart and went to check on the patient herself.

Belle had been watching Doctor Nolan's patient since her shift had started and she was pretty sure that she was starting to wake up. She checked her IV bags and her dressings, and then left the room in search of something for the poor thing to write on, since speaking with her jaws wired shut wouldn't be an option.

When she returned, the first thing she noticed was the patient, Emma Swan, lying quietly, her green eyes wide open staring around the room as if scared and confused. Setting the whiteboard and markers close by, Belle smiled at her, hoping to make her feel at ease. "Good evening, Emma. I'm Belle, your nurse. Are you in pain?"

The young woman frowned as if she were taking inventory of her injuries, finally shaking her head, indicating no, or at least not at this time. "I'm going to contact your doctor and let him know you're awake. Do you need anything before I go?" Another negative shake of Emma's head had her turning to go contact Doctor Nolan.

Belle had just picked up the phone to page him when David Nolan himself breezed into the room. "She's awake?" he asked, going straight to the new patient's side.

"She is," Belle told him, meeting him at Emma's side. "Emma," she said quietly, "this is Doctor Nolan. He's the one who fixed you jaw."

David was taken aback by the sadness and fear he saw on Emma's face. "Are you in pain?" he couldn't help but ask. She shook her head no, which alleviated that concern and moved on with his questions. "Did the nurse tell you where you are?" Again, she responded in the negative. "You are at Seattle Grace Hospital. You arrived a little over a day ago and were taken directly to surgery, as one of the wires used to repair your jaw had broken, causing an infection. You've been asleep since."

He went on to tell her that her jaw should be healed in six to eight weeks, at which time she would
need surgery to replace some bones that were broken in her face and give her new teeth. "Until then, it's straws and protein drinks for you. Do you understand?" This time she shook her head in the affirmative, and he continued. "Your arm is broken, and once the cast comes off you might need a little therapy to strengthen it, but I don't believe you need those big bandages on your hands and face that you arrived with." Seeing her confusion, he hastened to add, "Do you have any questions?"

She nodded her head and, since her mouth wouldn't open, looked around for something to write on. Belle, who had remained standing close by, handed her the whiteboard and a marker. Unable to write with her right hand, she put the marker in her left and David watched her painstakingly write a simple sentence. When she turned the board in his direction, he read:

"Who is Emma?"

And yes, I did go there. But you found out that Liam does have a heart so now the question is where do they go from here? I've loved writing the journey. Hope you all enjoy it too... Sunday your Chapter 18 preview gifs will pop up and next Wednesday the chapter. Keep tossing those positive vibes to my muse. I'm currently writing Chapter 22 and trying to tell my muse to shut up - which means the story will have 24 chapters. However, I have a tendency to word vomit so...
Chapter 18

Chapter Summary

Let's continue the journey with Emma, Killian, their family and friends.

Chapter 17 left Emma confused and scared and not sure who she was while Killian fell into a coma. If I did my job right, this chapter will pull a tear or two from you... Grab a tissue and let's go.

Chapter 18

Seattle Grace Hospital
Seattle, WA
Wednesday Morning

Confused. Helpless. Alone. All emotions threatening to overwhelm her until...she closed her eyes. In there, inside her mind, they waited for her. Eyes, windows to a soul that reached out and grabbed hold of her and made her feel...safe. Gave her strength to carry on, telling her they were unique. Eyes made for her, only her.

Those eyes, looking at her with love and calling to her, not with words spilling from lips but communicating in the way of lovers. Who are you? she wanted to scream. Where are you and why are you important to me? Will any blue eyes give me the same comfort? Will any blue eyes do?

Her gaze was drawn to her doctor, whose eyes were blue. But his blue eyes were encircled by blond lashes and not dark, and while fear was not the emotion they created, neither was safety. Only a pair of indigo eyes surrounded by thick inky lashes would do. Those eyes called to her. Those eyes protected her. Those eyes loved her. They waited for her. They needed her and she...needed them.

She watched the doctor out of the corner of her eye, wondering who he was talking to and what he was saying. Periodically, he or the nurse, Belle, would glance her direction, almost furtively, as if they didn't want her to worry. She wanted to tell them that it was ridiculous for them think she wouldn't worry, but really, was it truly ridiculous? Was she a worrier? Yet one more thing for her to question.

She looked down at the whiteboard sitting on her lap and read the sentence she had written. "Who is Emma?" As soon as the doctor had read that, his blue eyes had widened in concern before moving straight into professional mode. He had left her alone, but didn't go far. Was that something she feared? Who would know? The eyes? If so, where were they?

She watched as he slowly hung up the phone and walked her way. "Emma," he said softly, "I've contacted Doctor Derek Shepherd. He's a neurologist and is going to help us find out what's going on. Once his testing is done, I'm going to have you see Doctor Blanchard, our Psychologist. We will get some answers." He squeezed her arm gently, handed her chart to Belle, and left the room.

Once he was gone, Belle made sure she was comfortable with her whiteboard next to her, and
tucked an extra blanket around her as transport arrived to wheel her away for testing. As the gurney was pushed down the hall, they passed several groups of people and moved in and out of different corridors. There were snippets of conversations that she heard and they all made sense. She heard someone say "They were eating a peanut butter and jelly sandwich," then she heard, "I went to see a movie last night," and "The weather has been exceptionally warm here in Seattle." While she understood the meaning of all the sentences, she couldn't apply feelings to all of them.

The first was simple, as she somehow knew what peanut butter was and, if asked, would say she preferred strawberry jelly. The second, she knew what a movie was but couldn't come up with any titles that she may have seen. And the last - she was in Seattle. Was she from here? For some reason, she didn't think so, as there were no emotions associated with it. Was that good? Was that bad?

She was pushed into a room and if she listened carefully, she could hear music. It was peaceful music, playing softly, keeping someone company, reminding them that someone was thinking of them too. As she was transferred from one table to another, the music was turned up a little louder and, ignoring the people as they fussed around her, she focused on the music. Hoping something, anything, would sound familiar. "Lay still, Emma," a disembodied voice told her. "You will hear some loud sounds, but please don't move."

She closed her eyes as the clanking started, looking for the eyes because she was in a tube and it was coming closer and she couldn't breathe. "Stay calm, Emma." she heard, but it felt as if they were talking to someone else because Emma...meant nothing. Who was Emma?

"Just a few more minutes," the voice finally announced, and she felt like she could breathe again. As she was pulled out of the tube, there was the music, waiting for her, and as a haunting voice came on singing words on love, she felt tears well up and spill over. Closing her eyes...she waited, and just like every other time there they were...waiting for her too. Don't cry they seemed to say. It will be alright.

When the testing was all done and they had moved her back onto the gurney she had arrived on, she looked up into the friendly face of an older woman, and picked up her board, writing, "What song? Beautiful."

"Oh, yes, that's a lovely song," the woman told her, in a soft melodic voice. "That was Nat King Cole singing Unforgettable."

She repeated it to herself several times as they pushed her out of the room. Unforgettable, she thought, as the melody played over and over inside of her head and the eyes seemed to be relaying a message: Remember. Please, remember.

Liam's Place
New York City, NY
Wednesday Morning

Liam's head pounded and, rubbing his forehead, he groaned, not wanting to get out of bed. It felt like a hangover, and not one from whisky but rather one from feeling like he had been constantly pummeled by something or someone. His body ached from sleeping on an uncomfortable sofa, in an uncomfortable position, and the need to stretch his legs made him want to move. He pushed up into a sitting position and heard the crinkle of plastic and pulled the bag holding Emma's belongings out from under him; the diamond ring, along with a wallet, keys and her cell phone. What could they tell him?

He stared at the bag for what seemed like an eternity but no matter how hard he tried, he couldn't make himself reach inside and touch any of the contents. He had discovered a few truths about
himself and the question, ‘was I wrong?’ kept circling around and around inside his head. His fear was that he had been wrong and if that were true, then living with what he had done was not something he was ready to examine with words or feelings. The contents waivered in front of his eyes and his gaze locked on the ring and what giving that to her must have meant to his brother. Had he ever listened to how Killian sounded when he spoke of her? Had he ever listened to the things that Killian said about her? The answer wasn’t easy for him to admit to himself, but the truth was no. He had been bitter and no one's feelings mattered but his own.

Not quite having the courage to delve into her life just yet, he decided he needed caffeine. Leaving the bag behind, he wandered into the kitchen, poured a cup of coffee and moved to the window to stare out at the city spread before him. He was man enough to admit that his experiences with Lily had changed him. They had taken a man who had believed in love and happily ever after, and turned him into one who looked at love as something that just brought pain. He had discovered that loving someone made you vulnerable, and learned the hard way that no one should have that much control over you. He had taken a lesson from his wife and was treating life as a garden, with him the butterfly who periodically landed to sip the nectar but never stayed long. His brother believed he had met a woman worthy of his love. Was Emma that woman?

Nemo had said, "Are you saying people who grow up as orphans don't know how to love, son?" reminding him that he and his father had grown up as orphans, yet both had become successful men who were honorable and loved unconditionally. That made them different from Lily, but which pattern did Emma follow? His file on her revealed very little as to whom Emma was as a person. He had only been given basics, such as the name of the group home where she had grown up, the kind of student she had been and that there had been some trouble when she was a teenager that had eventually been cleared up. What kind of trouble, he wondered, and what had clearing it up involved?

His investigator also found out she was a good art student, graduating from college with her degree before moving on to Harvard on a complete assistantship. There hadn't been any information on when she had started drawing or why she enjoyed it, or what her plans were for the future.

Why hadn't he bothered to show up in Boston to meet her? He had essentially hounded Killian for years to give up his vagabond ways and move closer, so they could be a family. Yet what had he done? Shut him out, refusing to consider that his brother had met a woman worthy of him. Had he become so bitter that he was unable to form his own opinions of women in a fair manner? Did he immediately make them the enemy with the standards to receive his approval too high for them to even try?

He set his empty cup on the table and picked up the bag to look inside. Unsure about his decision but too far gone too back out, he stuck his hand inside and pulled out her keys. There were three, all different colors attached to a ring. The key ring was a beautifully crafted gold piece resembling a swan, its neck long and graceful, its feathers folded around it neatly. It felt heavy in his hand but was shiny, as if she hadn't had it that long. Knowing it had to be from his brother before he even turned it over, he flipped it to see an inscription that read:

*You will forever be my always.*

*Love, Killian*

*12/25/16*

Liam remembered his conversation last December and how he had tried to get Killian to leave Boston to go skiing. Even then he had chosen her, and Nemo had already been involved with Cora.
He had been blind...so very blind.

Next, he stuck his hand inside the bag, intending to take out the phone, but at the last minute he didn't feel ready and picked up her wallet instead. Simple brown leather that closed with a snap, very thin and lightweight. So thin and lightweight that he didn't expect to find much inside and wasn't disappointed with his assumption. Inside he found some cash, her Massachusetts driver's license, a credit card and a folded piece of paper with an address in New York City, he assumed for the apartment that Killian had recently purchased. When he placed it on the table next to the keys, he asked himself what he had learned about her so far. She didn't appear to care about things, for she had been carrying very little, and that the glitz included had been from his brother.

The ring and the phone were the only items left, and knowing the ring wouldn't give him any answers, he slowly pulled out the phone. It wasn't the newest version, nor was it the largest one, but holding it in his hand gave him a feeling that he wasn't ready to name. His thumb hovered over the home button. One push, he thought and some of her secrets would be revealed. Was he ready? As he sat contemplating his answer, his own cell rang saving him from having to make a decision too quickly. He shoved it back in the bag and answered, "Hello."

"Liam, what's the word about Killian?" Nemo asked on the other end.

Liam told him what he had learned from Doctor Hopper the day before about Killian lapsing into a coma.

"I'm just getting ready to jump in the shower and go back. I'll let you know if anything changes," he answered hurriedly with the hope that nothing was said about Emma, as he wasn't ready to talk to anyone about her...except perhaps with Killian.

"Good, good," Nemo continued surprisingly, "I also wanted to tell you about Robin."

Liam frowned, "Robin? What about him?"

"Robin was with Emma and Killian. You didn't know that?"

Liam thought about what had happened that first night when he showed up at the hospital but was positive that Killian's thoughts that night had been only of Emma.

As Nemo went on to tell him about Robin's injuries, which hospital he was in and that his girlfriend was with him, that invisible noose that he had been feeling started to tighten around his neck. The possibility that his actions had somehow been the motivator for this hurried wedding and the subsequent accident kept sitting in the back of his mind and he couldn't get it out. He was very relieved to learn that, although serious, Robin's injuries were not life threatening and that he had someone with him for support.

As their call was coming to an end, he assured Nemo that he would let Killian know about Robin and that he would speak to him soon. He had just taken a deep breath, thinking that he could relax a little when he heard,

"Oh, and Liam?"

There was something in Nemo's voice when he interjected that told him, he was going to learn something he might not expect. "Something else?" He tried to keep the irritation in his voice to a minimum.

"Cora and I are getting married."
He sounded happy, but married was something that he never would have expected for Dakkar Nemo. "I'm, uh, surprised, but if you're happy, then so am I," he finally came up with, wondering why all of a sudden it seemed that everyone around him came in pairs. Promising to text later, he clicked off and went to shower and change before leaving for the hospital once again.

**Hospital for Special Surgery**
**New York NY**
**Thursday Late Morning**

As the week progressed, Robin continued to get stronger, and as the pain and swelling in his collarbone healed, he was able to remove the sling. With the removal of the sling came more mobility and twice daily visits by his own torture master, Will Scarlett, Physical Therapist.

The next questions were, what came next and, when it was time to leave the hospital, where did he go? Back to Boston where they had another few months on their lease, or stay in New York City where he would be working, as soon as he was able? But staying in New York City when he hadn't had time to find a place to live presented a problem also, as his father lived in a nice brownstone, but climbing those steps to the front door would be impossible.

When the door to his room opened, he looked up expecting to see Will arriving with his weights, bands and other assorted pieces of equipment meant to torture, but he was pleasantly surprised to see it was Regina. She was dressed in yellow and, immediately, he felt as if she were filling his room with sunshine. Holding his hand out toward her, he beckoned her inside. "Well, hello. I didn't expect you quite so early."

She gave him that shy smile of hers that he loved so well, and pushed the door closed. "I was hoping I would get here in time for your therapy session. Did I miss it?"

He gave her a quizzical look. "Not that I'm complaining, but why?" Her steps brought her closer to where he was stuck in the miserable bed, but with the sling gone, he was able to reach for her hand, pull her close and wrap his arms around her, bringing her down for a more thorough good morning kiss than they had exchanged recently.

She lifted her head and ran her hand along his newly freed arm. "You lost your sling." She smiled down at him.

"I did." He leaned close for another kiss. "I needed that." He gave her a gentle smile before continuing with his earlier question, "Now, why do you want to be here when the therapist comes in. He tortures me and if I cry like a baby, you might not think it too manly." His dimples popped as the air between them sizzled.

"That's okay," she pushed upright and shrugged one shoulder, "if you cry, I'll hand you a tissue." She grinned at him as she busied herself straightening his blankets.

When she lifted her head and there was a twinkle in her dark eyes, he couldn't resist tugging her closer once again. He hadn't had her in his arms since before the accident and he hadn't realized how much he needed her until she was there. "Have I told you how happy I am that you came running when I needed you?" He said huskily while his hand leisurely moved up and down her back, as if he couldn't stop touching her.

Her hands hit the bed, bracketing his body as she leaned closer. "Yes, you did, but it's nice to hear again."

Her soft breath wafted across his lips, sending a sensuous awareness over his skin that was present
whenever she was near. "Well, then," he licked his lips drawing her gaze to his mouth, "have I told you that I love you?" Her eyes immediately filled with tears and while she never withdrew the eye contact that held him trapped in her web, neither did she say anything causing him to worry that perhaps he had misread her. "Regina, did I say something wrong?"

Her tears falling freely, she shook her head from side to side. "No, Robin. I just never thought I would have this." She cupped his jaw, running her thumb along his bottom lip. "I love you too," she sighed against his mouth.

He didn't give her any longer to think, but cupped the back of her head, bringing their lips together. The kiss continued until he felt his body waking after lying dormant for days from pain and medication, giving him thoughts best not to have in a hospital bed with two broken legs. Just a little more, he decided, as he dove back in for seconds.

"'Ere, 'ere," Robin heard the cockney accent of his physical therapist as he burst into the room, interrupting the moment. "Time to work."

"Stay?" Robin asked Regina as she pushed to standing.

"Always." She released his hand and moved aside to watch Will work.

Robin was led through multiple exercises, with both weights and therapeutic bands, all working to increase his upper body strength which would allow him to transfer himself from a bed to a wheelchair. With a collarbone that was still tender and after laying around most of the week, he felt weak, and by the time they were finished, he was sweating and exhausted.

Will nodded his head. "You're ready. I'll tell the Doc." He picked up his equipment and just as quickly as he arrived, he departed.

Regina had been standing beside the window but as soon as Will left, she disappeared, returning moments later, a towel and a cloth in her hand. Robin reached out for the cloth but she waved his hand away. "Let me." She lowered the side rail of his bed and hitched her hip up beside him and his heart rate sped up waiting for her next move.

She ran the wet cloth across his heated forehead, his cheeks and then his neck. "What are you ready for, Robin?"

It took him a few seconds to process what she had asked, but finally he was able to respond, "To be moved to the rehabilitation unit."

"That's wonderful. And then home?"

"Yes," he began hesitantly, "I'm just not sure where that is yet. I guess I could go back to Boston, but since we'll be based from here, I had hoped to already have a place."

"Would you move in with me?" She asked him almost hesitantly.

Robin's eyes went straight to hers. "Regina, are you sure?"

"More than anything," she hurried to answer in a hushed voice.

He tilted his head and studied her expression. "I could sleep on the sofa, so I don't keep you awake.

"You could," she agreed, "but that would make it more difficult to do this." She kissed one cheek before moving to the other and then settling on his mouth.
Robin allowed the kiss to go on, probably longer than he should have, but he couldn't seem to pull away. He had waited so long to find a woman like her, and now that he had, he just wanted to be with her in every way possible. However, his body's response to the kissing was reminding him that not only did he want to share his life with her, he wanted to make love with her, and having casts on both legs was going to limit his movement for a while. As the kiss continued, threatening to get out of hand, he cupped Regina's head, separating their lips and took a few moments to appreciate how sexy she looked with her kiss swollen mouth and sultry eyes. "You realize if we are to share a bed, there are some things that I may have difficulty with for the next few months." He gave her what felt like a self-deprecating smile.

His body jerked as her hands wandered down to his nether regions. "Feels like everything works fine to me," she responded sassily.

He groaned, "That works quite well, thank you very much. But, I can't move these," he waved his hands toward his legs, both encased in plaster casts.

Regina looked toward where he was pointing. "Well," she murmured, "perhaps I could do the moving for both of us."

His thoughts went straight to the gutter. "I do like how you think," he murmured before seeing how far he could push his control by sampling a few more kisses.

University Hospital,
Newark, NJ
Thursday Afternoon

Unsure how long he had been in this void, Killian floated, his mind detached from reality. He felt safe and, as it had been the last place where he'd had contact with his girl, the hope was that she would return looking for him. If she did, he wanted to be waiting for her, as by her side was where he was meant to be.

He found that the longer he remained submerged, the better he became at moving around at will. He knew when medical personnel happened to be in the room and working with his body, and if the pain became too great, how to get away from it. He also became aware of the times Liam was in the room or when Nemo had stopped by to check on him.

He was aware that Liam had been close quite often, but had chosen not to get close enough to be able to understand his words, nor was he interested in trying to place Liam's moods. After hearing Liam's mumblings upon returning from the errand he had sent him on, he had been hesitant to listen too closely for fear of hearing more bad news, although he couldn't fathom anything worse. His path of escape allowed him to pretend that life was still wonderful and that it would somehow return to normal. The thought that she was gone from his life forever was not an option he was strong enough nor willing to consider. Perhaps someday, perhaps never.

~~~CS~~~~

Liam pushed open the door to Killian's room, hoping to find him with eyes open and sitting in a chair smiling. Instead, it was the same scene. Killian in bed, eyes closed. "Bloody hell, Killian," he shouted in frustration, before his voice softened to an agonized whisper. "Stop being an arsehole and open your eyes." The fear, worry, and utter helplessness he was feeling simultaneously bombarded his very existence, until the need to kick something or hit something almost took control. A calming breath, though, gave him his answer. He needed to turn back time. Turn back time to a place where life was simpler and his only goal had been to protect his little brother. Many times, at an enormous cost to himself. But Killian's well-being led the way.
He pulled a chair close to the bed and sat down, trying to decide which story would fit with the mood of the day. Since Doctor Hopper had suggested talking to Killian as if they were sitting side by side, he had gone through his memories, pulling story after story out of times when they were growing up. As he clicked through the files in his mind, he had rediscovered feelings inside himself that he had thought were long lost; feelings that helped him understand just what a wanker he had truly been to his brother since the whole debacle with Lily had gone down.

"Killian, did I ever tell you about the time I almost lost you?" he started by asking the silent body on the bed. He didn't expect an answer and continued on with his story, "I must have been eleven or twelve, and with Papa away on business, I was tasked with watching my little brother while Mum ran a quick errand."

Liam stopped to gather his thoughts before continuing with the story, "She told me not to leave the house. She told me not to answer the door. But then I heard the secret knock that signaled my best mate John had arrived and I couldn't resist. Even after being told not to, I answered his knock." He hesitated as if listening to a question.

"I know," he answered the question he had only heard in his head, "but I was at that age where it was important to be brill, and so I answered, and he issued a challenge. We were going to race across the train tracks as the train was coming around the corner."

Once more he stopped and cocked his head, waiting for a question. "You don't have to tell me twice," he said to his listener, "I shouldn't have. But I did."

Unable to sit still, Liam pushed up and paced back and forth in front of the bed, as he was wont to do when he had a lot on his mind. "You were watching something on the telly, and after telling you I would be right back, John and I left the house, heading toward the train tracks. Little did I know that my four-year-old brother had followed us out the door. Oh Killian," he sighed, "that was the start of your never listening to me."

As he sat there, he could clearly hear his brother say, "I was born to be a captain."

"Yes, you were, Killian. Yes, you were." Taking a deep breath, he went on with his tale. "John and I arrived at the tracks and we could hear the train's whistle in the distance. Knowing there would be two trains, one going in either direction, we quickly scampered across the tracks as the train was approaching. While we stood there on the opposite side of the tracks, watching it fly by, I saw you standing on the other side waiting to run after us. But before the last car had passed, you disappeared… And, yes… I panicked."

Liam had to stop and wipe his face. Every time, he remembered the story, he relived it all over again. He could smell the dust that was tossed into the air as the train flew past. He could hear the screech of the metal wheels against the metal tracks, and the sick pit in his stomach always returned full force.

He took a drink from the bottle of water he had brought in, and with his emotions under control continued with the memory. "As soon as the train's last car flew past, John and I raced back across the tracks, but Killian…" he hesitated to swallow the bile that always rose to the back of his throat when he thought about his little brother sprinting across the dusty tracks, "you had hidden behind something and crossed over the tracks, so you were standing on the opposite side from where John and I were standing, but too far away to hear our cries. Any chance you remember why you couldn't hear us?"

He didn't know why he tossed that question out to Killian. They had never talked about that day and Liam had always assumed it was because Killian had been so young and had forgotten it. "The
reason you couldn’t hear our cries, little brother, was the train coming in the opposite direction had sounded its whistle and could be seen."

Liam closed his eyes and was immediately pulled back to that day. He could clearly see himself and John yelling at Killian to stay where he was and wait, but with all the patience of any four-year-old, Killian didn’t listen, or just didn’t hear them. Liam had started running but he hadn’t been able to get very far, because the train had arrived. For what seemed like forever, Liam had stood there as car after car flew past, not knowing what had happened to Killian. Not knowing if his brother was dead or alive.

"Once the train had passed," he went on with his story, "John and I took off running toward you as fast as we were able. And, Killian," Liam's voice settled to a whisper, "when we found you, you were so still, I thought I had lost you without really getting a chance to know you." He blinked his eyes rapidly trying to clear his vision and dug a little deeper for the strength he would need for the next part.

"You were lying on your stomach, covered with debris blown up by the train, arms splayed out on either side. Finally, after we had called your name multiple times, you stirred and started crying. That sound served as a balm to my soul because it meant you were alive. I'm not ashamed to admit, I pretty much lost it right then and there." Liam let his words die and remembered kneeling there in the sand while they leaned over him. He and John had examined Killian, trying to see where he were hurt, but all they could find was a small burn, where the train's wheels had tossed something metal in the air, and it had bounced off his arm.

Liam stood and, picking up Killian's right hand, slowly turned it over until he could see the inside of his wrist. Tenderly he ran his finger over the red mark left behind that fateful day beside the train. "After that I swore I would do whatever I had to do to protect you. Looks like I failed, didn't I? Come back to me, little brother. I love you."

~~~CS~~~

Inside his safe place, Killian heard a sound that could only be described as an agonizing wail, sounding more like it was coming from a wounded animal rather than a person. He knew he had heard it once before, but the where and the when, he couldn’t quite grasp. The cry continued for so long, with its tone nearly piercing his soul, that he slowly floated up to see if there was anything he could do to help. Not quite ready to completely surface, he went up just enough for his hand and arm to float along the top, while the rest of his body remained safely cocooned, free from pain. As he hovered in the space between, he became aware that the arm that was above the surface was getting wet, but not all at once. It felt as if he were standing under a cloud and it was sprinkling lightly with raindrops falling…one by one.

"What is that?" he asked himself. "If I go back, what then? Am I ready?" Not having the answers readily at hand, Killian stayed in his limbo and listened.

~~~CS~~~

Liam heard the door open and, letting go of Killian's arm, wiped his tears before turning to face the newcomer. "Doctor Hopper." he was pleased to see it was someone who might give some helpful information.

The doctor smiled, coming forward to shake his hand. "Mr. Jones. How's your brother?" he asked before pulling on his gloves and turning to the patient.

"I've been telling him stories just like you suggested, but I don’t think it's done any good. He appears
to be the same," he sighed, "It's very frustrating."

"I'm sure it is. Now let's see if there's any change in his responses."

Seattle Grace Hospital
Seattle, WA
Doctor David Nolan's Offices
Thursday Afternoon

David read the report that Derek Shepherd had just sent him about his new patient. Then he read it again,

Findings and Recommendations

MRI - no abnormalities noted
CT Scan - no abnormalities noted
EEG - no abnormalities noted

Refer to Speech Pathology and Psychology for further testing

The report from the neurologist hadn't given him any new insight and so he moved onto the report written by the speech/language pathologist. Since Emma was unable to speak, and with her dominant arm broken, testing had been limited.

Results of Testing

Nonverbal communication skills show higher than average vocabulary and language comprehension. Reads and understands on a college level. Written language skills hampered by broken dominant hand, however spelling and grammar skills consistent with a college education.

Recommendations - Refer to psychologist for further testing.

After reading both reports, David was no closer to discovering why the girl had lost her memory than he had been earlier in the day. Reaching for his phone, he called the one person who might be able to help him solve his problem.

After several rings he heard his brother answer, "David. How is our patient?"

Getting right to the point, he answered, "That's why I'm calling. When she woke up after surgery, she woke up with amnesia. Is there any more you can tell me?"

James told him she had been in the car with her fiancé and it had been her fiancé's brother who had provided financial support for her treatment. "I actually saw him yesterday and returned her belongings to him. If I see him, I'll see if I can find out more about her for you."

"That's a good idea. Meanwhile, I'm going to ask my lovely wife to consult."

With a "keep me posted," James clicked off and David was once again left with his thoughts about what could have caused the lovely Ms. Swan to suppress memories of her life.

"Well, Emma Swan," he murmured to the quiet room, "if anyone can help you get those memories to return, it's Mary Margaret Blanchard." He picked up the phone and dialed her extension.

Emma's room, Thursday Afternoon
She thought she had been in this hospital for three days but time moved so slowly, she couldn't be sure. Since hearing that song, *Unforgettable*, she hadn't been able to get it out of her mind. Its melody felt familiar, yet she had no idea why. But consistently when the song played in her head, the eyes appeared, as if waiting for her to say or do something important. What though? She just didn't know.

Some of the testing they had done with her yesterday had involved pointing to items or scenes that matched what the person had said. The fact that she had known what the person was talking about had to mean something, right? And that she had been able to read and answer questions as well as do a little writing, were all positive signs, they told her. But she couldn't remember the names of any friends or family members. She didn't even know if she had any. But if she did, where were they?

She had discovered she enjoyed just about any type of music, knew something about art, as she somehow recognized styles as well as the artists of the pictures she saw as they moved her around from place to place, and she had discovered she hated the smell of peas. On the plus side, the protein drinks that were her meals didn't taste too bad, and while they rotated the flavors, she preferred chocolate. But even with that, she kept wishing they would bring her a grilled cheese and onion rings, and trying to figure out why those foods had popped into her head just added to the list of things that she didn't know.

Feeling a headache starting to form, she closed her eyes and leaned back against the pillow. She had learned if she tried too hard to remember her past, the pain in her head returned in almost crippling form. Not wanting to dwell too long on why that happened, she searched for the eyes and let them soothe her to sleep.

**Mary Margaret Blanchard's Offices**  
**Thursday Afternoon**

Mary Margaret hung up the phone and turned to her computer to pull up the electronic reports on Emma Swan. With no neurological issues present and her semantic memory active, she suspected that something traumatic had occurred and was causing Emma to block her past. Possibly, the trauma from the accident triggered a previous fear that caused her to shut down, but she was certain that with patience she could help Emma unlock what her mind was refusing to acknowledge. Only then would she be able to completely heal.

Having looked over the report by the speech/language pathologist and knowing verbal responses were limited, she opted for an informal and nonthreatening approach. She grabbed a sketch pad, a small box of colored pencils, and just in case Emma preferred the whiteboard, a new box of whiteboard markers, and left her office. She planned to start with a little word to picture association and see where it went.

When she walked into Emma's room, she hadn't known what to expect, but what she saw made her wish that a simple hug could take this girl's pain away. She was lying on her left side, almost in a fetal position, her broken right arm resting on a pillow. Asleep, the bruises and small cuts from her facial injuries stood out in bright and colorful contrast against the white bed linens. From red to purple, green and yellow, each color a painful reminder that whatever had transpired within the last few days had been painful enough for her brain to need a time out.

Mary Margaret had been a psychologist for many years, and as one who worked closely with many head injury and amnesic cases, was used to feelings of empathy. Without ever making eye contact, though, something about this case was pulling her in and connecting her with this stranger. As she continued to stare, Emma opened her eyes, and the minute their gazes locked, Mary Margaret knew she would do whatever she could to make sure Emma Swan was one day reunited with the man who
loved her. That was her promise to her patient.

As Emma stared into the small, dark headed woman's eyes, she felt a peace that she hadn't felt since waking up, and knew that whomever she was, her plan was to help.

"Hello Emma," the woman smiled softly as she moved closer to the bed. She introduced herself and asked if they could talk a while.

Emma tilted her head, and reaching over took her whiteboard and marker and wrote, "Can't talk."

"Oh, I'm fully aware of your limitations. I brought a sketch pad. Would you like to use it or the whiteboard?"

Emma looked at the sketch pad she was holding and for a split-second thought there was something familiar about it. The feeling refused to stay long enough for her to make sense of it, however, if seeing it created a feeling, perhaps holding it would too. Pointing to the sketch pad, she held her breath as it was placed into her hand, both nervous and excited about the feelings it might elicit.

As she held it in her hand, looking down at the cover, she couldn't say that it brought back memories so much as it brought back feelings. Laying it on her lap, she ran her hand over the cover, and the feel of it was so comfortable that her shoulders relaxed ever so slightly. Flipping open to the first page, she ran her hand over the it before she picked it up and sniffed it. The distinct smell coming from the paper filled her with such an overwhelming urge to draw, her eyes immediately filled with tears. The problem, though, was in what could she draw?

A soft voice interrupted her thoughts. "Did you remember something, Emma?"

"No," she shook her head to the question.

"But you felt something?" the doctor continued to prod.

Emma looked up from the sketch pad knowing that the look on her face said, "Call me surprised."

Dr. Blanchard smiled. "You're not the first person I've helped regain their memory. Are you ready?"

She was told that she would be given a word and all that would be required for her was to either write the first word that came to mind or to draw a picture. She emptied the box of colored pencils next to her legs and waited for her first word.

Mary Margaret watched Emma to see how she would handle the sketch pad and pencils. It quickly became obvious that even though she was obviously using her nondominant hand, she was familiar with them. Once she knew her patient was comfortable with her current means of communication, she began giving words, starting with simple ones that wouldn't feel too threatening or even reveal too much about the person behind the amnesic. After several words into the process, she decided to see what she could find out about Emma. "Hungry. When I say hungry, what comes to mind?"

She watched Emma immediately drop the black pencil she had been using and pick up a tan and an orange one and painstakingly start drawing. Emma was focused, and several times she would frown before moving on. Finally, laying down the pencils, the pad was turned around. Emma had drawn a perfect replica of a golden brown grilled cheese sandwich surrounded by crispy onion rings.
"Nicely done. Do you remember what they taste like?"

Emma stared down at her picture for a few minutes before looking back up and slowly nodding her head.

"Good job. Ready to move on?" Once Emma had turned the page, the next word was given, "Boston."

Emma wrote, "Home."

"Friend."

The corner of Emma's lips curved up, before she drew a picture of a girl wearing a red cape and wrote, "Red."

"How about 'mother'?"

Emma's answer surprised her as she had written, "Snow White."

When Mary Margaret saw the answer, she thought for a moment that Emma was joking, but her expression told another story, one that would be best left untouched until another time. "How about 'safe,' Emma."

Emma was observed to briefly close her eyes before opening them to draw quickly on her pad. When she turned the pad around, she had drawn a pair of blue eyes, rimmed by dark lashes, that were quite realistic looking.

"Do you see those eyes when you close yours?"

Emma looked down at her paper. "Yes," she wrote. "Unforgettable." A lone tear trickled from the corner of her eye.

"Name. What jumps to mind?"

Emma quickly wrote one thing, almost as if she were afraid she would lose it if she didn't hurry, but when she turned the pad around, there wasn't a name written on the page, but rather a single letter. Emma had drawn the letter K.

 Regina's Place  
 New York City, NY  
 Friday Early Evening

Regina stood in the middle of her apartment that was located in a prime location on the upper east side, and felt as if she were standing in someone else's house. She had lived in it for the better part of six years, yet the small place she had lived in for five months in Boston felt more like a home than this place. Had she really changed that much?

Standing in front of the mirror, she examined her appearance and realized it was true, she had changed. She had exchanged her severe suits for more relaxed and comfortable clothing, and traded in much of her black for red, yellow and blues. She even noticed a difference in her face. It appeared younger, more relaxed, and she often caught herself smiling for no reason except that she was happy. But the biggest change of all were her eyes. They sparkled, for lack of a better word, and it was all because she had opened her heart and allowed others inside.

Looking around the apartment, she realized that before she brought Robin home, she was going to
have to do some rearranging. He would have both legs in casts for several more weeks, which meant room would need to be made for a wheelchair. She couldn't wait, she finally admitted to herself. Now that they had shared their feelings with each other, the possibility of a future with him was within her grasp. A family, just like she always wanted, kept floating through her mind, bringing with it a picture of Roland holding their hands and smiling up at them.

Thoughts of Roland brought on a wave of guilt for not having called Elsa or Blue to let them know what had happened, but she had assumed that Liam or Nemo would have done so, since they were Killian's family. With the appearance of Nemo's name, her thoughts changed direction and she realized it was time to try to make sense out of the information she had just been given about her mother...and Nemo? How was that right? Had she been dreaming? She leaned back and closed her eyes with the hope of replaying those events over...

"Knock knock knock," A slight hesitation before once again, "Knock, knock, knock."

Regina's eyes flew open, and without even opening the door, she knew who was going to be on the other side. On her way to answer it, she automatically looked down to see what she was wearing, wondering what negative comments would be forthcoming about her leggings and oversized shirt. Knowing it was too late to change, she took a deep breath and opened the door, but before greeting her mother, she had to look twice to make sure it really was Cora Mills standing there. "Mother?"

"Hello, dear." Cora kissed her cheek as she breezed by in a peasant blouse and, Regina gulped, bohemian skirt. "You look lovely."

She had to forcibly pick her chin up off the ground before she could shut the door and follow her mother inside. "Mother, you look..." she took in her outfit, so very unlike Cora, "different," she finally decided on.

Cora preened, "Oh, thank you. Dakkar picked it out."

"Oh?" Regina was having a difficult time mentally combining this woman with the rather haughty woman she had known her entire life.

"Why, yes, he did. I just love that he's so manly on one hand, yet isn't afraid to show me his softer side." Cora went on with the conversation as she took a seat on one of the sofas. "And that voice of his," she gave a little shiver, "it just does things to me," *wink, wink* "if you know what I mean."

"Mother!" Regina exclaimed, "A bit too much information about you and my...uh...boss."

Cora smiled calmly. "I do hope I'm not making you uncomfortable. I just love that man and what he does with his-"

"Mother!" Regina exclaimed thinking, please don't say it.

"Hands," Cora finished her sentence, and then without even stopping for a breath, continued, "So how about your young man? How is he with his hands?"

Regina studied her mother, trying to determine exactly was going on in her head, as the words coming out of her mouth were so atypical that she wasn't sure whether she should laugh or cry. "Robin is fine with his hands, but mother..."

"Just fine?" Cora interrupted, "I'm so sorry. You deserve someone who is more than just fine."

Never having found herself in this situation before, Regina wasn't exactly sure what it would take to get out of this conversation, for she felt as if she were caught between that proverbial rock...
and hard place. Deciding a change of topic might be the best way to handle the situation, she
wracked her brain. "Tell me about your wedding plans"

"I would love to share our plans for the summer with you," Cora simpered, a huge smile on her face.
"It's like this..."

**University Hospital**
**Newark NJ**
**Friday Evening**

Killian had to admit his safe place was becoming rather monotonous, and the longer he stayed, the
more discouraged he became. He had looked around every corner he could find. He had looked in
the deeper places as well as in the shallower ones, and it seemed that Emma was no longer close
enough to be found. He knew he would never give up hope that some way, some day she would be
returned to him, but for now, there was a little person who needed him, and if he were honest with
himself, he needed them too. At one time the person he would have turned to in a time of emotional
crisis had been his brother, yet since their parent's death, for one reason after another, they had
continued to fail each other. The time had arrived for them to heal themselves. Once that had
happened, then...they could heal as brothers.

He remembered the time that he had gone to see Liam after getting word that he had left Lily. When
he had finally located him, his brother had been in a run-down establishment not far from where he
was stationed, looking terrible. Bladdered, even before noon, and unkept. And from the amount
of empty whiskey bottles around the room, his bender had been going on for several days. They had
talked but even then, Liam refused to tell his story, keeping his pain and heartache bottled inside. For
as long as Killian could remember, Liam had been the stoic one. He refused to show weaknesses or
to allow Killian to see him as a person who might need others. By the end of the visit, Liam had sent
him away. "Don't push me, Killian. I'll share when I'm ready."

After that encounter, they had each been so involved in their own lives that the time for each other
was limited to holidays. But then Nemo had stepped in, acting as a surrogate father and had taken
Liam away from England and the memories. Once that had happened, and Killian had moved to the
United States, there had been hope that their relationship would change. But, alas, the Jones men
were a stubborn lot, and after hearing Liam's story and the pain he was feeling, Killian had to
wonder if anything or anyone could bring his brother back. Liam's heart had been crushed and it
needed love to help it heal, but his brother needed to be willing to allow that love entry, and after
their conversation in Liam apartment, Killian wasn't sure if that were possible.

"When I opened the door to the apartment, it was a mess. There were clothes strewn everywhere,
empty containers littering the counters and dirty dishes stacked in the sink. Hearing noises in the
bedroom, I had to see, and," he closed his eyes but the pain on his face was real.
He took another
deep breath, "I pushed open the door and there were several others in the room, all without
clothing. All I saw was my wife in a compromising position with not one, but two men and I was out
of there."

"That's another part of this tragic love story. I had decided that I didn't care if the child were mine
or not, that I would claim them and give them our name. I didn't realize how much I wanted that
until I found out that the child had been stillborn. I had nothing left and so I buried myself in work
until Nemo convinced me I needed a change and I moved here to try to put the past behind me and
for you, Killian. I made a vow that I would do what I had to in order to protect you, because I didn't
want you to become the same kind of man that I saw when I looked in the mirror each day. So, there
you have it, little brother. There is the sordid truth about women like Lily, and Emma, two peas in a
pod, and why you should never marry a tramp like her."
It had taken hearing the pain in Liam's voice when he had uttered the words, "But how am I going to explain to Killian what happened to Emma?" as well as seeing how he, just like Liam, had allowed the pain to overwhelm him, preventing him from standing and fighting for what he wanted. It had, strangely enough, allowed him to put himself into the shoes that Liam had been walking in for years. And now he understood that the pain of losing someone you love can be so crippling that you go to a place where you lock it inside a box, only allowing it out a tiny piece at a time. Before he would allow himself to leave his safe place, he gathered all the pain that had sent him diving and locked it into a place where, as he healed and became stronger, he would take the pieces out and examine them bit by bit, until he had all the answers he needed.

He wrapped his love for Emma securely around him and slowly began his climb toward the surface. As he ascended, the memory of saying goodbye to Emma in his safe place floated through his mind.

She looked up, as if she were being called by someone above them, and after giving a little sigh, started pulling away. "They're calling me, Killian. I have to go."

"No, Emma," he cried, "I'm not ready to say goodbye." He gave her another kiss, this one hard and meant to leave an impression. He wanted to leave the taste and feel of his lips on her so that she would never forget him, just like he would never forget her.

She heaved another sigh as if she couldn't find the energy to push the words out, "Then don't say goodbye. Just remember your promise, Killian." Her body started floating upward as if she were on an elevator that was rising, leaving him behind.

He grabbed her hand with both of his to keep her in place, and kissed it longingly, trying desperately to keep her near him but it was slipping away. Before he lost her, he needed to tell her he loved her, one more time, and kissing her hand three times, repeating I love you after each kiss, both with actions and words, one last time before her hand slipped from his. "I'll remember, Emma. I won't ever forget my promise to you." As the tears silently made tracks down his face, she faded from sight, and he was left alone.

As he started to move, her last words echoed loudly in his mind, but the closer he got to the surface, the softer the sound until…eventually…it was no more. When his head broke through the silence and the world around him came alive, he forced his eyes to open to the bright light.

"Hello, Killian."

And Killian is back with us. See that wasn't too painful, was it? But now you have a bit more insight into Liam and his responsibility as a big brother. Did it change your mind about him at all? And Cora is quite different, isn't she? I love Robin and Regina and can totally see Will as Robin's PT. Hope you enjoyed. Please let me know. Next week's Chapter is a long one. As always, preview on Sunday on tumblr and Chapter posted on Wednesday. Thanks for stopping by.
Chapter 19

Chapter Summary

The journey continues with Emma, Killian, Liam and their friends.

I am writing a Christmas story that takes place in Chapter 8, after the Christmas Ball so if you want to go back and reread a chapter or two around that one in preparation, feel free. I had to do it to get in the right headspace for where Emma and Killian were in their relationship then.

and lastly... you might need a tissue this week. Grab one just in case.

Chapter 19

New York City, NY
Late Friday to Early Saturday

"Mr. Jones, I'm calling to let you know your brother is awake," Liam heard Doctor Hopper say.

The doctor's words didn't initially register, making Liam think perhaps he was dreaming. Not responding immediately, he looked around the room and heard the music playing, saw the lights from the city outside the windows shining, and heard the gentle hum from the air conditioner; all sounds assuring him that he was not dreaming. "Killian is awake?" he couldn't help but ask, just in case he had been hallucinating.

"Yes. I was standing next to his bed when he opened his eyes."

"How is he, Doctor Hopper?" he asked anxiously, "Is he alright?"

"Based on Killian's questions and comments when I spoke to him, I have every reason to believe all is fine."

Liam sighed in relief. "I'm on my way." He needed to get to the hospital. He needed to talk to Killian, if only to assure himself that he was fine. And once he had done that, then they needed to have a discussion about Emma.

"Mr. Jones, perhaps it would be best for you to wait until the morning. Killian is going to be undergoing several tests over the next few hours and I really don't want to overtire him until we're sure there are no complications. Shall we meet tomorrow at say…10:00?"

Unable to hide his disappointment, Liam agreed and hung up the phone. As soon as the call disconnected, he sent a quick text to Nemo, letting him know about Killian's awakening and then, as usual, ended up next to the window. The lights far below caught his attention in an almost hypnotic way and he allowed himself to get lost in his thoughts.

He kept playing what he wanted to say to Killian over and over in his head, rewinding and editing as necessary until he was comfortable with the message he wanted to convey. Once that message was complete he turned to go to bed, noticing his reflection for the first time in the window. The man looking back at him wasn't frowning…his smile wasn't huge, but it was there. Liam Jones was happy
for the first time in many years.

When he finally crawled into bed, he knew he should be tired, but his mind was wide awake and active with thoughts of what had transpired over the past week. It didn't seem possible that less than a week ago, Nemo had stopped by his office and after a few exchanges said to him, "Don't ignore the pain, Liam, as that helps make you the man you are supposed to become, but trust your brother. If he says one look and he knew Emma was the one for him, just may I remind you, as your father did, then perhaps you are not giving him credit to know his own mind." And that was crux of the matter, really. That he continued to view his brother as that four-year-old little boy that he had almost lost. That same little boy that he had tried to save and protect for close to thirty years. How did one change a behavior when it had been part of his very existence for longer than not?

Nemo's words, "This is when we come together as a family and perhaps if we meet her halfway, Emma will save all of us just like she seems to have saved your brother," had made him want to laugh at the possibility that someone who had come from the very same place as the woman who had crushed him could ever save him. But now, looking back at what had transpired in such a short time, he had to wonder if perhaps his old mentor had known something about Emma that either he hadn't known or that he hadn't been willing to see. His judgment had been sorely impaired for years and while no means perfect, he felt he was back on the road to discovering the man his mother would admire.

To say that he regretted his behavior, especially toward his brother, was just a part of what was going on inside his head. There seemed to be too much clutter for him to really make sense of all the emotions, but the more that he attempted to organize and understand the many parts of his feelings, the better he seemed to be able to put them behind him in order to take responsibility. He knew, though, that taking it was only the first step toward healing wounds that ran deep. He felt it was important for all parties to come together, otherwise it was like covering something with a band-aid that never was able to heal properly. With band-aids often the hurts were covered, allowing them to fester, creating pain that could take years to fix. While he deserved for Killian to shut him down and walk away, Liam hoped that his little brother would meet him half way.

After several hours of being no closer to sleep than when he had crawled into bed, Liam padded into the kitchen for a cup of coffee. Leaning against the counter, he sipped the strong brew and mentally made a check list of what he needed to take to the hospital with him. Once the caffeine started zipping through his system, he poured another cup, and went to shower.

After he was dressed, he searched for an old gym bag which would easily hold a few changes of clothes for Killian. A couple pair of gym shorts and t-shirts, which the doctor had recommended for comfort, along with shoes and socks were the first things to go in the bag. Some toiletries followed and just as he was zipping it, he decided to include a pair of jeans and a shirt. He had a few hours before he was to meet with the doctor, and with the bag and a third cup of coffee, he decided to stop by his office to try to catch up on some overdue work.

Boston, MA  
Saturday Early Morning

Ruby closed her suitcase and took another look around the room that she had shared with Emma and Ashley until they were 18 and moved into their first apartment together. So many memories within these walls, she thought. From gossiping about boys to experimenting with make-up, they had shared the highs and lows of each other's lives. And even though other kids had come and gone in the Home, they had remained constants, always together. Always there for each other. Sisters in every way but blood.
Pushing away from the bed, she walked over to the window seat where her raggedy doll, dressed in red, sat next to Ashley's, dressed in blue and Emma's, dressed in white. "We made quite the team, didn't we Annie?" She crooned to her doll, hugging her close to her chest.

These days the doll's answers weren't so readily heard as they were when she was ten, but the comfort she derived from holding her tight almost had her stuffing the doll into her suitcase. Only the little smirk that she'd be sure to get from Victor prevented it, and when the doll just gazed at her with its wide blue eyes, after another hug, she kissed its forehead softly and set it back on the cushion. She had confided just about as many secrets to the doll as she had to Ashley and Emma, and as they moved their separate ways, it was a little frightening.

Her attention shifted to the bookcase, which sat next to the window, holding an eclectic array of books. There were tattered copies of Charlotte's Web and Black Beauty next to Harry Potter. All were well read and well-loved and many eliciting discussions long into the night. As her eye moved down the shelves, she saw her Little Red Riding Hood next to Ashley's Cinderella. A quick glance confirmed what she had already known - that Emma's fairytale books were missing, which wasn't really surprising as she had loved them best of all.

Knowing it was about time to leave for Emma's graduation, Ruby turned back to the bed, picked up her suitcase, and just as she moved to walk out of the room, her eyes landed on a picture that had been taken when they were twelve or thirteen. Ruby, as the tallest, stood in the center flanked by Emma and Ashley, all wearing huge grins and shirts that said, "All for one, and one for all."

"I wonder," she murmured, remembering their treasure box they had hidden not long after the picture was taken. Her suitcase was dropped, and she was in the closet, searching for the loose board before she even realized she had moved. When she found it, using the palm of her hand, she popped it up enough to move the board aside and pulled out the small box that held their treasures.

A quick glance at the clock assured her that, even though time was short, she still had a few moments for nostalgia. After all, she was leaving for six months and when she returned life would look different. Ashley and Sean were thinking of moving outside of Boston, Emma and Killian were moving to New York and she was...well she hoped she would be planning her own wedding. A lot of changes in a short time were bound to bring on a little melancholy, right?

Reverently, the lid was removed and set aside. Inside she found three mood rings and slipped one on her finger, wondering if it still turned colors. There were hair ribbons, an old necklace, a pet rock, sunglasses and a picture Emma had drawn of herself standing next to Snow White and Prince Charming. The last thing in the box was their old Magic 8 Ball. Memories of them asking it about grades and clothes and friends bombarded her, and feeling her eyes glass over, had to blink several times to clear her vision.

Hearing Blue calling her to come help, she quickly reloaded the box, noticing that, indeed, her mood ring had turned dark blue. *That's a good sign,* she thought as she picked up the ball to drop it into the box, but couldn't resist asking it, "Have I met my Prince Charming?" It's answer, "Yes, definitely," put such a huge smile on her face, she couldn't help but ask it another question. "Is Emma getting her happy ever after?" The resulting message sent a chill through her body.

University Hospital
Newark, NJ
Saturday Mid-Morning

When Liam arrived at the hospital a little before he was to meet with Doctor Hopper, his first inclination was to go directly to Killian's room. He needed to see with his own eyes that Killian was
indeed awake and that he hadn't merely been dreaming it were true. But as luck would have it, when he stepped off the elevator, the doctor was standing at the nurse's station waiting for him.

"Mr. Jones, I'm happy to see you. Come with me."

His abrupt greeting took Liam a little aback, but he followed the doctor around a corner and into an empty room, anxious to hear what he had to say. "How is Killian?" he blurted without preamble.

When Doctor Hopper crossed his arms, leaned against the counter and looked at him from under his glasses, Liam prepared himself to hear the worst.

"Medically, your brother is doing surprisingly well. All his tests came back within normal ranges and I don't anticipate any residual damage. He's very fortunate, but..."

He hesitated just a tad too long for Liam's comfort. "But what? What is it you're not telling me?" His rapid speech was the only external sign of his anxiousness whereas internally his pulse was quickly escalating and his breathing becoming shallower by the minute.

The doctor must have realized how his comment had sounded because he immediately responded, "No, no. Killian is fine. But he's insisting that he's checking out of the hospital today. I'm hoping you can talk some sense into him."

A relieved laugh burst out before he could stop it, and regaining a little decorum, he smiled at the doctor. "I'm sorry, Doctor," he shook his head at the thought, "but Killian stopped listening to me a long time ago. However, I'm willing to try."

Doctor Hopper nodded. "I certainly understand, as many times patients refuse to listen to family members when it comes to their care, unless of course," he took off his glasses and proceeded to clean them, "they're married. Sometimes that helps, but not always. Now here's what he's saying..."

~~~CS~~~

Killian watched the lass as she tightened the brace around his knee one more time.

"How does that feel?" she asked as she handed him a crutch to use for support.

"How do you think it feels?" He growled. "It feels fine. Now can I walk?"

"Mr. Jones," she began in a placating tone, "your knee..."

Killian tried for patience but after what he had endured in the twelve-plus hours he had been awake, those reserves were all but depleted. "I'm not bloody daft," he interrupted her explanation, "I heard you the first and the second time. Now can I walk?"

She inclined her head in agreement and helped him stand while supporting some of his weight. "Here's the crutch. Don't try to move right away. Let me know if you feel light headed."

Killian had to admit, but only to himself, that his body seemed weaker than a newborn babe's and that the room had taken on the feel of an amusement park ride, but once he started breathing through the pain, he felt stronger. Digging deep down inside, he put one foot in front of the other, and with the persistence and fortitude that he had learned from his parents, he walked across the room and back before collapsing onto the side of the bed. He had sweat pouring down his face, but refused to show pain, instead giving the therapist a cheeky smile. "Satisfied?"

Her glance told him that she was used to people behaving rudely when she was only trying to help,
but he needed out of this bloody place. There was someone in Boston that needed him, and he was
tired of waiting. "Mr. Jones," she sighed as she took the crutch and leaned it against the bed. "You
must remember all the instructions I gave you. Do not overtire yourself."

"I'm not likely to forget them as you've repeated them ad nauseum since you walked through that
door. Are we done?"

Killian watched her as she cleaned up her work paraphernalia and picked up his chart to make notes.
Was she one of the ones he'd heard speaking about the accident before he woke? That they were
outside his room and not right next to his bed had prevented him from hearing more clearly, but the
words he did hear, they nearly tore him apart. Those words seemed to add validity to what he heard
Liam say. And while unclear on what day the conversation had occurred, the meaning was very
clear. Emma was dead and not coming back to him.

Since waking last night and seeing his red-headed doctor, he hadn't felt like doing much talking. He
had asked about Robin but hadn't had the strength to ask about Emma, because…he already knew
the answer. Talking about it just made it more real and he wasn't strong enough to deal with the fact
that he would never see his Swan again. Never hold her in his arms again…except in his dreams.
There she was always waiting for him.

The lass closed the chart, picked up her bag of equipment and checked the brace one more time
before conspicuously leaving an ice pack nearby and exiting the room. As soon as the door closed
behind her, Killian let out the breath he had been holding and allowed his shoulders to droop with
fatigue. Only alone would he allow the pain that was his constant companion to surface, as it could
be construed as a weakness. And he had no time for being weak. He had lost too much here in this
place and each day he remained here, he felt his soul slowly being sucked away. Now, the strength
he gained from having Emma's love wrapped around him had become even more important. He had
to borrow on that strength to get on his feet enough to get back to Boston, because he knew what he
needed in order to heal could no longer be found here.

As soon as the throbbing in his leg had become nothing but a dull ache, he contemplated using the
ice pack. But his hope was that as soon as Liam arrived, he would be able to leave and to do that he
needed - a shower. The question was, could he make it on his own?

He eyed the bathroom door some six feet away and, positioning the crutch, he used it and the bed
railing to manipulate himself onto his feet. From there it was a less than a dozen miserable steps
before he reached the door and entered the tiny room. With no normal clothing to put on after
showering, he took a couple of the arse-showing gowns and dropped them on the counter for easy
reach. A flick of the wrist started the steamy water and, dropping the offending gown, he stepped in.

~~~CS~~~

As he walked toward Killian's room, Liam found himself rubbing an imaginary spot over his heart
where Doctor Hopper had inadvertently shoved a dagger. His words, while innocent, had really
brought his poor judgment right back and planted it squarely in his lap. The universe, it seemed, had
decided that it was time for him to man-up, and he was feeling like it had brought everyone
surrounding him to the party. Now, the words, "unless they're married," kept reverberating inside his
head, echoing louder and louder with each step he took until he had no choice but to confront them
head on. And what did he find?

His discovery was that the good doctor was probably right. Had Emma been in the same hospital
instead of across the country, Killian would have been willing to stay. He might have insisted that
they share a room, but he would have been willing to cooperate and not so quick to leave University
Hospital.
What Liam hadn't uncovered in his musings was just how Killian even knew where she was, or that she had gone away for treatment. As far as he was aware, no one even knew about the others in the car. In fact, Doctor Hopper had mentioned that Killian had asked about Robin, and that had been the first time he had heard that name. Who, then, was talking out of turn? And now that Killian knew she was in Seattle, and Liam's less than chivalrous part in her transfer, would Killian's willingness to listen to his story be affected?

~~~CS~~~

Killian tied one gown in back and then slipped the other on in reverse, allowing himself some semblance of modesty. Getting the brace back on in such a confined space proved difficult, but once he had succeeded, he felt better than he had since he'd been awake. They had moved him all over the hospital, allowing every machine possible to study his brain, and following that, several others had asked him the same bloody things over and over again. It had been many grueling hours of questioning and by the time he returned to his room, he had been glad Liam hadn't been there waiting for him. Having to keep up his front of 'being normal' would have been too difficult, mostly because he knew that true normal was asking the impossible.

~~~CS~~~

Liam had been waiting for several minutes when Killian emerged from the washroom. The only outward signs of his accident were the tiny cuts left on his face, the knee brace and crutch, and the pallor of his skin. "Killian, I'm so relieved you're awake." He quickly moved to Killian's side to give him a hug and when Killian remained passive in his arms prepared himself to explain.

"Aye, I'm awake." Killian answered matter-of-factly. "Did you bring me some clothes?"

Taken aback at his brusque tone, Liam held the bag out toward him, studying his face for some sign of what he was thinking or feeling. Without saying anything further, the bag was slipped over a shoulder and Killian retreated back behind closed doors, leaving him to try to piece together what had just happened and how to approach the conversation that would be the start of making things right between them, as brothers.

~~~CS~~~

Killian collapsed against the closed door and felt tears spring to his eyes. He had known it would be difficult to be near Liam, but discussing Emma with him, knowing how Liam felt about her, was too hard. In his current condition, the strength he needed to process all of those emotions just wasn't there. With every cell in his body vibrating with pain, the only other overwhelming emotion he had room for was anger. He was angry at himself, at Liam, at the doctors and even, god help him, at Emma; feelings he hadn't had he lost his parents. "How am I going to get through this?" he whispered to the silent room, fighting against the need to slide down onto the cold hard floor and sob.

He was unsure how long he had been in there before he heard rapping on the door followed by Liam's voice, "Killian, you alright?" and realized he needed to get dressed and get his brother to take him to the airport. It was time to go.

~~~CS~~~

The second time Killian emerged from the washroom, he was fully dressed with his brace over his jeans, leaning heavily on the crutch. And even though the look on his brother's face reminded him of the stubborn man he'd seen in the mirror for too many years, Liam took a deep breath and wandered into the minefield. "Killian, we need to talk about Emma," he blurted out.
Killian's head lifted quickly, his blue eyes steely as they bore into him. "No, we don't." His words were measured, almost as if he were in pain. "I know about Emma."

Liam couldn't quite connect the pain in Killian's voice with the knowledge of Emma's whereabouts, because she was getting the best care possible. If anything, he expected anger for the way he had behaved as an arsehole for years, and hadn't even succeeded in caring for Emma properly. "But Killian, Emma is-

He hadn't been aware that an injured man could move as quickly as Killian did, but before he had even finished the sentence, Killian was snarling in his face, "Do not mention her name to me. When I am ready to talk, you will know. Sound familiar?"

Liam was thrown right back into that room he had been hiding in after finding Lily and discovering her duplicitous nature, and it hit him this time like a punch to the gut. His brother was behaving exactly like him. He was pulled back to the present when he heard Killian say, "We'll be right there," and then hang up the phone.

"Where are you going, Killian?"

Killian gave him a hard stare as he turned toward the door. "To sign myself out of this place and then to the airport. You taking me or do I get a cab?" he asked before he vanished out the door.

Liam took a look around the room and picked up the bag, slipping it over his shoulder. "Pot, meet Kettle," he murmured as he followed.

Seattle-Grace Hospital
Seattle, WA
Early Saturday Morning PST

Mary Margaret didn't usually go into the hospital on Saturday, but after her session with Emma, and the glimpses into Emma's memories, she felt that a breakthrough could happen at any time. Dropping her bag in her office, she took the elevator to the fourth floor, and when she arrived at Emma's room, the sight that greeted her nearly broke her heart.

Emma was sitting up in bed, her sketch pad on her lap, head bowed, her shoulders shaking as giant, silent sobs shook her body. Knowing that she should never get so emotionally attached to a patient but realizing she was too far gone, Mary Margaret did the only thing she could do. She took the lost girl in her arms and let her cry until no more tears were left.

As Emma's tears quieted, Mary Margaret handed her a tissue, watching as she wiped her eyes, blew her nose, and once again gained control. "Do you want to tell me about it?" In her experience talking about one's feelings helped, however, when it was suspected that feelings or emotions were the cause of what brought the patient to her, it became more of a delicate matter.

Emma's silence was almost off-putting, but watching the emotions flit across her face told her all she needed to know. When she handed over the sketchbook, her face telling a story of its own, Mary Margaret was almost hesitant to look down, but once she did, a smile graced her face as she gazed back at the patient. "You remembered this?"

Emma hesitantly nodded her head. Studying the picture, Mary Margaret was once again in awe of the talent exhibited before her. Emma had drawn three girls standing close together, arms around each other, as if a team, and huge smiles on their faces. "Is this you?" She pointed to one of the girls on the end. Emma shook her head yes. "This is excellent work. Were you awake when the memory returned?"
Emma reached for the ever-present whiteboard and wrote, "No. Dream."

"Ah, ok. Let's see if you can remember more about this time in your life, alright?"

Nodding her head eagerly, Mary Margaret gently prodded at the edges of Emma's brain, asking subtle questions about the picture. Emma remembered generalities; she felt happy and carefree, the other girls were her best friends and they had eaten snow cones, each of them liking a different flavor. "Search the picture in your mind Emma," Mary Margaret instructed, "can you hear their names?"

She watched as Emma closed her eyes and waited. When she opened them, her response was immediate, in that she grabbed the sketch pad and drew another object next to them, before writing something next to the two girls that were not her. When she handed over the sketch pad, Mary Margaret read the names, "Red and Ella," thinking nicknames, but a wonderful start. Her eyes were then drawn to the new object that had been drawn. "And this, Emma. Do you remember playing with this?"

Emma shook her head and pointed to Red and Ella. "You remember playing with it alongside Red and Ella?"

Another nod. "Do you remember what it's called?"

This time, Emma shook her head indicating that she didn't remember. "It's called a Magic 8 Ball."

Boston, MA
Saturday Late Morning

With Blue's assurances that if anything had happened to Emma, they would know, ringing in her ears, Ruby had allowed herself to be swept up helping to set up for the post-graduation festivities. They cleaned and rearranged furniture and then hung streamers and decorated several tables. Finger foods that didn't need refrigeration were arranged on one and a place for a wedding cake that would be delivered later was made on another.

Ruby moved from group to group, helping fill balloons with helium in one place to supplying tape to a group hanging signs of congratulations in another. She tied ribbons on balloons and attached them to chairs and railings. She lifted the smaller children up so they could help with decorating and carted a large trash bag around collecting the wrapping that had been dropped on the floor in the excitement.

Eventually, the melancholy returned and taking a bunch of balloons and a roll of streamers, Ruby left the chaos of the house for the quiet oasis in the backyard. The minute she stepped out the door, the peacefulness of the surroundings calmed her as they had so often when she was growing up. She quickly decorated the porch railing with the balloons and streamers and then made her way to the swing that had been hanging from a large tree branch for as long as she could remember. The same tree she remembered climbing as a child to peer through the branches and that she used to hide behind during hide-and-seek. It was the same tree under which she, Ashley and Emma used to spread a blanket and play with their dolls.

"Ashley," Ruby smiled at her friend as she smoothed out her doll's dress, "meet, Annie. What did you name yours?"

Ashley picked up one of Ruby's doll's hands. "Pleased to meet ya, Annie," she giggled before she stood her doll up, too. "Meet Ella."
"Well hello, Ella," Ruby greeted the doll in a high-pitched voice. "How are you?"

Ruby remembered Emma hadn't been outside with them because she had been sick with a fever, and Blue had suggested they let Emma sleep. However, as was usually the case without their third musketeer, they had quickly gotten bored and packed up their dolls, ending up on the floor of their bedroom, while Emma and her doll had played from afar.

"Ready, Ella?" Annie asked her new friend.

"I'm ready, Annie," answered Ella. "Let's go find out what our new neighbor's name is."

"Yes, let's," Annie agreed as they started walking toward the 'house' next door. "Knock, knock," Ruby made the sound as if her doll were knocking.

Emma had picked up her doll and walked her across the blanket on her bed and pretended to open a door. "Hello."

"Welcome to the neighborhood," Annie said to the new friend, "I'm Annie and this is Ella."

"Thank you," the new friend said. "It's nice to meet you, Ella, Annie. My name is Kate."

"Hello, Kate," they said in unison.

"Such good memories," Ruby murmured as she came back to the present when she heard Henry calling her name. "Coming, Henry."

Seattle Grace Hospital  
Seattle, WA  
Saturday Late Morning

*Her eyes cataloged what they saw looking back at her in the mirror. Long, blonde hair lying limp against her skull, bright green eyes rimmed by huge purple bruises and a swollen face covered with...yes, more bruises, these ranging in colors from the darkest purple to the lightest yellow.*

"Who am I?" She asked the face silently.

"Your name is Emma Swan," the doctor with the kind blue eyes had told her.

"But who is Emma Swan?" she pleaded. "Why don't I remember her?"

He hadn't said anything more because, really, what could he say? He had just continued watching her, but not with pity in his eyes. They had contained concern, care and even empathy.

The eyes in the mirror, though, they looked lost, and even though she had been told that her name was Emma Swan, she couldn't connect that name with any familiarity. "Are you sure?" She asked again, the pain and frustration evident even inside her own head.

"Yes. Trust us." This time she could hear another voice added to his. Mary Margaret, the woman with the soft eyes and gentle voice, had joined them. "It will come, Emma. We will work on it, together."

Together? Why did that sound so familiar? But the words were just slightly off, different than what Mary Margaret had said, but they were stuck inside her head. With the word reverberating inside her mind, she crawled onto the uncomfortable bed and fell into a restless sleep.
She dreamed she was standing next to a large tree, its branches stretching tall toward the sky. She could see a swing hanging on one side of the tree and if she listened carefully, she could hear the tinkling laughter of other children. Backing away from the trunk, she looked up into the branches to see the face of someone looking back at her. With a mischievous grin, the face disappeared from view.

"Wait. Wait. Come back." But before she had even finished her thought, the scene had faded from view.

Tired and feeling alone, she curled up into a ball as tight as possible and allowed herself a few moments of grief. It seemed that she had just settled when she heard, "Hello," being called faintly, ever so faintly.

"Hello. What is your name?" a disembodied voice called quietly to her right.

She turned quickly to ask them whom they were talking to before they faded from sight, just like the other scenes she had pictured, and then lost just as quickly. But before she could give voice to her question, from her left another voice filled the air, "My name is Kate."

The voice was so close and so familiar that she whipped her head to the left and found herself looking into...a much younger version of herself holding a raggedy doll. "My name is Kate," the young girl said again.

"Kate," she repeated. It felt right. "Kate," she said again. This time it felt more familiar. "Kate," she said a third time, and the name felt more comfortable still. She needed that. She needed to feel comfortable with the person she was right now. "My name is Kate. It's Kate." She felt like she had taken ownership of it and for the first time since she had woken up in this place, she felt a glimmer of hope.

Her eyes popped open, and taking her sketch pad, she drew the scene with the girl in the tree. She wasn't positive, but thought maybe she had drawn that girl before. Next to the tree, she drew a simple sketch of her younger self and the doll and then wrote next to it, "My name is Kate Swan."

As she studied that name, she realized that the graceful, elegant Swan name no longer fit the person she saw in the mirror. She needed a name that made her feel comfortable and safe. With that thought, she marked out the entire sentence and tried again. Once she had completed the task, she put away the pencils and promptly fell into a deep sleep where she waited for the eyes to come to her.

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An hour later, David Nolan stopped by to check on his new patient and found her drawing lying on the bed, as if waiting for inspection. "Oh, no," he whispered as he read what she had written.

He decided that Mary Margaret needed to see the new development and slowly slipped the paper out of the book to take with him. "I hope this isn't a permanent problem," he murmured.

She had written, "My name is Kate Blue."

Hospital for Special Surgery
New York, NY
Saturday, Early Afternoon

Regina stood outside the door of the rehabilitation room and watched Will put Robin through the paces of learning to transfer from the bed to a chair and back again. With every try, his moves
became easier and more natural, but with his shirt sticking to chest, she could tell the exertion was taking its toll and he would tire soon. She knew he was pushing himself because he wanted to get out of the hospital, but she also worried about him. She didn't want him to push so hard as to risk injury because, according to his doctors, he was on schedule to be discharged before the following weekend. She was looking forward to taking him home so they could see where things would go between them.

And then there were the two pieces of news her mother had shared with her. While both inadvertently involved Killian, one more directly than the other, she knew as soon as she told Robin, he was going to be anxious to speak with Killian himself. The fact that their line of communication had been cut off since the accident had been difficult for him. He needed to assure himself that his friend of many years was okay, and that Robin cared so deeply made her love him even more.

And the second piece of news, while not entirely a shock, did surprise her just a little as she thought Nemo would want to hang around and make sure that all was well with Killian and Emma. However, according to her mother, they were flying out bright and early the next day to spend the summer traveling wherever the whim took them. Her mother even said that during part of the trip, they might not even have the ability to communicate with the outside world. Afraid of what her mother's answer would be if she had questioned more, Regina had instead wished them well and hung up the phone.

And now, they had to not only worry about Killian and where he was flying off to, but why no one seemed to have any information about Emma's injuries. That, in and of itself, was a bit concerning. Her current working theory was that Blue had been notified of Emma's accident and had her moved back to Boston to be close to her friends. Deciding it would be a good time to catch up with Elsa before any other interruptions occurred, Regina dialed her number. It would be a good way to pass the time while she waited for Robin to finish his therapy.

Boston, MA
Saturday, Mid-Afternoon

"Elsa," she heard Anna call her name in a voice just a little too loud.

"Go 'way," she managed to mumble before settling a little deeper into her pillow.

"Elsa. Wake up!" Anna repeated a little louder, and this time added shaking her shoulder, making her feel like she was on a boat being tossed around by high waves.

Elsa swallowed hard to push down the bile that had risen in her throat and cracked open one eye. When the spinning room joined the bell choir in her head, she groaned and shut her eye again.
"Later… Wake later…"

"Elsa. Your phone has been vibrating like crazy. Weren't you going to Emma's graduation? What did you have to drink?" Everything was blurted out in one breath.

When Anna was excited, she often spoke quickly, but Elsa had always been able to understand her. Today, however, it felt like her thoughts were mired in molasses. Taking them apart piece by piece, she bypassed the part about her phone and went straight to Emma's graduation. Was she going to the graduation? "Ugh," she groaned as she pushed up into a sitting position and had a moment of panic before remembering that she wasn't going to the ceremony but just to the party. "I must be coming down with something. What time is it?"

"Around 3:00, I think. And you didn't answer. What did you drink last night?" She humphed and handed over two Tylenol and a glass of water.
Draining the glass, Elsa handed it to Anna and buried her face in her hands, waiting for the medication to stop the pounding in her head. "I just had some New York Iced Tea, that's all. Why do you keep asking me what I had to drink? You know that I only have a little wine now and then."

"True, but this time I'm asking because the girls who brought you home last night were all giggly and said, "Oh don't mind her, she had too much to drink." She shook her head and handed Elsa a plate with a dry piece of toast on it. "Here, eat this."

Picking up the toast, Elsa absently nibbled on it while thinking over what Anna had said. "But that can't be right. I told you, I was just drinking New York Iced Teas." She dropped the half-eaten toast back on the plate and prayed it stayed down.

"Elsa," Anna prodded gently, "by New York Iced Teas, do you mean Long Island Iced Teas?"

All of a sudden Elsa had a quick memory of the cute guy behind the bar saying, "Whatever you want to call them, doll, but be careful as they pack a punch." And she had giggled. She groaned again. "Maybe a hot shower before the party will help." Slowly, she pushed off the sofa, which apparently was as far as she made it when she got home, and headed toward the bathroom.

"Don't you want to check your phone? It might be important," Anna called to her just before she left the room.

Did she want to check the messages now? Not really. "I'll check them when I get out. It's probably just Ruby wanting me to pick up some last-minute item." With that, she shut the door and hoped a hot shower was powerful magic for what ailed her.

Harvard Campus
Boston, MA
Saturday, Late Afternoon

Henry sat next to Ruby on the hard metal chair, swinging his feet back and forth. He was feeling uncomfortable because he had to wear a shirt and a tie and he didn't like its tight fit. He had tried using Killian’s motto of it being important for his chest to breathe, but Blue had rolled her eyes at him and told him to get dressed. That had been hours ago, and now here he sat being strangled by his tie, even though secretly he felt very important that he was the only kid who had been invited to Emma and Killian's graduation.

"Ruby," he whispered, "when does it start?"

She smiled down at him and patted him on the leg. "Oh, not for a while yet."

"Then why," he frowned at her, "are we here so early?"

"Because, silly," she grinned, "we wanted a good seat."

Henry looked around at the sea of people sitting around him and mentally shrugged his shoulders. *If she says so*, he thought as he went back to swinging his legs to see how close he could get to the chair in front of him without actually touching it. When he accidentally kicked it and the lady sitting in there turned around and gave him a dirty look, he gave her what Blue always referred to as his charming smile. He thought about continuing the game, but when Ruby laid her hand on his leg, he humphed and stopped. *Adults can be so annoying*, he thought as he tucked his hands under his legs and resumed looking around.

But that thought brought him to the way that Blue, Ruby and even Marion had been acting all week
since they had told him that Emma and Killian had gone away for a few days. They thought that just because he was a kid, he didn't notice these things, but he was ten-years-old, after all. Something was up, he was sure of it, and those extra decorations at the Home were a part of it.

"Ruby," he leaned closer, "why are there so many people here?"

"Because there are a lot of people graduating," she answered.

He thought that over for a few seconds before asking, "So how does this graduation work?"

"Well," she began in a patient voice, "in a minute all of the graduates will come in and sit down. Then there will be speeches. Then they will call out names, and once the graduates leave, then we can too."

"This is going to take forever, isn't it?" he sighed.

"Probably," she agreed. "Want to play something on my phone while we wait?"

"I guess," he grunted. Her phone didn't have as many fun games on it as his did, but it was better than nothing. Settling on one, he kept busy until the music started and he could keep an eye out for Emma, Killian and Robin.

**Hospital for Special Surgery**  
**New York, NY**  
**Saturday, Late Afternoon**

Robin had known the minute Regina appeared outside the rehab room, and when she didn't immediately come inside assumed she was allowing him time to complete his therapy. But when she shoved her phone in her pocket and he caught the frown that made its way across her face, he knew there was more to the picture.

"We 'bout done here, Will? My lady looks lonely."

Will looked toward where Regina was standing and back at Robin. "Look like a lovesick fool, you do."

"That's because I am," Robin agreed cheekily. "We done? I need to say hello properly."

Will smirked at his comment. "Ere, 'ere. None of that 'ere in the 'ospital."

"Not even a little?" Robin inquired, "Especially if she's the love of your life," he finished quietly.

"Like that, is it?" Robin nodded his head. "Then I say, if you're lucky enough to find someone that you love, and she loves you, you grab on with both hands and don't let go."

"Oh, I don't plan on letting go...ever." Robin finished just as the lady in question walked up.

"What are you two so deep in discussion about?" Regina asked them, lifting a thin eyebrow.

*Her prissy voice,* thought Robin, reaching for her hand to draw her close, *really turned him on.* Of course, if he told her that, she might very well tell him to sod off, so he just grinned and kissed her hand. "Oh, we were just discussing what type of behaviors might not be appropriate in the hospital. Would you like to guess?" He did his best to give her a lascivious smile, and when she blushed knew he had succeeded.
"Oh? I'm sure I can guess." She cut her eyes away from his to look around the room as if afraid of what else might be said.

Her insecurities were so endearing that he found it difficult not to pull her down onto his lap and show her a thing or two that might not be appropriate in the hospital, but things he really wanted to experience with her. "Am I free to go, Will?" he asked without dragging his eyes away from Regina.

Will sighed dramatically, "Off with you, then," and turned the wheelchair handles toward Regina. "See you Monday."

"Thanks, Will," Robin called as Regina pushed the chair out of the rehab room and into the hallway.

"Where to, Robin? Do you want to get some fresh air?

Did he want to go outside where there might be dozens of other families visiting on a Saturday afternoon or back to the privacy of his room? "Can we go back to the room first?"

She didn't say anything as she pushed him back to his room, but he could tell something was on her mind. He hoped that once they were settled where it was quiet, she would open up to him about what was going on to cause such a frown.

"Here we are." She pushed his chair over beside the window. "Would you like something to drink?"

He nodded his head and watched her get him a glass of water, and while he drank it, she kept tucking her hair behind her ear and worrying the lipstick off her lips. He handed the cup back for her to set on the table and when she turned back his way, he pulled her down onto the arm of the chair and back into his arms. "This is what I really need," he said against her lips just before taking possession of them. The minute she gave in, he kissed her with the pent-up feelings he'd been holding onto. After longing for her for months, being with her but not really with her was rather hard and if they didn't stop, painful might have to be added to the description.

She felt so good in his arms, he groaned with pleasure, not realizing it could have misinterpreted when she pushed out of his arms and stood up. "Robin, I'm sorry," she apologized. "Are you in pain? Should I call the nurse?"

He gave her a cheeky smile and pointedly looked down at his lap and back up at her. "I'm not sure this kind of pain fits under her job description, do you?"

When she realized what he had said, her eyes widened in surprise and her cheeks blushed. "Oh, you," she exclaimed quietly.

"I'll behave," he promised. "Sit with me and tell me why you were frowning earlier."

**Boston, MA**  
**Saturday Late Afternoon**

When Elsa came out of the bathroom with a head that was only slightly pounding, she considered it a win. She settled into an overstuffed chair and, with her feet tucked underneath her, leaned her head against the back. "How could I be so dumb?"

"Oh, that's easy," Anna piped up

Elsa lifted her head giving her sister a dirty look. "Gee, thanks."

Anna grinned and shrugged her shoulder. "You're welcome. Now check your phone. Do you need
me, cause if not I'm off to the hospital?" She gathered her things, ready to leave no matter what the answer ended up being.

Elsa figured there was more to that story than she knew but decided it could wait 'til another day. "I'm good. Where's my phone?"

Picking it up off the table, Anna tossed it in her lap and was out the door with only a brief wave.

Elsa stared at the closed door and again wondered what was going on with Anna, but with a shake of her head she mentally saved it for later. Picking up her phone, she looked at it expecting to see a message from Ruby asking her to pick up something for the party. Instead there were multiple messages from Regina as well as a voicemail:

"Elsa, It's Regina. I'm sorry that I disappeared with no warning, but something happened. Give me a call when you get this message and I'll try to explain."

"Oh no," Elsa murmured as she dialed Regina's cell phone. "Pick up. Come on, pick up," she chanted over and over.

"Hello," she heard Regina answer somewhat breathlessly.

"Regina. It's Elsa. What happened?" As the entire story came out, Elsa found herself unable to sit still and, pushing up, paced back and forth in front of the chair.

She learned about Robin and that he was in a hospital in New York City. Regina then went on to explain that Killian had been in a coma for a few days but had awakened and been taken to Newark airport. There the story got murkier as no one knew exactly where he had gone.

But that wasn't the biggest mystery. The biggest mystery surrounded Emma and her injuries. Because everyone knew that if Emma had still been in the hospital, Killian would have been by her side. Not wanting to jump to any conclusions until she had talked to Killian, she shoved the worry aside for the moment but the question remained. What had become of Emma?

"Oh, Regina. How awful for you to have to get that call. But I'm glad Robin has you. How are things between you two?" Elsa was curious as to how much Regina would confess now that her title as Robin's professor was over.

"Things are good, Elsa. In fact, really good. He's going to stay with me when he's discharged from here."

"I'm so happy to hear that. You both deserve such happiness. Do you mind if I speak with Robin a minute, just to assure myself he's fine?"

She heard Regina hand Robin the phone, and their conversation was so intimate and so different from the last time that she had seen them together that she couldn't stop the smile that spread across her face nor the tears that filled her eyes. They had waited so long to be together and now, though tragedy had struck, they had each other. "Elsa?" her friend's voice came through the line. "How are you?"

"How am I, you big dumbass? How are you? I really should kick your ass when I see you for not letting me know about the accident sooner. I'm so mad at you," she sniffed, "but very happy that you finally got the girl."

Robin chuckled, "Breathe, Elsa. You sounded a bit too much like Anna there for a second. I'm fine and I'm sorry you worried." She heard him ask Regina what day it was before he continued, "How
was graduation?"

"It was graduation. But tell me about you." She learned a little more about what was in his near future, medically and that he hoped to be out of the hospital the following week.

She promised him that as soon as they hung up, she would go see if she could track down Killian.

She heard Robin hand the phone back to Regina. "He's really okay?"

Elsa could hear the smile in Regina’s voice, "He's more than okay, Elsa. But yes, he's going to be fine. He's getting great care, and when I get him home I'm going to give him even better care."

She overheard Robin make a suggestive remark. "Hey TMI!" she exclaimed, "I didn't need to hear that!" and laughed at Regina scolding Robin. They are going to be just fine, she thought before pulling her thoughts back to her other friend involved in the accident. "What can I do from this end?"

"You really didn't know anything about the accident?" Regina had taken control of the phone again and the tone of her voice said she had expected someone else had relayed the information about the accident.

"No, nothing." She chewed on her bottom lip thinking that right now, Ruby, Henry, and Blue were waiting for Emma's name to be called at graduation. "Which means that neither do Ruby or Blue or any of Emma's other friends. I need to go and let them know."

"Thanks, Elsa. Please call or send a text if you find Killian or if you find out anything about Emma."

Hanging up the phone, Elsa felt a sense of urgency take hold and ran to the bedroom to throw on a pair of jeans and an old shirt. She had just slipped on her sneakers when there was a knock at the door. On the way to answer it, she drew a brush through her still wet hair and pulled it into a high ponytail. When she opened the door, all rational responses flew out of her head as she was left gasping at the sight before her.

Killian Jones, who always looked put together, was anything but. He was on his feet, but barely, his body seeming to sag against the wall and his knuckles standing out white where he was gripping the crutch too tightly. His face was pale against his dark beard that had grown long and scraggly, and when he opened his eyes, his haunted gaze pierced her very soul. She knew before he even opened his mouth that it was going to be bad. "Killian?" she whispered brokenly as the tears sprang to her eyes.

He swallowed audibly, obviously attempting to hold himself under control. "The key, Elsa. Please tell me you have the key." His whisper was that of a soul who had been tortured and was hanging on by a minuscule thread.

She felt a tear trickle over, spilling down her cheek as she reached on a shelf and picked up Emma's extra key. With measured steps, she advanced toward him, handing it to him carefully. "Emma? Killian, where's Emma?"

He closed his eyes, and with moisture leaking from the corners, whispered words she expected, but she wasn't ready to hear, "She's gone, Elsa. Emma is gone."

The shock of the words hit her with such force her phone fell out of her hands and bounced on the stairs, shattering. She couldn't move, feeling as if she were paralyzed with her feet nailed in place. Unsure what to say or how to comfort this man who had loved her friend more than life itself, she reached out to squeeze his arm, but he shrank away from her comfort.
"I can't. I need time." His body sagged even further as he turned away to open the door.

Her mind was going in a million directions, thinking of all the things that needed to be done. "Has anyone notified Blue?" she finally asked him. When he shook his head no, she decided that she would do this for her friend. "I'll handle it. Do you need anything?"

He didn't say anything right away, just leaned his forehead against the door of their apartment. Finally, he lifted his head and whispered so softly, that she had to strain to hear him, "Emma. I just need Emma."

New York City, NY  
Saturday, Early Evening

On the way to Newark International Airport, Liam had tried several times to get Killian to open up to him, but the way every attempt was shut down, it seemed that the brothers had truly switched places. This time, Killian was the one who wouldn't listen or talk, which reiterated what a wanker Liam had been for years. And now within the span of a week, his brother and the woman he planned to make his wife had unknowingly started mending the pieces that had once been his heart; the heart that had shattered on that fateful day when he had walked into his apartment and found that his ideas of love and commitment were not the same as the woman he had married. He was finally admitting that he had become a bitter man who cared for no one's feelings but his own and who had treated his only living family as if he was still the lad he needed to protect. The man he had become was not someone he liked looking at in the mirror. Was he strong enough to put his heart and his family back together again?

Arriving home, he dropped his phone, keys and wallet on the table next to the door and immediately walked to the large set of windows lining one side. As dusk settled over the city, the lights spread out before him, reaching as far as the eye could see. And here he stood all alone, which was just what he deserved.

He had stopped by the office, thinking since it was Saturday, he might as well catch up on some of the work he had put off while spending time at the hospital. But even that had proven to be a bad idea, as he had spent nearly the entire time staring off into space. His thoughts had been on Killian. Worrying about Killian, except...this time, it wasn't just Killian, but also Emma's well-being that occupied his mind. And that was a foreign concept for him, thinking of someone else. Caring about someone that he had never really met.

Finally accepting that he wasn't going to get any work done, he hadn't been ready to go home to a too-quiet place, and ended up at the gym. However, after only a mile on the treadmill, he had given it up and taken a walk through Central Park. Once again, as he walked his thoughts had been on Killian and Emma and the journey they had ahead of them. According to the doctor, Emma's injuries were substantial, and she would need a strong support system. Would Killian be all she needed? If not, and she needed more, was it possible that he, too, would be allowed into their circle? Could they forgive his behavior?

Emma and her wounds filled his mind, and wondering how long it would be before she was well, he turned on his laptop and researched her injuries. His findings led him to believe that by sometime in August, her broken bones would be healed and the surgeries to replace her facial bones and teeth would be completed. Meaning that before the fall, perhaps, they would have a chance to work together to be a family. Was that possible?

When the plastic bag with Emma's belongings caught his eye, he wondered if he had the courage to get to know her through the photos on her phone, something he hadn't had the strength to do just a
few days ago. The fact that it was still in his apartment and not with Killian brought to mind other questions. Why hadn't he given it to his brother? Had he worried he'd have to explain why he had it? Perhaps. Had he worried Killian would have demanded taking it to her right then? Possibly. But more than likely, it was because he hadn't been thinking about her, but about Killian and what Killian needed. Another situation where he had thought of his brother as a lad and not a man.

When the screen on her phone lit up with an incoming text, he blinked several times, wondering whom it was from. Did they know about the accident? Unable to stop himself, he opened the bag and pulled out the phone, holding it out in front of him as if it were going to explode in his hand if he moved too quickly or brought it too close. It vibrated again as he stared at it, and noticing that there were multiple messages, his thumb hovered over the screen...until...he slid it across, and the image would be forever engraved on his mind.

He was looking at a picture of a man and a woman who were so totally besotted with each other that the world around them seemed to not exist. The look, he was more than familiar with as it had been the same look his parents had given each other when they had been alive. A look that said you are my everything. A look, he acknowledged, that he had never shared with Lily. His little brother had been lucky to find the person who gave him that look. Damn, little brother, how did you get so lucky?

Scrolling through her photos, he began to get a feel of the woman behind the pretty face. There were pictures of her with not only Killian and Robin, but with other women. A brunette and two blondes, a redhead, all smiling or laughing. Several older women and children, even the little boy Liam vaguely remembered from the report he had been given. Was he Emma's as the investigator assumed?

Liam placed Emma's phone back inside the bag and tucked it into the corner of his desk. If Killian stayed in Seattle with her the entire time she was recuperating, then he had a few months to try to become a man that Killian could look in the eye and respect. To try to become that brother that he deserved. He was determined that when they arrived, he would be waiting with open arms and an open heart.

Boston, MA
Saturday Early Evening

As soon as Elsa was gone, Killian slipped the key in the lock and pushed open the door. He knew returning was going to hurt but nothing had prepared him for the distress he felt when the memories bombarded him the minute he stepped over the threshold. Kissing her against the door, loving her on the sofa, watching her sit at the table and study. One by one, the memories washed over him, causing him to feel so desolate that he was forced to lean on the sofa to maintain his balance.

When he pushed off, it took every ounce of strength he had left not to run out of the room but to move farther inside, closer to the spot where, during the last night they spent under this roof, he had asked her to marry him for the second time. But this time, he had slipped a ring on her finger. His words haunted him in how true they had proven to be.

"Swan, I know there are parts of our immediate future that are uncertain, but I want you to be sure of one thing. And that is that I will always, always be by your side."

However, he had failed her, and he had to live with that knowledge for the rest of his days. But how? How did one live without one's heart? She had been his heart, and without her in his arms and by his side, he felt that his heart had been ripped from his chest and crushed, a description that he had heard before from Liam. Was that the destiny of the Jones men? To forever be alone?
A few measured steps and his question was answered when his eye caught a picture of Emma, Henry and him, taken when they had gone whale watching. So, no, he might be without his mate, but he was not alone. There was Henry who needed him now...but could he give him everything he needed with a missing heart? After all, there was only one Killian Jones. Was there still enough to go around?

She's everywhere, he thought, as he picked up one of the sketch pads he never saw her without. The dates on the inside cover indicated the drawings were before he had moved to the states, but as with any of her work, he was immediately captivated. He found his eye drawn again and again to her renderings of Captain Hook and how closely her imagination had made him Killian Jones' twin, creating a feeling they had met in another realm and had been searching for their other halves to make them whole.

"And I did, Swan," he whispered as his finger traced the drawing, imagining he was holding Emma's hand as she moved it over the paper. "I searched my whole life to find you, and now..." the words died as a sob bubbled up inside and the pages blurred. The pain becoming too much to bear, he tossed the book aside, making his way to the bathroom to take a hot shower. As the water creaked through the old pipes, he took off the brace and groaned in pain as his knee protested. Dropping the clothes Liam had given him earlier, he stepped into the hot shower and let the steady pulsing spray pound against his aching head.

It didn't take long, though, for his mind to no longer find rest under the hot water, because as it splashed, Emma's scent quickly filled the space. Within minutes all he could feel were her soft arms circling his waist, her womanly body pressing against his back and her hands working their magic until he had taken her against the wall. Turning his face up to the shower spray, the water mingled with his tears, and as the despair rose up from inside, his cry echoed around him sounding more like a wounded animal than that of a man.

He stayed that way until the water ran cold, and then hauled his weary body out, drying and dressing in an old tee and sleep pants. A glance in the mirror told him it wasn't Killian Jones looking back at him, but the scraggily beard reminded him of the Liam as he had looked...was it just last weekend? Using his electric razor, he quickly straightened his beard until once again, the scruff in place, he was looking at the man he had been for the past few months. But that man didn't feel right, either. He had told Robin that unshaven Killian had given him luck. But unshaven Killian now was only feeling pain. Before he could change his mind, the scruff was gone and a clean-faced Killian Jones' eyes met his in the mirror. The eyes couldn't be fixed as easily. The eyes were windows to his soul, and they showed the truth.

Leaving his image behind, he walked into the bedroom where Emma's easel was the thing he saw first. She had placed it next to the bed before they left, telling him that as soon as they returned, she would show him his gift. Could he look at it without her? Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath and slowly reached out his hand to yank off the covering. As the picture slowly came into view, he found his legs would no longer support his weight and slid down onto the edge of the bed, instantly transported back in time.

"I believe when two souls are destined to meet, when they become one, nothing can pull them apart. Today, with these beads, I thee wed for as long as this rock, this earth, this sea and the sky shall live. And I promise you that I will never forget these beads and our promise to each other and what they stand for. I love you Killian."

"And I promise to always be there when you need me and to never, ever say goodbye to you. I love you Emma."
She had painted their cliff with the rock and the water and the trees, blended together on the canvas as if they were living and breathing. When he closed his eyes, he could smell the seawater, feel the breeze blowing across his skin and hear her telling him how much she loved him in that sweet voice he loved so much, and as the pain washed over him, he couldn't breathe.

Falling back, he buried his face in the pillows and let everything inside bubble over and spill out. The smell of her surrounded him, bringing with it not comfort, but more pain, squeezing his chest painfully until he gasped for breath and slid down onto the floor. As the tears cascaded down his face, his eyes stared up at her creation and rocking back and forth, he whispered, "I love you, Swan," over and over again.

Boston, MA
Saturday Evening

When the car was parked in front of the Home, Blue sent Henry inside to change before turning to Ruby. "This wasn't your fault." She hoped to calm her down, as she had noticed how tightly Ruby was gripping the steering wheel on the way home.

Ruby didn't say anything for a few minutes, just stood there worrying her bottom lip before she finally mumbled, "But the-"

"No buts," Blue interrupted before any negative thoughts could be spoken where they might take root and grow. "No black ball is able to tell you the future. I told you girls that when you were growing up, and it's still true today."

"I know, Blue. But this isn't like Emma." She looked at her watch. "And Victor will be here in thirty minutes for us to catch our flight, so..."

Hooking her arm with Ruby's, Blue directed them toward the house. "I know you're worried, Ruby, and so am I, but you have a responsibility to be on that ship for the next six months. I will keep you posted."

"Promise?" Ruby sighed, knowing there was really no other option.

"I promise." As soon as she felt Ruby relax, Blue squeezed her hand and continued, "Since we stayed on campus waiting, Ashley and Elsa should already be inside. Let's go see if they've heard from Emma or Killian."

Walking toward the door, something told Blue that once inside they wouldn't find out any more information about Emma than they already knew, and were going to have to expand their questioning. She felt her mama bear protective streak rising up inside her, something she hadn't had to use since the incident with Neal, and knew that she wouldn't rest until she had found all the answers she needed.

Seattle, WA
Saturday, Early Evening PST

David slipped behind his wife and wrapped his arms around her, resting his hands on the gentle swell of her stomach. "How are we feeling?"

"We," she leaned back against him, "are feeling fine. How was your emergency?"

He helped her set the table, and once they had each helped themselves to the various Chinese takeout items he had brought home, filled her in on what had taken him to the hospital on a Saturday
When he was finished with his story, Mary Margaret contemplated him with her professional eye. "There's more, isn't there David?" she asked him quietly.

He should have known she would be able to see right through him as he slowly got up from his chair and pulled the picture from his briefcase. "I stopped by to check on Emma on my way out and found this." He handed her the picture.

He watched her catch her breath as she studied the drawing and when she looked up, her eyes were glassy. "Oh dear. That poor girl."

David wasn't sure he had ever seen her so empathetic over an amnesiac before and pulling her into his arms, letting her cry on his shoulder. "If she's calling herself Kate Blue, can Emma Swan find her way back?"

It took her a few minutes to control herself but when she did, she picked up the picture once again. "Emma's in pain for some reason, but yes. She will be back, stronger and more beautiful than ever. Until then, if she feels stronger as Kate Blue, then I'm going to allow it. But I'll never stop trying to get her to remember Emma. You can count on that."

**Boston, MA**

**Saturday Evening EST**

Henry wasn't stupid and could tell that the adults were worried about Emma and Killian, but thought if they kept it to themselves, he wouldn't know. He knew. He also knew that Blue was trying to act calm for the sake of all the other adults around her, but he had caught her wiping her eyes with a tissue. He knew it was something bad.

Ruby and Victor had driven off a while ago after a lot of hugging and tears, but after she had promised to send him some really cool stuff, he had given her one more hug and waved goodbye. Ashley and Sean were somewhere in the house with their baby, Alex, trying to get her to go to sleep, and everyone else was waiting for Elsa. Apparently, her sister, Anna, had told Blue that Elsa had planned on attending the party, but no one had heard directly from Elsa herself. He had to wonder about adults sometimes, as he got in trouble if he didn't check in. Yet, here it was almost a week since he'd heard from Emma and Killian and he hadn't heard from them. He didn't think Roland had heard from Robin either, and yet, chances were, they didn't see anything wrong with their actions. There was something wrong with that picture, as Blue would say.

Watching out the window of his bedroom, he caught sight of Elsa running up the walk, and without thinking he took off down the stairs. He reached the first floor just in time to see Blue quiet her and then quickly lead her down the hall toward the offices. He followed quietly, taking care not to step on the squeaky boards and listened outside the door.

"Blue," Elsa took deep breaths and tried to get her breathing under control. "Have you heard about the accident?"

"Accident? No nothing. Tell me." Blue sounded upset but he didn't think she was crying yet.

Elsa told Blue about talking to Regina and hearing that Emma, Killian and Robin had all been involved in a horrible car accident on Monday. She went on to say that Robin was in New York having to learn how to walk again.

"Oh, that poor boy," Blue exclaimed. "I'll have to contact his father. Did Regina know anything
about Emma or Killian?"

When Elsa started speaking again, her voice softened, and Henry thought she might be crying, but since he didn't want to risk being seen, he stayed hidden. "I saw Killian, Blue. He looks awful, not only physically, but his eyes are haunted. He looked like he was barely able to hold himself together.

"And our girl, Elsa. What of Emma?"

This time, Elsa was crying so hard, Henry had trouble understanding her, but when she said, "Killian refused to talk to me but he did say one thing." She sniffed and blew her nose before continuing, "He said, 'Emma is gone.' How can that be, Blue?"

The minute Henry heard those words, he didn't wait around to hear anything else. He needed to get to Killian and find out what was going on. Grabbing his jacket and one of the extra Charlie Cards for the T, he took off running before anyone could stop him. He needed to find Killian and he needed to find him now.

CS-CS-CS

The knock on the door roused Killian from where he had slouched against the side of the bed, trying to escape from his grief. But it didn't seem to matter where he was or what he was doing, the grief continued to bombard him, sometimes just a little and other times it overwhelmed him, coming in waves. Not interested in hearing any platitudes he ignored the knocking until it came again. This time louder, more forcefully.

As he made his way to the door, he wiped his face and prepared to face questions that he wasn't ready to think about or even talk about, but when he opened the door, instead of questions, he was met by the rush of a small, but sturdy body. Henry wrapped his arms around Killian's legs and turned up his tear-stained face. "Is it true? Is it true, Killian? Is Emma gone?"

Killian looked down into the freckled face of the little boy who had come to mean so much to him and Emma, and wished he didn't have to break the child's heart. "Aye, lad. It's true." He whispered brokenly.

"But it can't be true, Killian. It can't be. We need her," cried Henry. "We were going to be a family." Henry's little body was shaking so hard that, in his weakened state, Killian was afraid they were both going to fall.

Sliding toward the sofa, he sat down, pulling Henry onto his lap. As Henry relaxed against him, Killian leaned his cheek on the top of his head. "Is that what you want, Henry? To be a family?"

Henry nodded his head, snuggling even closer against Killian's chest. "Then we shall. And I know just the person to help make it happen."

And we finally reached the bottom of the roller coaster so all we can do now is go up but sadly you're going to have to wait until Jan 3 to catch up with the next step in their journey. I will try to put out a bit of the chapter early though and my goal is to preview it 12/31. My Happy New Year to you all...

So Merry Christmas to those who celebrate and please, let me know what you thought of Chapter 19.
Chapter 20

Chapter Summary

The journey continues almost three months after Chapter 19 ended.

I hope you all enjoyed the Christmas fluff but are ready to get back into the story. Chapter 19 left off in May, 5 days after the accident had occurred and Chapter 20 moves ahead to the end of July and then quickly moves into August. It's a busy chapter...

Chapter 20

Anita's Place
Seattle, WA
Late July

It had been ten weeks since that fateful day in May that had changed Emma Swan's life, leaving her with significant injuries to her face and body and no memories of whom she was and where she belonged. As the summer progressed and her outer wounds and broken bones healed, steps were taken to repair her cheekbones, replace her lost teeth, and remove the myriad of tiny scars left from the broken glass.

But while her external wounds healed, the ones on the inside remained, and without family close by, where she would go next would have been difficult had it not been for Doctor Blanchard and her friend Mrs. Lucas. Anita's Place, run by Mrs. Lucas, was a transitional residential facility, located relatively close to the hospital campus. It was built to house individuals who motorically were fine, but continued to suffer from various stages of amnesia. The facility was named after Mrs. Lucas' daughter, Anita, who had lost her memory as a teenager and, without any place to go, had vanished from home one day. Running Anita's Place was a way for a mother to help other families heal almost thirty years later.

The first time Emma met Mrs. Lucas, she had felt an immediate connection. From the picture of the woman whose name the place held to the room decorations, she felt comfortable and welcomed. It was homey, and with all the residents moving in and out and the photographs lining the walls, it had been easy to tell that the owner was needed by the residents just as much as she needed them.

When Doctor Blanchard helped her move into her room, she had introduced herself as Kate Blue to the others, and while she didn't really feel like she was Kate Blue, neither did she feel like she was Emma Swan. Just a ship without its port.

As part of her work with Doctor Blanchard, she had realized how much she missed making art, and since painting and sketching with her dominant hand in a cast was quite difficult, she had been loaned a camera. At the suggestion of Doctor Nolan's nurse, Belle, Kate had spent hours in the hospital daycare center taking photographs of the children as they interacted with the workers, their parents and the other children. The discovery that she had an affinity for capturing the essence of a child with the lens had brought her joy unlike anything else that she could remember.

Now, a month after she had taken her first picture, she had joined with Ariel, another friend of
Doctor Blanchard's, who owned a small gallery near Pike's Place. Emma took the photographs and Ariel sold them in her business. That part of her life felt right, which left her wondering if gallery work was a part of her past.

She was still receiving visits from the blue eyes in her dreams, but they no longer just made her feel just safe, they elicited unspoken needs that she didn't understand. Her dreams had become colorful and real, but when she opened her eyes, all that remained were the feelings. The pictures that had rushed through her mind while she slept never stayed. But this morning was different, and one memory stayed. The eyes were joined by a face that had turned into a drawing. Her hope was that soon the face would be joined by a body and her dreams would finally give the man a name.

Dressing quickly, she made her way to the hospital for what she hoped would be her last appointment with Doctor Nolan. While she sat in the waiting room, Emma couldn't stop looking at the picture she'd made of the face that haunted her dreams and stayed with her even after she woke. Unforgettable, she thought, just like the song that seemed to trigger emotions she didn't understand when she had first arrived in Seattle.

After being called back into the examination room, Emma sat quietly while Doctor Nolan completed his inspection of her new face and teeth. "No tenderness at all?" he asked her as he palpated around her eyes and down around her mouth.

As he touched her face, she kept expecting to feel different somehow, more like her old self and less like someone lost, but rarely did she get her wish. Even though she recognized that the person in the mirror was her, she was no closer to knowing that person than she was last week or even last month. Or so she thought.

Her doctors didn't agree with her thought process, though, as they kept telling her that even though she might not remember her life as Emma Swan, there were still pieces of her past self that were present in her daily behaviors. She just needed to grab onto those pieces when the memories surfaced and not be scared of what they might reveal.

It was easier said than done, she thought, realizing the doctor was staring at her while waiting for an answer. "No tenderness," she said quickly, hoping he wouldn't ask questions that were too difficult to answer.

He studied her, his blue eyes piercing as they tried to read her mind. "How's your memory, Emma...I mean Kate?"

"Bits and pieces come back every day. But it's weird," she frowned and looked down at her lap, "as I find that I remember things about my life as Emma or about people I might know, or even places I might have been, but none of it seems real. It's as if," her mind searched for how to describe her thoughts, "I'm watching a show on television or working one of those puzzles that gives you little hints, one at a time. I never get a big picture, but..." she stopped and gave him a little smile, "I woke up with a new memory today and drew it to show Doctor Blanchard when I meet with her later."

He smiled at her affectionately. "It must be good, as there's a twinkle in your eye."

"I think so," she hopped down off the examination table, "but I still can't remember me. I'm beginning to wonder if I ever will."

He finished writing a note, and after closing her file, looked her in the eye. "Don't push so hard. Isn't that what my lovely wife says?"

Emma sighed, "Yes, but there are a few at Anita's Place that have been there for months and haven't
remembered. Sometimes, it's just so lonely." Except now, she thought, she had something else to go with the eyes that visited her in her dreams. When her mystery man was around, the loneliness didn't seem as bad.

"I'm sorry to hear that. I'm also sorry we couldn't give you more."

Something kept nagging at her about her whole situation, but unable to give it words, she mentally packed it away until later. "It's okay, Doctor Nolan. I know you did your best and I really appreciate everything that you've done already." She followed him down the hall and into the waiting room where there were several other patients waiting to see him. "Thanks, again."

**Nemo's Innovative Designs' Offices**
**New York City, NY**
**First week of August**

Sitting in the lunchroom reading contracts, leases, letters, etcetera, had quickly become the normal for Elsa since she had started her position as in-house counsel for Nemo's Innovative Designs. But usually the problems she dealt with on a daily basis didn't make her suspect someone was specifically targeting her. Normally, the problems were dealt with and then she moved on to other projects and other problems.

However, with one specific project, which happened to be the first one assigned to her, there were constant issues. As soon as one was rectified, another appeared. None of them too large, and all seemed as if they were meant more to slow down progress and not stop it completely. Since the cause and solution to the initial problem had involved her family, the chances that they were still involved grew with each complication. At least that's how it seemed to her. Or was she just being paranoid?

It had all started earlier in the month, on her first day of work for NID. She hadn't thought there was anything specific or special in the way the cases were assigned, but considering who her family was, now she wasn't so sure.

_Elsa had arrived early for her first day of work, and after filling out her paperwork in Human Resources, she had been led to the office of Sydney Glass, her immediate superior. He had been sitting behind a large desk surrounded by stacks of files. When he looked up at her, the relief on his face was almost palpable, and after breathing a huge sigh of relief, he had stood up and randomly, or so it had appeared, selected a pile and handed it over._

"Here are some open projects Isaac was working on before he left. You can start on these. Come, let me show you to your office."

_She had followed him to her office where he had pulled out the chair and, with a sweep of his hand, indicated she should sit. She had set the pile of files on the desk, expecting him to go over what he had wanted her to do, but instead he just said, "If there's a problem, let me know," before he walked away._

_Elsa opened the first file and the title caught her attention. Inside she found a contract that NID had been negotiating for a piece of property in Westchester County, but the owners of the property had stalled time and time again. Wondering what type of company they were dealing with, Elsa had flipped through the pages and was only mildly surprised when she saw the company's name._

"This is freakin' great," she muttered disgustedly, as she looked down at the name of the property owners. Ingrid Frost's company, better known as Snow Queen Real Estate, was not only a powerful force when it came to real estate along the Eastern Seaboard, but they were also...her family. After
hours of reviewing all the documentation, Elsa felt that NID's offer should have been accepted in the beginning as it had been above market value. But it hadn't been, and since then multiple discussions had gone back and forth stretching over eighteen months. She found it positive that the person they had been negotiating with happened to be her favorite aunt and promptly made a telephone call.

Happily, her Aunt Ingrid had listened to reason and after a pleasant conversation, she had gone to Sydney with a settled contract. Since then the project had become hers, and instead of each step moving along quickly as they had in several of her other projects, it had been littered with issues, all meant to slow, but not to stop.

"And this permit issue is just one more hassle," she muttered as she closed the file and shoved it away.

"Do you always talk to yourself when you eat lunch?" she heard as Regina pulled out a chair and sat down.

Elsa rolled her eyes. "When the need arises and there's no one else to complain to." She grinned and tapped her finger on the folder. "Just another issue with the Westchester County project, but I'll deal. How are things with you?"

"Oh, things are fine." Regina tried to answer nonchalantly, but her grin and sparkling eyes told Elsa everything she needed to know about how her relationship with Robin was going.

"That good, huh?" Elsa teased her. "That's not what Robin told me the other day when he stopped by.

"Oh," Regina's eyebrow went up in interest, "when was that?"

"It was nothing, really." Elsa frowned slightly. "He was asking about Killian."

Regina sighed. "I know he's upset that Killian hasn't been in touch recently, but do you have any news?"

Every time she thought of the devastation on Killian's face when she had seen him last, her eyes teared up, but she didn't have a lot of information, either. "Blue talks to him, I think." She looked away to compose herself before continuing and noticed Liam Jones walking into the lunchroom. Watching out of the corner of her eye, she went on with her story, "It has something to do with Henry."

"And what about Emma?" Regina asked slowly, as if she had an idea her friend wasn't listening very closely.

"Nothing," Elsa forcibly pulled her attention away from the man she found to be such an intriguing dichotomy, "but I know Blue is trying to look into what happened." Her voice trailed off as she watched Liam leaving the room. When she turned back to Regina, there was a look on her friend's face that told her she'd been busted. "What?" she demurred, thinking perhaps if she played dumb it would divert any questions, but then again, she should have known better after all that Emma and she had done to push Regina and Robin toward each other.

"You know who that is, right?" Regina's voice held a slightly disdainful tone.

"Yes," Elsa agreed, "he's Killian's brother and," she hesitated trying to think of what she wanted to say, "I know what I've heard about him from Emma and Robin, mainly But, Regina, I've not seen that side of him."
"Ah oh," murmured her friend. "What does that mean?"

"Well," she pointed to the folder that she had been reading, "this is his project, and from what I've been told, he hasn't been so easy to work with. But," she thought about the interactions she'd had with him and how pleasant he'd been, "I find him rather charming." She shrugged her shoulders, giving Regina a sheepish look.

"Oh, Elsa. Don't-" Regina started to say before Elsa interrupted.

"I'm not," Elsa jumped in, "but I don't need a lecture. Let's talk about you and Robin."

Regina just looked at her for a few minutes before nodding her head in agreement. "Okay. But if you need to talk…"

Sitting there listening to Regina talk about Robin and how they hoped to go visit Roland soon, Elsa tried to push Liam out of her mind, but the sadness she saw in his eyes called to her.

**Second week of August**

It had been almost three months. Who was he kidding? It was exactly eleven weeks and four days since he had taken Killian to the Newark airport. That added up to eighty-one days that he was left to wonder how his brother was feeling. Eighty-one days to wonder how Emma's wounds were healing and eighty-one days to wonder when Killian would bring her to New York City.

During those eighty-one days, Liam had done quite a bit of soul searching and working through all the clutter in his mind; the clutter had been building up inside from not taking time to deal with the death of his parents, from not dealing with Lily's betrayal and from the huge wall that living without a heart had created around him. Somehow with all his soul searching, his love for his brother, and his brother's love for a woman, his heart was slowly healing.

He needed to find the man his mother would approve of and not one that she would find appalling. His first course of action had been to improve his treatment of others, which meant decreasing his negative behaviors and increasing his positive. Question was, did he have what it took?

He thought so, and while waiting for the people whose forgiveness he needed the most to arrive in town, he planned to start with those he saw on a daily basis. And for the last seventy-nine days he had been making more of an effort to treat people as he wished to someday be treated in return. The problem was that even after seventy-nine days, when he walked anywhere in the offices, people stared, and he was having a difficult time getting used to that.

"What did you expect, you git? You can't expect miracles," he groused to himself as he entered his assistant's office on the way to his own.

She looked up as he walked by her desk. "What's got ye so out of sorts?" His plan was to ignore her and hope she didn't hound him with questions. He made it to his office and had just sat down when he heard the tread of her shoes approaching. "Come now," she stopped right inside the door and looked at him over her glasses, "why the awful puss?"

Colleen, Liam's assistant, had been a part of NID since its inception and had taken him under her wing as soon as Nemo brought him on board. Most days Liam felt like he couldn't do without her, but other days, not so much. Those were the days she made him feel like he was ten and being scolded for something he had done wrong.

"I don't have a sulky face," he told her and pointed to his lips, giving her what was obviously a fake smile. "See?" He even managed to show some teeth.
"Oh, come now, son. It can't be all bad. Tell Colleen what's troublin' ye." She pulled out the chair in front of her desk and made herself comfortable.

At times like these, Liam knew he only had a few options. The easiest would be to invent an excuse for leaving and just go, but since she knew his schedule better than he did, that wouldn't work. He could also just ignore her and leave the room and not deal with his issues, but that was something the old Liam would have done. Another option he had tried before would be to start working on a project, but not only would he end up redoing whatever he drew, he'd get an inquisition.

And so, he manned-up and opted for the truth. "How much longer must I endure the odd looks around here, as if they're waiting for me to explode any moment?" he huffed. "It's rather disconcerting."

"Well," she began, "you..."

"I know," he interrupted, "I've not been easy to work with." Her look over the top of her glasses told him that was an understatement. "Alright, I've been a right bastard to work with, but I'm trying to change."

"And I see that," she tried again, "but..."

"I was a wanker for many years, and being civil for only seventy-nine days is too soon to expect acceptance," he finished for her.

"Looks like you are on the right path, Liam," she told him quietly and stood up to leave the room. Just before she disappeared into her office, she looked back. "Ye've not said anything but I know a broken heart when I see it. I'll also wager whatever happened with your brother started that heart's healing. The next step in your journey is to get it to beat again."

The first part of her statement surprised him at how perceptive she was, but the latter part perplexed him. "And just how do I do that?" he whispered brokenly.

"Ye know." She gave him a look as if he should be able to read her mind and then was gone.

Liam thought about what she had said about his beating heart and knew she was right. A beating heart meant you were alive and he hadn't felt alive in years, except...his mind wandered back to a meeting nine days ago.

_He had walked into Nemo's office, and when the goddess with the blonde hair had turned his way and smiled, he had been gobsmacked. His tongue felt too big for his mouth, all words had escaped from his head and his hands had gotten clammy. Behaviors he hadn't experienced since secondary school._

_Nemo had introduced Elsa Winters as their in-house counsel replacing Isaac, and, tongue-tied, he had stuttered his way through the introductions. He had surreptitiously wiped his hand on his pants and then held it out toward her. When she had placed her hand in his, the shock reverberating through his system almost brought him to his knees. It had only been sheer will that had kept him on his feet, and after making his excuses, he had exited the office. As soon as he was through the door, he remembered placing his hand on his chest, and there it was...his heart...beating._

But once he had returned to his office, he had realized why she was so familiar to him. She had been prominently featured in the pictures on Emma's cell phone, which meant she had a good idea of what an arsehole he had been to his brother and her friend. If she had preconceived ideas about him, he didn't know if he would be able to change her mind, even if he wished to. And so, he had tried to
stay away. But sometimes fate has other plans and everywhere he turned, she was there. He, the moth and she, the flame, and nine days ago the dance had begun. The question was who would win?

Seattle Grace Hospital
Seattle, WA
Third week in August
Monday

Mary Margaret watched one of her patients shut the door behind him, and seeing that she had some time before Emma's appointment sat down to review her chart. In comparison to many, it was relatively thin, but unlike the others this one had a neon tab with a number written on it. Matching that number with a large, envelope style folder she took from another filing cabinet, Mary Margaret spread out the contents on the table in front of the sofa.

Wishing she knew more about Emma Swan, or Kate Blue as she was calling herself these days, Mary Margaret studied the artwork. Talented, even when drawing with the wrong hand, but a very fanciful pattern to her work. When asked about her mother, Snow White was the first thing that popped into her mind, and her friends were Red and Ella. Little Red Riding Hood and Cinderella were the fairytale names that fit those nicknames she had written on one of her drawings, but had she always lived in a fantasy world? And who did those blue eyes belong to? The last time she had drawn a new memory it had been of the face that went with those eyes. An interesting one, but not one to assign a character name to yet.

When the knock at the door came, signaling Emma's arrival, her plan was ready. "Kate," she almost had to grit her teeth to call her by that name but at this time it was all about Emma's well-being. She was the person who mattered in all this. She was the person they wanted to find once again.

Emma walked into the room, a big smile on her face and holding several sketch pad sized pages in front of her like a shield. "Are those telling you anything new?" Emma asked suspiciously as she sat down in a chair to the right of Mary Margaret.

Mary Margaret stacked the drawings and pushed them off to her left. "Nothing new. I was just organizing your chart." She wrinkled her nose, "I'm just not a fan of paperwork."

"Oh, me eith..." Emma answered quickly before realizing what she was about to say and her eyes grew large.

"You remembered something, didn't you?" Mary Margaret watched the facial expressions as they moved across Emma's face. Surprise, happiness, before settling into sorrow.

"Not a memory, really" Emma stared across the room, almost as if the answers to the questions in her head were written on the wall, "more a feeling of disgust when paperwork was mentioned."

"Okay, if you say so." It wasn't that she didn't believe her patient, but more that she felt there was a wall stopping her from peeking around it. The question was, why? Was she scared of the person around the wall or was she scared of herself? Shelving that for now, she brought the attention back to what Emma had brought with her. "I see you've been drawing. New memories?"

Mary Margaret watched Emma look down at her drawings and smile at them. A smile that surprised her in its tenderness. "I did," Emma answered somewhat breathlessly before holding out the first drawing for her to take.

Reaching for the drawing and holding it in front of her, Mary Margaret was once again impressed with the talent that it took to draw such realistic figures; people that looked like they could easily step
off the page and have a conversation with you.

The drawing in front of her was of a man, and a rather good-looking man, too. Since she had seen his face before, it meant that this was the man whose eyes Emma saw in her dreams. He had a strong jaw covered in scruff, wind-swept black hair that fell over his forehead, and piercing blue eyes, but this time she had continued the drawing. The man was wearing black slim fitting jeans, black boots, and a dark shirt covered by a long, black leather jacket, but her portrait didn't stop there. He was standing behind a microphone, holding the stand with his right hand...and his left hand rested lightly against the base, except it wasn't a hand at all. Where his left hand was supposed to be, there was a hook.

"This is a beautiful drawing, but do you know who this man is?" she asked Emma as she continued to study the drawing.

Emma glanced at the picture and then back up at her. "His name? No, but he's the same man in this picture." She handed over a second drawing.

Mary Margaret felt her eyebrows raise high as she studied the new drawing. The picture took place in a large room that could have easily been a living room/dining room combination, as there were clusters of chairs and eating tables too. Standing next to the tables, Emma had drawn, not one, but three fairies, complete with wings. One blue, one green and the last one pink.

Sitting on one of the sofas was a woman who was dressed as Cinderella, but she was obviously very pregnant and she was facing another woman wearing a long red cape. Standing off to the side Emma had drawn the same man as in her first picture, but this time he was standing next to none other than...Robin Hood.

Mary Margaret couldn't be sure because of the different ages of the girls, but thought they had been drawn before. "What were you doing when you remembered this scene, Kate?"

Emma grinned shyly. "It was the other night at our group session, remember?" Mary Margaret shook her head no. "Well," Emma continued, "we were just talking and all of a sudden it was as if I was in that room," she pointed to the picture with the group in it, "instead of at Anita's Place," she finished.

"What about this?" Mary Margaret put the drawing of the lone man behind the microphone. "Why the mike?"

Emma stared at the picture, saying nothing but worrying her bottom lip with her teeth, until finally she met Mary Margaret's eyes and whispered, "I don't know."

Something was stopping her from letting those memories in, thought Mary Margaret as she gathered up the drawings and put them all in the folder. "Don't be afraid of those feelings, Kate. I'm right here with you. Remember, we're in this together."

Emma suddenly found something interesting to stare at on the floor and had just lifted her head as if she were going to say something when the phone rang. Mary Margaret glanced at it but during her sessions she asked that all her calls be held so its ringing had to mean something important.

"Go ahead and get that. I'll see myself out," she heard Emma say.

"Doctor Blanchard," she answered quickly before it rang back to her assistant. "Can I help you?"

"You're treating Emma Swan." It was said with such authority and in such a definite manner that she almost found herself agreeing with the caller. It was only her years of experience at maintaining confidentiality that had her swallowing the affirmative answer and responding, "Excuse me?"
"Emma Swan," her caller repeated. "She is your patient."

Mary Margaret really had to fight to not give any indication that, yes, she treated the person in question, but she really wanted to. She wanted this person to be someone who loved Emma and wanted to see her whole again and reunited with her family. Years of practice won out and finally she came up with, "I'm sorry but patient confidentiality prevents me from either confirming or denying anything having to do with patients, understand?"

"I understand, Doctor Blanchard. I understand keeping confidentiality, but I'm desperate. Perhaps, I can change your mind. Let me tell you a little about Emma Swan."

Mary Margaret could no more make herself hang up than she could give up a good piece of chocolate. With a pen in hand, she listened.

**Portland, Maine**  
**Third week in August**  
**Monday**

"Yes, I understand," Killian said into the phone as he stood on the front porch of the cabin and stared out at the ocean.

"Things happen on her schedule. You can't rush them, no matter how much you would like," he heard through the phone.

He sighed. "It depends on her. I get that, but I'm just tired of waiting."

The speaker's voice conveyed a little sympathy before she continued, "I'm sure you are. Try to be patient. We'll speak again soon. Goodbye." And the line went dead.

"And just like that I'm back to waiting," Killian muttered as he pocketed the phone.

Assured that Henry was still involved in his DS game, Killian leaned on the porch railing of the cabin and went back to staring at the sea. He had spent many hours this summer looking out at this spot, the same spot that if he walked down to the shoreline and turned his head to the left he could see the cliff. The cliff that protected the trees. The trees that protected the rock. The rock that protected the beads. And that beads that symbolized the promise.

The promise that he had given to the woman he loved with his entire heart and soul. And since he had lost her, his heart felt as if it had been crushed. But it went beyond just the crushed heart. His failure to keep that promise destroyed his soul. Now, as a man without a heart or a soul, what did he have to give?

*Nothing*, he thought. "I have nothing," he whispered as the ever present lump in his throat tightened, keeping him from saying more.

"You have me," Killian heard Henry cry from behind him.

*You bloody fool*, he thought as he slowly turned to face his young charge. *How could you be such a git?*

"Henry," Killian exclaimed, "I didn't know..." was all he got out before Henry launched his body at Killian, wrapping his little boy body around his legs.

"Killian," Henry sobbed, "don't leave me too. Please, don't leave me too."
His arms clutching Henry's body as he cried against his legs, Killian tried to think of the words to make everything right, but he didn't have any. And even though he didn't know if things could be right, he knew he had to try, if not for his own sake then for Henry's. "I'm not going anywhere Henry."

"Promise?" Henry responded.

It came out muffled against his legs, but the word sent a charge through Killian's system. The question was the nature of the charge. Was it a sense of dread that he would eventually break the lad's heart? Or was it a sense of anticipation that he would keep his promise and give him the life he deserved?

Taking a deep, cleansing breath of the warm sea air, Killian moved them around so they could sit side by side on the step. "Henry," he began solemnly, "I promise I will do everything in my power to give you what you need. And I'm sorry that I'm..." But what could he say? He could say he missed Emma. He could say he needed Emma. He just wasn't sure how to go on without her.

"It's okay." Henry put his hand on Killian's leg and leaned against his shoulder. "I know you miss Emma. I do too, but she's still with us."

His last statement caused Killian's breath to catch in his throat. "I do miss Emma, Henry," Killian told him quietly, "but what do you mean about Emma still being with us?"

Henry smiled up at him and laid his hand over Killian's heart. "She's in here, Killian. She always will be."

Killian had to swallow before he could get his voice to work, and even then it sounded overly husky to his ears. "Aye, lad, she is. How did you get so smart?"

He felt Henry shrug one boney shoulder. "Just comes naturally, I guess." And then as was typical of his ten-year-old attention span, he leaned around and asked, "Can we go get ice cream?"

When Killian nodded his head, Henry whooped and ran inside for a second before he was back pulling Killian to his feet.

As they walked along the shoreline toward town and the ice cream shop, Killian realized that the crowds were getting thinner which meant the summer was ending. In the next few weeks they would have to leave their little hideaway and he would once again have to face the people and their good intentions.

Could he face Elsa, Ashley and Blue as they looked on with pity? And his best mate Robin, how did he apologize for not only disappearing but for his actions that caused his injuries? Would Robin just forgive him and that was it? If the roles were reversed and Robin had been driving, could he have given his forgiveness easily?

And seeing Liam on a daily basis, how was that going to work? Could he deal with Liam's constant interference in his life? The last time he had seen his brother it was almost if he had wanted to talk about Emma, but if so, why? Killian had no desire to hear what Liam had to say about her as experience had taught him to expect nothing but bad would be said. He was afraid that might lead to his punching his brother for real and not just in a dream world.

Seeing the ice cream store ahead, Henry took off running. "Race you," he called as his feet tossed sand into the air.

Letting him get a little head start, Killian envied the easiness of youth, until finally he took off at an
easy jog. He caught up with Henry just as he opened the door of the shop and proclaimed himself the victor.

"I won!" he shouted as he hurried to the counter to be the first to order.

They sat on a bench outside and as they ate, Killian listened to Henry chattering on about anything and everything that happened to pop into his mind. Thankfully the topics didn't require a lot of interaction since his mind kept coming back to the same thing. It was past time that he made a phone call and he needed to make it now. Pulling out his phone, he dialed.

**Central Park**
**New York City, NY**
**Third week in August**
**Monday**

When the phone rang as he was walking through Central Park on his way home, Robin had answered it, not expecting it to be the person that he had thought about several times a day for the past twelve weeks. On one hand, speaking with Killian again had been just like riding the proverbial bike, but on the other hand the elephant in the room had stilted the conversation, keeping it from flowing smoothly. And while it was true that as the conversation continued some of the familiarity returned, there were words that needed to be said, but just what the words were exactly, he hadn't figured it out yet.

Not speaking directly with Killian since that fateful day in May that had changed both their lives had been frustrating. When he had initially found out from Marco that Killian had called to check on his recovery, Robin's first thought had been relief, but then he had learned that Killian had apologized about the accident and the worry had returned. As the summer had continued and no other calls had been forthcoming, Robin's worry turned to concern that Killian was angry with him, because while that day would forever be remembered as the end of Killian's happy ending, it had aided in accelerating his own. To that extent the guilt lay squarely on Robin's shoulders.

"It was good to talk to you, you big git," Robin scolded his best mate. "You owe me a pint."

"That's it?" Killian asked quietly.

"That's it." Hanging up the phone, Robin was left with a feeling of melancholy over what might have been. He could hear the pain in his mate's voice and after being a part of Killian's life for fourteen years, he had a pretty good idea what he was feeling. He just wished Killian would accept support from his friends. If he lost Regina, he wasn't sure how he would behave. Quite possibly he would want to run in the same way.

But thoughts of loss on a day when all other aspects of his life were ace and promised to continue in that direction needed to be put aside as he had plans in the courtship of his lady love. From their rather unorthodox flirtation, with her as the instructor and he the student, to their first date and their first time together all served to ready them for what came next. A tragedy that brought her immediately to his side. And that led to confessions of love and to moments that quickly taught him that he was exactly where he belonged.

This summer, Regina had learned about the many obstacles of loving a man who had not one, but both legs encased in casts. From broken vases, knocked over furniture and concessions in the bath, they had to discover the best way for the rooms to be arranged to accommodate his clumsy ways. In addition, they'd had to discover and adjust to sharing space with another. It had been a journey where she had learned which side of the bed he preferred and that he loved holding her in his arms as they
fell asleep each night. There was nothing he liked better, except perhaps her creative ministration to parts of his broken body that weren't so broken after all.

Never having lived with a woman, Robin found himself holding his breath while he waited for everything to fall apart, but when their love for each other grew, he became more and more settled. Seven weeks after they had moved into her apartment his casts had been removed and his mobility had improved. Physical therapy had given him the independence back he had lost, and as the physical reason why he had moved into Regina's disappeared and he could move out, he realized that was the last thing he desired. Having her as a part of his life became something he needed to make permanent.

Waiting and watching for the right time became difficult as he was an impatient man. However, when they had gone to bed last night, as he loved her, an epiphany had come to him that today would be the day. Today he would visit his pop's jewelry store and choose the perfect ring to give to her.

He had awakened hard and needy but one look at her sleeping so peacefully and he couldn't disturb her. The shower had called to him and as the steam rose in the room and the soap had reached the perfect lather consistency, he took himself in hand. It felt good but not nearly as good as when she surprised him and her warm, wet body pressed up against his and her magical fingers had taken him to the stars. His body sated, she had given him a kiss and left the shower, saying she had to make a phone call.

After his shower was complete, he had pulled her close as she was dressing and the ensuing exchange still caused his...toes to tingle, he thought with a grin.

Physical Therapy had been a formality and after donating his cane to some other person in need, he had walked out a free man.

His last stop had been at Hidden Gems to see if he could locate the perfect ring for Regina. He had looked at large and small diamonds, emeralds, rubies and sapphires but nothing caught his eye as the special ring that he should give to his bride. Until finally, as he had many times over the years, his father saved the day. Marco shared that he had been saving a ring for someone special and wished for his son to give it to the woman he loved with the hope that they have many years together.

Robin took the box from his pocket and stared at the circle of diamonds. So beautiful and classy just like his girl, but while he had loved hearing from Killian, he was left unsettled; sad for his friend for what should have been and guilty that his own happy ending was within his grasp. What should he do, he wondered before unlocking and entering the apartment.

"Regina?" She was staring out the windows as if lost deep in thought. "I didn't realize you would be home so early."

When she turned around and her gaze met his, he felt a little like she was trying to read his mind. "I had this strangest feeling you needed me. Besides," she smiled, "don't we have something to celebrate?"

He frowned at her as he didn't think he had forgotten anything nor did he think she knew about the ring in his pocket. "Did I forget something?" Crossing the room, he took her in his arms thinking how wonderful she felt and that he would never take what they had for granted.

~~~CS~~~

As soon as she turned around, Regina could tell something was bothering Robin. His smile didn't
quite reach his eyes and after she noticed his missing cane and mentioned celebration, he had frowned as if he wasn't sure what she was talking about. But when he took her in his arms and there was a fine tremor throughout his body, she decided she was going to have to force it out of him.

Taking his hand, she pulled him down in front of the fireplace, kissing him softly. "What happened, Robin?"

His green gaze locked with hers, his eyes changing shade as his thoughts swirled behind them. He kissed her fingertips and finally started talking. She learned that Killian had called and he had bought a small cabin in Portland, Maine where he and Henry had been staying during the summer. They also learned that Sister Blue was in the process of helping Killian adopt Henry and that by the end of the month they would be moving to New York City.

"I found myself feeling guilty for being happy and Roland..." He let the statement trail off.

"Robin," She said quietly, "why feel guilty about Roland? We've talked to him several times, and now that you are no longer going to therapy, we can go see him."

"You wouldn't mind?" His eyes pleaded with hers.

She frowned slightly. "Why would I mind? I fell in love with the little boy even before I fell in love with you."

His smile was genuine this time, causing his eyes to sparkle and his dimples to pop. His selfless love for that child and his empathy for his friend touched her, and her heart rose into her throat, making it hard to breathe. She didn't think, didn't plan, nor did she worry that it wasn't proper, but before her confidence deserted her blurted, "Marry me?"

When his eyes went wide and he didn't immediately blurt out yes, she felt her face flame and regretted her impulsiveness. She was mentally kicking herself and calling herself names when his expression changed and he tilted her chin up forcing her to meet his eyes, "Shouldn't I be the one asking you?"

"Oh," she uttered softly.

"But," He continued without waiting for her to say anything further, "since you asked so eloquently, my answer is yes. Of course, I'll marry you. In fact..." He pulled a ring box from his pocket and opened it, slipping the glittering piece of jewelry onto her finger. "Perfect."

Regina looked down at the ring on her finger, and even with her vision blurred she could tell it was gorgeous. "I love you."

"And I love you."

When his lips covered hers, her heart soared with the knowledge that her dreams really were coming true.

**NID Offices**  
**New York City, NY**  
**Third week of August**  
**Wednesday**

After Colleen helped him see that being near Elsa caused his heart to beat again, Liam found himself unconsciously seeking her out. He wasn't fooled into thinking that he had changed enough to
warrant having someone care for him, but when he was feeling low, she was like a long, cool drink to a parched man. The fact that the more he was in her company, the more alive he felt hadn't escaped him either.

Even now, several days after being in the same room as her, he could feel the energy that her presence brought into his life and his blood to rushed through his system. The details of their last encounter were so burned in his brain that every time he closed his eyes he was right back in that room.

*On his way to the meeting the anticipation of seeing the Blonde Goddess again zipped through him. His heart beat out a staccato rhythm, beads of sweat covered his brow and the minute he walked into the room, the air around him seemed charged with energy. Her eyes met his as he stood in the doorway and for just a split second, he felt connected to her. Like they were two halves of a whole... but then reality set in and he shook off that irrational thought.*

*When he was finally able to tear his eyes away from Elsa's, he noticed she wasn't the only one in the room as he had originally thought, but leaning against the table next to her was the CFO of NID, Michael Darling. When Michael turned around and gave him a look he was unsure how to interpret, and with a brief greeting, the younger man moved around the table to where he had left his paperwork. Taking a seat to Elsa's right, Liam opened his file and tried to focus on what was in front of him instead leaning toward the woman on his left for another whiff of her scent.*

*When he opened the folder and saw they were speaking with Ingrid Frost, who was part of the Frost Foundation, he glanced over at Elsa with a frown, but she was already starting the call. He hadn't heard they were dealing with any other projects that involved property owned by the Frost Foundation since his projects issues had been resolved.*

*His project in Westchester County had been stalled for months until Elsa started working for NID and somehow solved a few problems that no one else had been able to fix. And now a second piece of property owned by the same foundation, which a quick glance through the file told him had been thought dead end, was suddenly back in the picture. Was Elsa responsible for this one too?*

*As the meeting continued, he found himself observing more than participating as he trusted her to do what was best for NID. Several times throughout the call, he saw a subtle shift in her facial expression but for the most part she was professional and the meeting was over relatively quickly and painlessly for them. After Michael left, Liam stayed to watch her make changes within several sections of the contract and knowing that he shouldn't, but unable to help himself, stood next to her, ostensibly to read over her shoulder.*

*He tried to stop, he really did, but the closer to her he stood, the more alive he felt, the louder the buzz that sang inside of him and the warmer his once cold and sterile life seemed. Placing one arm on the table and the other on the back of her chair, he leaned in just enough to get another generous whiff of her perfume. It was a light mixture of floral and musk, but one he wasn't sure he would ever get tired of smelling.*

*As he watched her typing, he fought against the need to bury his nose just behind her ear, taking a whiff of woman and that elusive smell that he had come to associate with her. Her hair hung loose, and when a few strands fell across his hand, the urge to rub it between his fingers, feeling its softness, was overpowering.*

*The fine tremor in her hand and the way her breath hitched periodically told him she was not as immune to him as she was letting on, but what did he have to offer? He was just a man who was working to change but hadn't completed his journey yet. She provided such a temptation that when she turned her head in his direction, her mouth open just enough so that he could see the tips of her
pearly white teeth, he desperately wanted to cover her lips with his. With a silent groan, his common sense won out, and pushing up, he lifted his hip up onto the table, waiting for her to finish.

As she completed the work and shut down her computer, she gave him a hesitant look as if she wasn’t sure if she should stay in the room or gather her belongings and run. He didn’t know what it was that swayed her, but when she closed the laptop, stood up and, putting a bit of distance between them, leaned against the wall. He watched and he waited, curious as to who would speak first.

“What?” She finally broke the silence that had become so thick that he could almost feel it.

Waiting a heartbeat or two, he finally answered, "Isn't it about time you shared with me your secret when it comes to dealing with the Frost Foundation? A group, I should remind you, that has been a thorn in NID's side for years." He stretched his legs out in front of him as if he had all the time in the world. Her eyes widened and there was a subtle tightening of her lips as she took a few deep breaths before opening her mouth and surprising him with her words.

"Ingrid Frost is my aunt," she said rapidly, before continuing to shock him even more, "and my sister and I own thirty-three percent of the Foundation."

When she finished her speech, she suddenly found the need to study the carpet as he tried to wrap his head around what he had just learned. "You own part of that Foundation, yet you have been negotiating contracts against them? Isn't there some conflict in there?"

"I believe in what we do here, but the properties involved in the NID projects are not owned by the Foundation, but by my aunt's real estate business that she started on her own. However, if I really thought there would be an issue, I would have Sydney handle those projects. I hope this isn't going to cause a problem."

He didn't think so, but he trusted her and Sydney to do what was necessary to make sure it wasn't. "So, your relationship with Ingrid explains the ease with which you work with her and were able to take care of contracts so quickly. But with the Westchester County project, there were permit issues, yet you worked magic there too. Shall I assume you have connections within the county offices?" he tossed out at her, not really expecting to get an affirmative answer.

"Well..." she grimaced as if what she was going to say annoyed her, "a cousin," she finally admitted.

"And this cousin is the reason behind the permit issues?" He asked as he tried to fit all the pieces together.

"Yes," she responded hesitantly.

"Care to elaborate?"

Her glance at the clock on the wall told him his answer before she opened her mouth. "Perhaps another time. I have a conference call in twenty minutes and I need to prepare." She gathered her things and walked toward the door. Just before she stepped through she tossed him a little wave and then disappeared from sight.

Liam sat there for a few minutes wondering about the whole encounter. He was left confused by his feelings regarding the interaction. Picking up his file to leave the room, he caught sight of his reflection in a mirror and what he saw confused him even more.

The man in the mirror was smiling.

New York City
Third week in August
Friday

Having just returned from a late lunch at *The Odeon* after standing up for Robin and Regina's nuptials, Elsa was feeling lethargic. But after running out of the office earlier in the day, she had promised herself she would return to finish up a few things before taking the weekend off to fly to Boston to see Anna. Kicking her shoes off, she opened the first file and was immediately immersed in her work.

The next time she looked up four hours had passed, and while her back and neck hurt from leaning over her desk, she could safely say her work was complete until Monday morning. With her files locked away and her briefcase packed, she slipped her shoes back on and left her office, taking, as usual, the long way out. Rarely did she actually see him when she left the building, but she always found herself looking. The answer as to why was something she hadn't been willing to give voice to yet, but with each passing day and every new encounter, the attraction she felt for him grew and would need to be dealt with soon. *Just not today*, she thought as she peered into his office suite, surprised when all was dark.

Her trip downtown to West Village where the penthouse apartment was located was relatively unremarkable for a Friday evening. Only a handful of vagrants asked for money, the subway was on time and when she even had a seat for the entire journey, she considered that a bonus. More to be happy for as she arrived at her building where the doorman greeted her by name, there was a postcard from Ruby and the elevator opened seemingly just for her. As it glided smoothly to the top floor, she envisioned yoga pants, a tank and no shoes, and so when the doors opened and all she heard was shouting, it was a fight not to stay in the elevator and ride back down.

Having not met any of her neighbors, her hopes of being able to sneak past the open door into her own apartment were dashed when she caught sight of the person who was doing most of the yelling. As if drawn by some invisible thread, her feet led her through the open door into a room that looked more like the showroom of a furniture store and not someone's living space. There were several sofas, two made of beautiful gray leather, the others navy with subtle stripes. There were also multiple chairs, none arranged but just pushed aside, their colors matching one set of sofas or the other, and there were bright, colorful pillows tossed all over the floor, and plants - lots and lots of plants, almost as if the apartment owner were turning his apartment into a greenhouse. And standing in the middle of the chaos facing off against a delivery man was none other than the very man who so intrigued her.

Liam hadn't noticed her yet, but boy, she had noticed him. With his bare chest and only lightweight sweats that rode low on his hips, she had to keep biting her tongue to keep her mouth closed. His chest was well defined and sexy, and the longer she gazed at him the more she wanted...almost needed to touch. Without conscious thought, she dropped her bags onto the floor and wound around the chairs, making her way to where Liam had cornered the delivery man.

Standing just behind Liam's left shoulder, she watched as he gestured with his hands causing the muscles to dance across his back. His skin was smooth and something inside of her wanted to run her fingertips down the center of his shoulder blades to see if it felt as soft as it looked. Tearing her gaze away from his body, she focused on the argument that hadn't slowed down any since she had arrived.

As she listened, she gathered that Liam had ordered the new furniture that had just been delivered, however the furniture that was delivered wasn't what he felt he had ordered. Instead of red sofas, he had gotten blue ones. Instead of blue chairs, he had gotten red ones and instead of blue pillows, he had gotten red and red and blue striped ones.
Realizing that the argument kept moving around in circles, she stepped forward and laid her hand on Liam's arm. He smelled musky and the urge to lean against him had to be shoved aside in lieu of more appropriate behavior. Liam stopped his argument mid-sentence and gazed down at her. She saw his nostrils flare and his eyes widen in shock before they softened and his entire body relaxed.

"Liam," she dropped her hand from his arm, "is there something I can do to help?"

"This buffoon," he pointed at the delivery guy, "delivered the wrong furniture, yet he claims he delivered what I ordered." He handed her the invoice that he had rolled up and had been shaking in the delivery man's face.

Elsa took the paperwork, and after unrolling it, read through the order. Once again, she laid her hand lightly on his arm. "Trust me?" she asked him softly.

Liam studied her face closely as if he were trying to read her mind, until finally he seemed to come to a conclusion. "Aye, I trust you."

His trust being given meant more to her than it probably should have and for a split second she felt like a traitor for feeling the way she did about the man who had given her friend such grief. But, she knew that Emma would want her to try to help the brothers reunite if possible. She also had gotten to know Liam and had heard all the gossip about his behavior at work. Based on what she had learned so far, the accident in May had not only changed Killian's life, but it seemed it might have been the catalyst that had pushed Liam to turn his life around. As far as she was concerned, this was positive and, as she had told Regina, she found him charming. And now, standing in front of him like this, darn if he didn't cause her heart to flutter. Reigning in her libido, she turned to the delivery man and led him toward the door. "I'll take it from here. Thank you. Do you need one of these?" She held up the papers.

He took the copy of the receipt he needed, and pulling his dolly with him, walked out into the hallway. Once he had crossed the threshold, he turned back. "I'm glad you showed up when you did, Mrs. Jones. I wasn't having any luck with your stubborn husband."

Elsa shook her head, "Oh, he's not my husband. We're just colleagues."

"Uh huh," he said dubiously, "you have quite the touch with him to be just colleagues. Thanks again," he repeated as he disappeared into the elevator.

Taking a deep breath, Elsa shut the door behind her, locking herself and Liam inside. This way, if he yelled the rest of the floor wouldn't have to hear.

He was standing in the same position she had left him in, looking around at the furniture rather forlornly. "Liam," she said softly, as she walked closer, "why did you want to order two large red sofas, blue chairs and all this greenery?"

His hands on his hips, Liam studied the furniture some more. "I thought..." he whispered quietly, "I thought if I surrounded myself with color, it would make me feel alive. But it seems," he shook his head in disgust, "I even botched that."

He is so full of self-hate, she thought. No wonder his eyes are always so sad. She took the last few steps, stopping directly in front of him. Slowly, she lifted her hand to rest directly over his heart where she could feel its steady cadence. "You feel very much alive to me, Liam," she told him gently. "I can help with this room, if you'll allow me."

He studied her face, and then ever so slowly covered her hands with both of his. "You would do that
"I would," she repeated softly. Before she was tempted to knead his chest with her fingers, she dropped her hand, clasping her fingers together. "Let me run home and change and then I'll be right back." She gave him the invoice she had been holding and picked up the bags she had left by the door. By the time she had it open, he had recovered and wrapped his hand around her arm, stopping her from leaving.

He frowned. "Where's home, Elsa? I'd hate for you to go too far out of your way."

She grinned. "Oh, that's impossible since I live right next door." Her smile turned into a giggle at the stunned look on his face, and taking advantage of his distraction, she pulled her arm free. He was still staring in her direction when she glanced back just before she disappeared behind her door.

Portland, Maine
Fourth week in August
Monday

Killian helped Henry pack his belongings, and after loading the car they closed up the seaside cabin for the winter. Unsure when they would be able to return, they took a long walk along the beach, and before starting the drive to Boston they entered Fort Williams Park, where he parked next to the cliff. While Henry explored, he sat on the rock and stared out sea. As the waves hypnotized him with their rhythmic movements, Killian replayed the words of their promise over again.

Emma had whispered, "Today, with these beads, I thee wed for as long as this rock, this earth, this sea and the sky shall live. And I promise you that I will never forget these beads and our promise to each other and what they stand for. I love you Killian."

And as his heart expanded with all the love that he felt for her, he had stared into her eyes and promised her everything he had to give. "And I promise to always be there when you need me and to never, ever say goodbye to you. I love you Emma."

As he sat there staring out to sea the lyrics of one of the songs his parents had loved floated through his mind;

When I say always

I mean forever

I trust tomorrow as much as I trust today

I'm not afraid to say I love you,

And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye.

"I can't say goodbye, Swan," Killian whispered, letting the wind carry the words out to sea. "Perhaps once we are settled in New York, it will be time to find out why."

Two hours later they were back in Boston, and Killian dropped Henry off at the Home to spend the night so he could catch up with his friends and Sisters Blue, Green and Astrid and Marion. They were going to help him pack his room, and when Kilian arrived the next day to pick him up, they would leave for New York City.

Killian waved goodbye and drove to the apartment he had briefly shared with Emma, and like a thief in the night, snuck up the stairs, locking himself inside. Her scent still hung in the air and ghostly
whispers could be heard as he undressed and climbed into bed. He needed her tonight, and these
days the only place she came to him was in his dreams.

As he lay there, trying to settle his mind, once again the lyrics of the song *I'll Never Say
Goodbye* drifted through his mind, except this time the need to hear it nearly consumed him. Without
thinking twice, he rolled over, grabbed his phone and pulled up the song, setting it on repeat. Once
the music started he had no difficulty drifting off to sleep, knowing that she would be there waiting
for him.

*And now time is going to slow down again as we move toward the end of the journey. Stay tuned
for Chapter 21 and send positive thoughts to my muse. She's hearing too much static lately.*
Chapter 21

Chapter Summary

Time once again slows down for Emma, Killian, their family and friends.

Time is going to once again slow down in this chapter. Also this is the T rated version of the chapter. If you would prefer the M rating, it can be found on FF.

And the song I'll Never Say Goodbye that plays during the first section can be found ... watch?v=CPjs2p3XqF0  It's SO Pretty.

Chapter 21

Boston, MA
Sunday evening

Killian knew he was asleep, but he could still hear the music as it played softly next to the bed; the melody haunting and the lyrics written, it seemed, just for him. As if there were a puzzle he needed to solve, yet hadn't uncovered the missing piece. Emma, he thought, she was the missing piece.

Say goodbye
Why, I can barely say good night
If I can hardly take my eyes from yours
How far can I go?

"I'm here. Come to me, love," he called, hoping she was close and could hear him.

He heard her giggle before he saw her smiling face, and as she ran to him, he braced to catch her.
"You're here," She jumped into his arms as if she had no doubt that he would always be there to catch her. "You're really here."

"I've missed you, love. So much." He covered her lips with his, pouring every ounce of love he felt for her into the kiss. She tasted like sunshine and chocolate and that unique taste that only belonged to Emma...his Emma...

Walk away
The thought would never cross my mind
I couldn't turn my back on spring or fall,
Your smile, least of all

Releasing her lips, he carded his fingers through her beautiful blonde hair, smiling when she purred like a kitten. "Still like that, do you?" he sighed against her skin as he placed butterfly kisses across her cheek to capture her earlobe between his lips, before burying his face in her sweet-smelling neck.

"I've missed you so much, Captain," she whispered against his shoulder.

"And I you." He tightened his hold around her trembling body, binding their bodies closer together just as their souls were bound, for together they were stronger. "I'm sorry, Emma. I never meant to
"Shh," she laid her finger on his lips, "mistakes were made by all."

"But you," he shook his head, "you didn't ..."

"Run?" He nodded his head. "I did, in my own way."

"But why?" It seemed that instead of answers, he was coming up with more questions.

She shrugged a shoulder. "We didn't believe enough? We didn't fight enough? Maybe deep down it's that we are lost and didn't think we deserved our happy ending."

\begin{quote}
When I say always
I mean forever
I trust tomorrow as much as today
I'm not afraid to say, I love you,
And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye
\end{quote}

Killian thought over what had transpired on that day in May and the events that followed, trying to decide if he agreed with her or not. Was what she said true? He didn't want to believe that, but Liam...had said...what? "But Liam said you were gone," he cried, agitated that maybe she was right.

"Did he, Killian? Did he say I was dead?" He was locked in her unwavering green gaze and couldn't look away. "Did you ask him?"

Had he? "No," he shook his head dejectedly, "I behaved just as he had, but that's no excuse for..."

Once again, her finger stopped the words. "What's done is done. We need to do what we do best, my love. Fight for each other...together.

\begin{quote}
We're dancers on a crowded floor
While other dancers live from song to song
Our music goes on,
On and on
And if I never leave your arms
I really will have traveled everywhere
For my world is there
\end{quote}

"There's something else we do well, Emma. We make beautiful music together." Killian threaded his fingers in her hair again and pulled her face up, needing his mouth on hers. Bringing her whole body close, he held her tightly while he explored her mouth with deep, soul-searching kisses. Every part of him felt her, tasted her, breathed her in as his tongue slid over and around hers and he nipped at her lips. Cupping her arse, he lifted her, encouraging her to lock her legs around his hips, and carried her across the room.

He lowered her to the bed, and removing her tank, he tossed it over his shoulder before closing his hands over her shoulders, down her arms and around to cup her breasts. Using his thumbs, he drew lazy circles over the tips causing them to tighten through the thin cotton of her bra.

Kneeling at her feet, he reached behind her where, with a simple twist of his wrist, the cotton joined her shirt on the floor. Using his lips and tongue he showed her how very much he had missed her, until she moaned and squirmed in his arms.

Releasing his possession with a pop, Killian covered her mouth and followed her down to the
mattress, taking the opportunity to slide his hands down her body, pushing her shorts and panties off. "You are so beautiful," he whispered, skimming his hand down the center of her body, before returning back to the top to repeat the process all over again. Never would he tire of her. Never would he willingly walk away. "You are mine. All mine."

"I'm yours," she agreed. "Love me. Please love me," she begged him, arching backwards, offering herself to him.

His lips traveled to her jawline, then beneath it, moving down the column of her neck as she arched back, her scent stimulating his senses, calling him home. He licked and stroked, creating a trail along her skin as he moved lower with each kiss, her movements dictating which direction he should move.

"So pretty," he whispered, stroking his hands along her shoulders, then down her arms to link their hands. Slowly he pulled both hands up, holding them on each side of her head as he lowered his lips to the upper swell of her breasts.

Love, hunger, and something more...something he didn't recognize and couldn't define threatened to pull him under. Threatened to destroy the control and the pleasure they were sharing.

Brushing his scruff over the hard tips of her breasts, he allowed his tongue to take a quick, flickering taste. As he laved and sucked he watched her expression, watched the pleasure building inside her.

This was a high that never could be duplicated in any other way with any other person. She was his woman and the pleasure he found with her was an addiction that he was afraid was impossible to live without.

Parting his lips, still watching her, he lowered his mouth to the pebble-hard tip again.

"Feels so good," she moaned, arching into him as desperation filled her voice and need filled her gaze.

Aye, he knew that pleasure rising inside her. That same pleasure he felt when she loved him.

Tearing his lips away from her breasts he dragged his open mouth down midline, kissing and licking at intervals until he left a wet trail between her breasts and her navel.

He kissed every inch of her body, taking her to the edge but always backing off before she reached her high. When her patience ran out, she finally grabbed his head, holding him in the spot she wanted and he willingly granted her wish and she slipped over the edge, reaching the high note in their song her body flushed and her heavy breathing like music to his ears.

Unable to wait any longer, he slid up her body, once again clasping her hands on either side of her head with his, holding her gaze.

"Hurry," she whispered, wrapping her legs around his hips, opening herself up for him.

Killian joined their bodies, feeling that after too long without her, he was finally home. "What you do to me." He murmured kissing her nose softly. "You undo me."

Emma tightened her legs around his hips, digging her fingers into his arse, pushing his hips tighter against hers and held on for the ride.

Unsure how much longer he could last, he watched and read her body, and with one more firm thrust, his lips clamped down on her neck, needing for some reason to leave his mark. Hitting the
note, their bodies perfectly in tune, she reached that high note she had been straining for, pulling him along, and together they rode the crescendo as it went on and on.

As her whole body relaxed in his arms, his eyes met hers and in a broken voice he uttered, "I love you, Emma. Come back to me," before kissing her and giving her his whole heart. And then, tucking her against his side, they drifted off to sleep...together.

*When I say always
I mean forever
I trust tomorrow as much as today
I am not afraid to say I love you
And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye
How could I ever say goodbye*

**Anita’s Place**
**Seattle, WA**
**Monday Morning**

The sun coming in the window woke Emma much earlier than she anticipated after spending the night making... Her eyes popped open before she could even finish that thought, and sitting straight up in bed, she dropped the sheet and looked down.

"But..." she squeaked after noticing she was in bed…naked. The image of a dark head kissing and caressing her body was so lifelike she checked the other side to make sure she was really alone.

Once she had assured herself there was no dark headed, blue-eyed pirate sleeping peacefully next to her, she glanced around for her clothes. She found them in a pile on the other side of the bed as if someone had removed them from her body and hurriedly tossed them aside.

"A dream...only a dream," she finally admitted, falling back against the pillow. "But oh, what a dream." Taking inventory of how she felt, the word that kept coming to mind had her worried about her sanity for a few seconds because she felt sated...sexually, she was almost embarrassed to admit. In her dreams, her blue-eyed Captain Hook had spent quite a few hours showing her how talented he was with his lips, fingers and other...parts...of his body. "But how can that be?"

When the empty room gave her no answers, she tossed the blankets aside, grabbed her clothing from the floor, and stepped into the bathroom. Turning the shower to warm, she reached for a ribbon to tie up her hair and her image in the mirror gave her pause.

The woman staring back at her had sleep...or...sex tousled hair, sparkling green eyes, lips that looked kiss swollen and...she leaned closer to the mirror...what looked like a hickey right where her neck curved into her shoulder.

"What the..." She pulled her hair up into a messy ponytail and stepped into the shower, wondering what Doctor Blanchard would make of this...and how much of it to share.

**NID Offices**
**New York City, NY**
**Monday Morning**

After spending a whirlwind weekend with Anna in Boston, Elsa felt hungover and decidedly uninterested in spending two hours on a conference call with Kurt Flynn and Frederick Teach of Sunsports out of Key West. Especially when, after ninety minutes into the call, they refused to deal with her any farther, wanting only to speak with Liam. Which is why she found herself, at not quite
10:00 on a Monday morning, tracking through the offices to Liam's side of the building.

"Good morning to ye," Liam's assistant greeted as she entered her office.

Elsa smiled at Colleen. "Good morning. Is Liam available?"

"He is," Colleen returned her smile, "and a fine mood he's in today."

"Is that fine as in good or fine as in watch out?" Elsa quipped.

"Oh, he's all smiles today, is our Liam. In fact, I've not seen him smile so much since-"

"Elsa," Liam interrupted his assistant before she could finish her sentence, "is there a problem?"

Elsa side-eyed Colleen, who was watching the exchange as if they were in a movie and just getting to the good stuff. "Some issues with the Sunsports," she said.

He sighed as if he had expected as much and indicated she follow him into his office. Once inside, she handed over the file and quickly explained the problem. When he indicated she have a seat while he made the call, she was surprised but curious to see him in action.

"How was your weekend?" he asked while waiting to be connected on the other end.

Pleased that he had remembered she was going away, her eyes met his and she saw an awareness that hadn't been there before Friday. "Good," she answered shyly. "Did you get rid of the extra sofas?"

He made a face and shook his head. "Not yet. Today, hopefully," he amended just as the call went through and Frederick and Kurt captured his attention with their demands.

Elsa observed him while he was focused on the call and not on her, because as much as she hated to admit it, he made her nervous and giddy at the same time. At times there was just something about his piercing blue eyes when he was attending to her that made her want to say, "Yes, sir. Anything you say, sir." That intensity no doubt made people give him whatever he wanted, which probably came in handy when he was in the Royal Navy. However, there were other times when the sadness in those eyes almost broke her heart. Did that sadness have to do with Emma and Killian, or was there something else in his past that put it there?

He was expressive when he talked, she noticed, using his hands to gesture even though the people on the other side couldn't see him. And he wasn't one for idle sitting, either, as he was constantly moving. His legs or hands or body were in motion at all times.

He hung up the phone, shut the folder, and stood up all in one motion. "Bloody hell," he bellowed, but not as forcefully as she was sure he would have done in the past.

"What happened?" she asked him curiously. "You sounded like you were making progress."

"Aye," he agreed, "I was until that wa... er... Frederick jumped in. Looks like we'll be making a trip to the Keys."

"Sorry about that," she sympathized. "I thought I could handle them."

"No problem." His somber face broke into a grin. "I love the Keys. Have you got an overnight bag here?"

"Ugh, no. Why do I need an overnight bag?" His moods were changing quicker than the weather
some places.

He shot her another quick grin. "Why, you're going with me, of course."

Elsa had no comeback, and as if by automation, she walked with him as he asked Colleen to contact their pilot, as they needed to be there in a few hours. After stopping by her office to pick up her briefcase and purse, and by their apartments to grab overnight bags, they arrived at the airport where they were ushered onto a small jet. Within minutes they were ordered to strap in, and the small plane had taken off bound for Key West, Florida, the southern-most tip of the United States.

Within a few hours they had touched down at the small Key West airport where a car was waiting to take them to their hotel. With barely time to drop their bags in the rooms, they were whisked away, this time to the offices of Sunsports. Frederick and Kurt were more jovial in person, more relaxed than they had been over the phone. Within a relatively short time, the contract had been signed, and as Liam and Elsa were ushered back to their car, they had been instructed to grab their swimming suits and be at the marina within the hour. Dinner and drinks would be served aboard the Sunsports yacht, and with instructions not to be late, they were left alone.

Elsa looked at Liam, who appeared to be just as perplexed as she felt. "Do you have any idea what just happened?"

He frowned. "What?" Then shook his head as if to clear the cobwebs out. "I think we've been out maneuvered," he whispered, showing his thought process, "but I'm just not sure why. I guess we grab our suits. Perhaps we'll find out tonight." He took off toward the wing that housed their rooms, expecting her to follow.

On the way to the elevators they passed by a small shop stocked with several items she had forgotten to pack. "Liam," Elsa grabbed his arm to stop him, "did you even bring a suit? I didn't."

There wasn't much variety in style, but both came away with the necessary wear for their afternoon and evening of boating. Since their hotel wasn't far from the marina, they walked. The sights and sounds around her were unique, and part of her wished they didn't have to go out with Frederick and Kurt and could just be tourists.

"Have you ever been to Key West?" Liam asked as they stepped down onto the dock.

"No," she shook her head, "I was just thinking I would like to play tourist."

He was prevented from saying anything more as there was a shout and they were ushered onto the Sunsport. Katheryn, Frederick's wife, and Charlotte, Kurt's fiancée, greeted her as if they were long lost friends and pulled her along with them to where they had already placed lounge chairs. Before she had time to think about it, Elsa dropped her sarong, revealing the skimpy red bikini she had on, stretched out on a chair and tilted her chin up to the sun.

As the yacht skimmed across the water of the blue Atlantic Ocean, Elsa listened more than she talked, and when she caught Liam staring at her with eyes that almost scorched her, told herself she was imagining it. But as the sun moved across the sky and darkness settled around them, she relished those looks and what they might mean once they returned to their hotel.

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Liam followed her into her room and tossed her bag on the bed. "I can't believe you forgot to put on sunscreen, Elsa." His eyes traveled from her face, across her chest and down her legs to where her feet peeked out under her sarong, bright red from sunburn. He closed the gap between them holding
up the bottle of aloe. "Your skin is too fair. Here, this will help it heal."

Her skin felt too tight for her body, and hot, she was so hot. "I'll be okay." Taking the bottle from him, she poured a little on her hand and rubbed it down her arm and over her shoulder. "That feels good. Thanks, I didn't realize the sun was so strong that late in the afternoon."

Liam shrugged a shoulder. "It's Florida." He took the bottle from her. "Turn around. Let me do your back."

Not really sure if it was a good idea or not, but helpless to resist the tenderness she saw in his gaze, Elsa slowly turned her back to him. There was no lying to herself, she had dreamed about his touch, but standing in front of him, waiting for it, scared her a little. In the past, the possibility of being this close had been only a dream, but now….now she could feel the heat from his body as he stood behind her. Holding her breath, she waited for his touch and when it came, his hands were so gentle and the shock of how good, how right it felt sent goosebumps throughout her body. When he lifted his hand, she turned back toward him. "Thank you."

He thumbed a drop of aloe left behind, his hand lingering on her shoulder. Their gazes locked and hung, suspended just the two of them, so very far away from home and all alone. His eyes, she thought, are so blue that I feel like I am drowning in them and his lips, she closed her eyes, but only briefly, as her gaze was immediately drawn back to his lips, I want a taste.

"I shouldn't do this," he whispered, his voice hoarse and edgy.

"Do what?" she asked, never assuming she would get the answer he gave.

"Kiss you."

"No?"

Instead of responding, he edged closer to her, his lips hovering precariously close to hers. Her sudden intake of air was all she had time for before their mouths met.

His hands framed her face as he pressed hot and hard against her. She gasped for air but never thought of pulling away. It consumed her. He consumed her.

His mouth inched upward until his teeth nipped and caught at her upper lip. His tongue licked and laved before he released her lip and moved to the corner of her mouth.

Forgotten was her sunscreen. Forgotten were all the reasons why she shouldn't be kissing this man because all that existed for her was him. His touch, his kiss, his very essence wound around her, filling her until everything else disappeared.

She reached for him, sliding her hands over his shoulders. Her fingers inched toward his neck until one hand cupped the nape, pulling him closer. She nibbled back at his mouth, meeting him kiss for kiss, lick for lick.

"Liam," she whispered as he let go of her and stepped back. "What?" She frowned up at him, unsure what had just happened.

"I'm sorry, sweet Elsa. That shouldn't have happened." He held her clasped hands between both of his. "I'll see you in the morning."

With another longing gaze, he turned and exited the room, leaving her with more questions than answers. Knowing no answers would be coming tonight, Elsa grabbed the bottle of aloe and went to
take a shower, a colder one than had been originally planned.

**Anita's Place**  
**Seattle, WA**  
**Tuesday Morning**

The weird, mystical phenomenon of a dream lover who left visible marks on your body and crystal-clear images of his...parts still lingered in Emma's mind. Oh, who was she kidding, she thought self-consciously, as just how much of an...impression those parts made still lingered twenty-four hours after she had awakened.

In fact, they had lingered so strongly, she spent too much time sharpening her skills at drawing human anatomy. Her proficiency seemed to display her acquaintance with her Captain's...sword in such a manner that should he jab her, she would feel it. And, here it was Tuesday morning, and while it had to be her imagination, she could definitely still...**feel** it.

But the explanation for the mark on her neck made it more difficult to chalk it all up to her imagination, as did the redness that could only be described as whisker burn that she found in other places on her body, or the soreness she felt down- "Not going there," she muttered as she finished her last sketch. "So, not going there."

With a flourish, she finished shading in the bed covers scattered over the mattress that she sat on with the Captain kneeling in front of her. Her tank lay on the floor behind her and the intense way he was looking at her caused her lady parts to jump up and down and yell, "More, more!" And, lawsy, was she more than willing to participate, if she could just remember who he was, and more importantly, who she was.

The Captain's sword wasn't the only thing she couldn't get out of her head. There were song lyrics spinning around and around inside, but she didn't remember ever hearing the song. Somehow it felt important. She wasn't hearing all of the song though, but the chorus...playing over and over, as if on repeat.

**When I say always**  
**I mean forever**  
**I trust tomorrow as much as today**  
**I'm not afraid to say I love you**  
**And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye**

There were so many questions she hoped Doctor Blanchard would help her unravel at their session later, most importantly that she hadn't lost the rest of her mind. Once she had sorted through the drawings and chosen three that weren't too graphic, she hid the others away in a drawer, considering them for her eyes only. She had just put the drawings she was taking with her into a file when there was a knock on the door and a shout that the shuttle would arrive in thirty minutes. With a smile on her face, she hurried to get ready.

**Seattle Grace Hospital**  
**Seattle, WA**  
**Tuesday Afternoon**

Mary Margaret handed over the charts to the floor nurse and started the long walk back to her office. Her hospital rounds had taken longer than she had anticipated and now she would have to wait until after Emma's session to grab a bite to eat. It was only an hour, so she could handle it, but she might have to grab some chocolate to appease baby girl Nolan.
A quick stop at the vending machine took care of her chocolate need, giving her extra time to review the new information she had learned about Emma. She needed to- her thought stopped mid-sentence when she walked into her office to see her hunky husband sitting at the table with a cheeseburger, fries, and a cookies and cream milkshake from her favorite place, Snow White's Burger Barn, waiting for her. The minute the smell tickled her olfactory system her mouth started to water, and before she had said hello to her husband, she picked up and took a large bite of her cheeseburger, groaning in ecstasy. "Hmm, so good," she mumbled around a mouthful of ice cream.

"I knew you wouldn't have time to eat and wanted to surprise you," David told her as he kissed her on the cheek while pushing her chair close to the table.

"We thank you." She patted her stomach. "I picked up these," a half-eaten bag of M&M's was tossed on the table, "on the way back."

David frowned at the chocolate. "I thought the doctor said to watch your sugar."

She smiled as she shoved a handful of fries in her mouth. "She did, and greasy foods too." She smirked and took another bite of her burger.

"Touché," he grimaced. "At least we don't eat this way every day."

"True, and I have a few minutes before Emma arrives."

"How's she doing?" David asked her quietly.

She thought about how much to say as she nibbled on her fries. "Good. She's remembering more daily, and..." She hesitated before rushing forward, "I got a break on the Emma case."

"Really?" David asked, surprised. "What happened?"

"Someone called to talk about Emma. Someone who loves her. It was her-" she got out before she was interrupted.

"Hello," Emma called out, pushing the door open. "I'm sorry, Doctor Blanchard but Dorothy wasn't at her desk."

Mary Margaret cut panicked eyes to David, but he gave a gentle shake of his head and she relaxed. "Not a problem, Emma." David pushed up from table and rewrapped his burger for later. "My lovely wife just told me you were on your way. Would you like a fry?"

She grinned at him. "No, I just ate. Thanks anyway."

"Your loss," David kissed Mary Margaret and walked toward the door, "Snow White's fries are...the best." He winked at his wife and was gone.

"Are you sure I'm not too early?" Emma asked as she moved farther into the room and set a file on the small table in front of the sofa.

"You're fine," Mary Margaret waved away her concern, "just let me finish my cheeseburger. Someone gets grumpy if I don't eat on a regular basis." She patted her belly with one hand as she continued eating with the other.

"I'm sorry, I've been meaning to ask when you're due. I feel I've been rude."

Mary Margaret dimpled. "I'm due at the end of October. We're having a girl and we don't know what
we're naming her. We want to meet her first." She took the last bite and stowed her trash before continuing, "And no, you've not been rude. You've had other things on your mind."

"Or out of it," Emma grumped, throwing herself into her usual chair.

Something's different, Mary Margaret thought as she sat down on across from her patient. "What happened?"

Mary Margaret watched Emma chew on her bottom lip and stare at the envelope in her hand. After a few minutes, she looked up and grimaced. "I had a dream."

"Oooookay," Mary Margaret began, "but...there's more, I gather?"

"I'm afraid you're going to think I'm nuts." Emma sighed, squirming in her chair. "It was a dream that felt...real," she finally shared.

"I would never think you're nuts, Emma," Mary Margaret told her in a soothing voice. "Dreams often feel very real."

When Emma didn't immediately start talking, Mary Margaret looked at her, really looked at her, and when she realized Emma was embarrassed, she smiled warmly. "You can tell me anything, honey. I'll never judge you, and chances are I've heard it all before."

Emma nodded her head. "When I woke up...the clothes I had worn to bed were on the floor," she finished in a rush.

"Oh, Emma, is that what's worrying you?" Mary Margaret asked. "Because if so, there are many reasons why a person might shed their clothing when sleeping."

"Really?" Emma asked in disbelief. "Such as?"

Crap, the good doctor thought, but quickly came up with a few examples. "You might have been dreaming you were too hot. Or maybe you were dreaming you were changing clothes. Or-"

"Making love," Emma finished.

"Exactly," Mary Margaret agreed, thinking perhaps it wasn't so much a dream, but a memory. "So, you dreamed you were making love?" Emma nodded her head. "With the man you've been drawing?"

Emma nodded her head again. "But how do you explain the fact that when I woke up, my lips were..." she touched her finger to her lips and Mary Margaret watched as a dreamy look crossed her face, "swollen, as if I had been kissed...extremely well."

"You were biting your lip in your dream? Or you had an allergic reaction to a new lotion." She knew she was reaching but that sign wasn't as easy to explain away.

Emma squinted as if remembering something that left her shattered. "I remember how he tasted," she whispered, "and how he felt. But there's more."

"More? What else happened, Emma?"

Emma moved the neck of her shirt aside, showing her the bruise displayed prominently on her neck. "It's a hickey," Mary Margaret said incredulously.

"I know!" Emma blurted. "See why I'm a bit freaked? And these..." She pulled the three drawings
out of the folder and handed them over. "I've been drawing images that won't get out of my head. And some of them are just..." She closed her eyes as a single tear spilled over and rolled down her cheek. "What am I missing?" she whispered. Reaching up, she wiped her face and pointed to the top picture. "See that drawing? See his arm? Why did I draw that?"

Mary Margaret looked down at the picture that was causing Emma such pain. It was her and her Captain Hook, locked in a heated embrace on a bed. She was on her left side, he on his right so his left hand that she usually attached the hook to was under the cover, but she had drawn a mark on the inside of his right wrist.

Slowly Mary Margaret moved to the second drawing. In this one Emma was sitting on the side of the bed with the man kneeling at her feet. But the way he was looking at her was powerful and the love on his face, thought Mary Margaret, was almost tangible. Just staring at them almost made her feel like a voyeur, which is an odd feeling when just looking at a picture.

"These are amazing," she told the artist as she flipped to the final picture, which showed the couple hugging and the man's face was buried in Emma's neck.

"See what I mean?" Emma murmured as Mary Margaret handed the drawings back and she slipped them back into the folder. "But there are some I drew that are just...just..."

"Just what?"

"Graphic," Emma answered without thinking, "almost as if I were drawing something for an anatomy book."

"What were you drawing?" Mary Margaret asked curiously.

Emma tilted her head and nodded it subtly, "Yes, his...sword," she finished on a little giggle.

"I see." Mary Margaret grinned but instantly sobered when she could tell that whatever had happened had obviously affected Emma. "How did he make you feel? Do you remember?"

Emma instantly answered, "Very loved and very safe. Do you think he's important to me?"

"Do you?" Mary Margaret threw right back at her.

"I do," Emma answered after a few minutes, "I just don't know why." She tilted her head as if an idea were being whispered into her ear. "Is it possible I know him?"

"I would count on it," Mary Margaret answered, relieved that it seemed as if a huge breakthrough had somehow occurred in her dreams.

Not quite ready to drop the subject, Emma shook her head slightly. "But how...why?"

"Connection," was the answer simply given.

And Emma snorted in disbelief. "Like what? True love or something?"

Not saying anything, Mary Margaret watched Emma come to her own conclusion, but instead of saying anything she just grunted. "That reminds me-" She needed to bring up something that she wasn't sure what Emma's reaction would be. During the last few sessions, she had purposefully stopped using the new moniker, Kate, and yet Emma had responded readily. "Now that you're having memories, I think there are a few things we should discuss."
Emma gave her a wary look but only answered, "Okay."

Taking a deep breath, Mary Margaret dove right in. "We've never talked about the possibility that someone might call me and ask about you. If that happens, unless I have your permission, I can't point them to you. You would need to sign a waiver so I have that option."

"Show me," Emma told her, conviction ringing true in each word. "This," she waved her hand over the folder, "whatever it is, made me see that I want my life back. Do you think that's possible?"

"Oh, Emma. I do. I really do. One more thing, you know August, right?"

Emma frowned. "Sure. He hangs out at the house all the time. Why?"

"Go to him. He's an attorney and can look into replacing some of your lost documents, you know...just in case you need them."

Emma nodded her head and stood up to leave. "Thanks, Doctor Blanchard. I feel better knowing I'm not crazy."

"Never crazy." She had Emma sign a couple of forms and walked with her to the door. "I'll see you Thursday."

When Emma spontaneously reached out and hugged her, Mary Margaret felt a lump in her throat and chalked it up to pregnancy hormones. Emma was half way out the door when she turned back quickly.

"Oh, do you know a song that has these lyrics?"

She sang,

"When I say always
I mean forever
I trust tomorrow as much as today
I am not afraid to say I love you
And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye"

The melody was haunting and the lump instantly returned. "It's beautiful, but I don't think I've ever heard it before. Where did you hear it?"

"Oh, that's too bad." Emma hummed through it again. "Since I woke up from my dream Monday, it keeps playing round and round in my head."

"Let me do a search for it and I'll let you know Thursday," was all she could say as she watched Emma walk out of the office, but this time there was something different. "Seems I have a phone call to make," she murmured, as she opened Emma's file, and after double checking a number, dialed it.

**Treasure Island, Florida**

**Tuesday Morning**

Robin wrapped his arms around Regina's waist and rested his chin on her shoulder. "Enjoying your last view of the Gulf before we catch our flight?"

"Yes," she sighed softly and pressed her head to his, "it's been a perfect four days." She turned to wrap her arms around his neck. "How did you know I needed this?"
His dimples appeared. "Oh, it was you who needed this? I thought it was me. Seems I made a comment about wanting to see you in a bikini..." he ran the back of his fingers down her cheek, "sometime in May. I'm happy you finally granted my wish." He kissed her, allowing the kiss to go just beyond that place where his body started thinking about doing more than kissing, but not so far gone that his body took control. "Perhaps a small walk along the beach before we have to leave?"

"That would be lovely." Regina smiled as she took his outstretched hand. "Lead away," she said softly as they left their room.

Robin led the way out of the hotel, where they walked down a set of steps to reach the powdery, soft sand of the Treasure Island beach. As they walked along the shoreline, periodically picking up seashells, they reminisced about the last four days they had spent in Florida.

They had exchanged their buttoned up, fast paced life in New York for four idyllic days of bikinis, boardshorts and sandals. They relaxed under the sun during the day, spent their evenings enjoying romantic meals and walks along the water, and their nights loving each other well into the morning hours. Through it all, they rejoiced in the freedom they felt being married to the person they were meant to be with for the rest of their days.

When they reached the bend in the beach and it was time to turn around, Robin pulled her close. "Are you ready for this?" he whispered as the warm sea breeze caressed their skin.

"I was born ready for this, Robin," she whispered back.

His eyes crinkled with happiness. "Then let's go," his smile grew, "Mrs. Mills-Locksley, and get our boy."

Her uncharacteristic giggle caused his heart to flip as his lips claimed hers for one more kiss under the warm summer sun.

Group Home
Boston, MA
Tuesday, Early Afternoon

Henry pushed aside the curtain of the bedroom window he shared with J.J. and Wyatt, hoping to see that Killian had arrived to pick him up. As had been the case the other times he had looked, the driveway was empty. When Killian had dropped him off on Sunday, he had been happy. He was excited to see his friends and play Guitar Hero. He had missed Sister Blue's hugs and Marion's cookies and the rest of his...things. But now, after being back for a few days, it wasn't the things he missed as much as he missed the people. He needed Killian...and Killian needed him too.

Sister Blue had tried to keep him busy, and on Monday had taken him to his old school where they got papers so that he could start a new school in New York. When they got home, he had asked where Killian was, and had been told he was taking care of things. Things, he thought, what kind of things?

All summer Killian had been taking care of things. Every time he had asked him what he was doing, that's what he had said, "I'm taking care of things, Henry." He had to wonder if an adult's things were the same as a kid's things, but hadn't quite got brave enough to ask. Maybe someday.

Since he had already packed his bag, Henry skipped down the stairs on the way to Sister Blue's office, intending to ask her for a cookie or two, or three, since a kid could never have too many cookies. When he heard her talking to someone, he stopped and peered around the door. She was
sitting behind her desk, with the phone up to her ear and she had her other hand pressed on her mouth. *Hmm,* he thought stopping to listen.

"I'm so glad you called, Doctor," he heard her say, and then she listened a few minutes.

"This is wonderful news. Things have been rather bleak."

And then her voice had gotten soft and he had scooted just a little closer to the doorway, thinking of leaning in when he remembered his conversation with Emma one time when they had gone to the aquarium.

Henry smiled and shrugged a shoulder. "I've been told I'm preco, uhm, preco, uhm, precochus." He beamed with pride at coming up with the right word.

"Precocious. And where did you hear that?" Emma smiled down at him as they moved up in line

Henry ducked his head and kicked the toe of his sneaker back and forth on the ground. "I heard Blue telling someone on the phone," he mumbled quietly.

"Henry," she put her hand on his shoulder to take the sting out of her words, "probably not a good habit to have."

"I know, Emma." He pressed against her side. "Next time I'll make more noise." Which he had when he came looking for her in Marion's office earlier in the day.

Emma's heart turned over at his show of affection and she had to swallow a couple of times before she felt her voice would come out normal. "Good idea."

And as tough as it was, he pulled himself away from the door and ran to the kitchen to get his own cookie. After all, he was eleven now.

Back up in his room, he grabbed his DS to play Pokemon, wishing he had gone to the park with Marion and the other kids. Wondering if it was too late to join them, he tossed his DS back into his backpack and ran out the door, right into Sister Blue.

"I'm sorry," he told her quickly, hoping she wasn't coming to bust him for listening outside her door. She placed her hand on his shoulder, and it was shaking, as if she were upset about something. He finally looked up at her, instead of at the ground, and realized her eyes were red and a little puffy.

"Henry, Killian's here. Are you ready?" She smiled but to him, her face looked a little sad.

"Alright!" He hugged her quickly, pumped his fist and grabbed his backpack before racing down the stairs.

~~~CS~~~

Killian had hated leaving Henry behind for an extra day, but after his dream on Sunday night that had seemed so real, he hadn't been able to get it out of his mind. Even the scratches on his back that he had brushed off as something he had done to himself served to haunt him, pulling him back time and again to Emma. She had come to him in his dreams just like many other times, yet this time when he woke...he could still feel her...still taste her...and still smell her on his skin. How could that be?

All day Monday he had stayed close to the apartment, climbing back in bed many times throughout the day, hoping and praying that she would return to his dreams. But while she was there, it had been
like before... He could see her, he just couldn't reach her. This morning, discouraged that she hadn't returned, he had finally taken care of all that needed to be done, and now it was time to move toward the next phase of his life.

Arriving at the Group Home where Emma had grown up, he had been prepared for the memories that bombarded him, but not for the pain that those memories created. Several times before he stepped out of the car, he had to forcibly clench his teeth and breathe through the pain to keep from driving away and asking Blue to bring Henry to him. But no...he was here...he just hoped Henry was ready to leave before the last of his strength was exhausted.

When Blue had answered the door, Killian hadn't been able to maintain eye contact for long. He was afraid he would see how much she blamed him for everything that had happened to Emma, afraid she would tell him to stay away from Henry. When she kept letting Henry leave with him, it always surprised him, and through it all she had been helping push the adoption paperwork through, giving him weekly phone calls with updates. He wasn't sure he deserved that kind of support.

"Killian," he heard as Henry barreled down the stairs into his legs, "I'm ready to go. I've got my backpack and there are a few boxes and my suitcase, that's it." He said it all quickly, as if he were afraid if he gave Killian too much time, he would be left behind.

"Whoa, mate. Slow down, you don't want to raise the ire of Sister Blue, now do you?" He grinned over Henry's head at the woman in question, just coming down the stairs carrying Henry's suitcase.

"No. Sorry, Blue," Henry mumbled as Killian untangled himself to take the suitcase from her.

"Let's get these loaded." Tipping his head slightly in Blue's direction, Killian led Henry to the car, loaded the suitcase and then ran back into the house to get the boxes that were waiting for him. The last trip in, Blue handed him an envelope with Henry's school papers and another file with Henry's health records. Was he truly ready to be a dad? he asked himself as he was handed the information. But one look into the face of the little boy standing patiently next to him, and he knew the answer was yes. He just wished...no, he wasn't going there until he could talk to Liam and try to figure a few things out.

After goodbyes were made and they had driven off, Killian looked in the rearview mirror at Blue standing there, with her hand covering her mouth, as if she were crying, and once again the song he had been hearing since Sunday drifted through his mind.

When I say always
I mean forever
I trust tomorrow as much as today
I am not afraid to say I love you
And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye

How could I ever say goodbye

Group Home
Tuesday, Late Afternoon

When Blue watched Killian drive off with Henry, the enormity of the secrets she was keeping threatened to overwhelm her. She found herself covering her mouth with her hand, forcibly holding them in. If she could just share them, the lives that she could bring joy to...a few more weeks, or she prayed, possibly just days, based on that phone call she had gotten earlier, and then everything would be out in the open. Hopefully.
Heading to her office, she pulled out the file of paperwork to go over with Regina and Robin when they arrived. The fact that two of her boys were being adopted this week, and by good friends no less, was a miracle. Roland's paperwork would be signed today and Henry's, she was covertly holding on to until...

Refusing to go there, she opened the file, flipping through the pages, making sure she had the proper forms and number of copies when her eye caught sight of a picture of Ruby, Emma and Ashley taken when they were younger, and a fresh set of tears filled her eyes. Picking it up she hugged it to her chest and whispered, "Hurry home, Sweet Girl," a simple prayer sent out hoping it reached its destination quickly.

She had tried to protect her Lost Girl ever since she had been found on the steps of the Home. It was ironic that now her Lost Girl and two Lost Boys had to trust each other and believe in the power of love to save them all. A happy ending for one assured a happy ending for all. "Can they do it?" she whispered, reaching for a tissue to blow her nose.

"Blue? Everything okay?" Robin asked as he and Regina entered the room.

Blue looked up at Robin, who, with his twinkling green eyes, had become a favorite of hers for the way he always jumped in to help the children whenever possible, and had to bite her tongue to keep from spilling her secrets. "Nothing, nothing." She pushed the picture aside and stood up to hug her company. "You two look wonderful. Married life suits you."

They sat down and one by one went through each of the forms until they were all signed and it was official. "We never had an official last name for Roland, so he will now be known as Roland Locksley." Blue looked up at the pair to make sure that would be okay.

She saw Regina exchange a glance with Robin. "Would it be possible to add Mills as his middle name?" she asked.

"That we can do," Blue easily agreed, and with the stroke of her pen, the paperwork was completed and Roland had new parents. "Congratulations, you two." She smiled at them as she closed the folder to take care of later.

"And now we celebrate." Going to a cabinet in the corner, she pulled out a bottle of champagne, which she handed to Robin to open, while she found three glasses. The cork was popped, champagne poured and a toast was made for well wishes in their married life and then another toast was made for the future of their family.

Robin was quiet and as soon as they sat down after the toasts were made, he pinned her with his green eyes. "You have made Regina and me very happy by helping us make Roland our child. Are you sure there isn't anything we can do to help you?" He looked pointedly at the picture on her desk she had been holding.

Blue glanced at the picture and then at the clock. They had a few minutes before Marion arrived back from the park and she really needed someone to talk to. Her mind made up, she set her glass down and turned to Robin. "Emma's alive and working her way back to us," she blurted out without any warning.
Robin's mouth dropped open. "But how...what...?" He tried to formulate his thoughts.

"It was like this," Blue began, "I called..."

**NID Offices**  
**New York City, NY**  
**Wednesday, Mid-Morning**

Liam stood looking down onto the atrium, watching Elsa walk across the floor and disappear down the hallway that led to her office. He hadn't seen her since they had returned from Key West...actually, he admitted to himself, he hadn't seen her since they had returned from Key West because he had been hiding from her. A chicken, that's what he was. Just a huge chicken. But after their encounter...hell, who was he kidding...after their *she's probably going to be the death of me* kiss, which he could still taste, he had slunk away with his tail tucked between his legs. He wasn't sure whom he was running from the fastest. Was it her? Or was it himself? More than likely, a bit of both.

Once she had disappeared from sight, he turned back toward his office, and just like every other time he had seen her this past month, her image lingered in his mind. Her cool blonde hair and ice blue eyes continued to mesmerize him, making him wish for things better left unsaid at this time in his life. But that didn't stop him from seeing beyond the buttoned-up suits of dark and muted colors to the woman underneath who wore soft cottons and warm colors when she was at home; the woman who made his heart beat again just by being in the same room.

And turned him into knots more than he ever could have imagined possible. And her body...

*Standing on the bridge listening with half an ear to Frederick and Kurt brag about their yacht, Liam watched Elsa. She was moving around the deck in a brightly colored sarong that was so from her usual attire that he'd practically swallowed his tongue when she stepped out into the hallway outside of their rooms. With her hair pulled up and the sarong tied around her neck, her shoulders and back were left bare for his perusal, making him want to touch to see if they were as soft as they looked. Several times on the walk to the marina their arms had accidentally brushed and the zing he'd felt had traveled throughout his body, waking parts that had been long dormant.*

*He told himself he was just making sure she was comfortable in the company of the other women, but when they had been chatting for a while and he was still watching, that excuse was harder to believe. Frederick had asked if he'd like to take the helm, and just as he was starting to turn away, Elsa had reached up to untie the sarong. As she lowered the ends and the first edges of her bright red bikini were revealed, his breath had stopped, and his heart rate had taken off at a gallop.*

"Bloody hell," he blurted just loud enough to catch the attention of his two bridge mates.

"Whoa, Liam, you've got it bad there, dude," He heard Kurt mutter.

*His primary head was no longer in control and he couldn't tear his eyes away from her to respond to Kurt. His gaze trailed from the tips of her feet, up those legs, over her flat stomach, and lingered over her pert breasts before reaching her face, covered by large sunglasses, leaving her luscious mouth ready and waiting for him.*

"No! He forcibly pulled his eyes away from her, wiping his chin that suddenly felt wet and muttering about something left the bridge. Crossing the deck, he made his way to the bow of the ship, as far away from his Blonde Goddess as possible. As the women were sunning in the stern, he needed to give himself a good talking to, as well as allow his body to calm down before he was fit for company.*
And while the ocean breeze had served to cool him off temporarily, he still hadn't gotten the image out of his mind, now going on thirty-six hours later. Unacceptable, he thought as he entered his office, set his briefcase on the desk and dropped down onto his chair. He didn't deserve someone as pure as the lovely Elsa, not until he made sure that all was well with his brother and his intended.

In all his soul searching, Liam had come to realize that he had been lying to himself for years in saying that this behavior had all been to protect Killian. The sad truth was that everything he had done had been not to protect his brother, but in truth to protect himself. He had sought to keep others out because that had been the best way to insulate himself. But after three long months, he was on his way to becoming a new man; one who put others' needs before his own. One who listened before making decisions, and one who loved without boundaries.

And today was the day. The day he had been waiting for since Killian had walked away into the airport terminal without so much as a goodbye. He just had to choose the right time and hope that Killian...and Emma would be receptive to everything he had to say.

He still had the bag holding her belongings that the doctor had given him that long ago day in May. Several times he had thought to pack them into a box and mail them to Killian's Boston address, knowing they would be forwarded, but something had stopped him each time. Liam felt he needed to look her in the eye when he returned them and say the words that had been haunting him...I'm sorry. Would she accept his apology? Would they?

Hearing the door to the outer office open, he glanced up, expecting to see Killian filling the doorway but was surprised to see Nemo. "Everything okay? You don't normally come to my corner of the world."

"Things are fine, Liam. I just wanted to apologize for being gone so much this summer, but what-"

"-Cora wants, Cora gets?" Liam finished teasingly as his mentor's face took on a reddish hue.

"Well...ugh," Nemo stopped and cleared his throat before continuing, "I wanted to be there for you and now I feel I've missed quite a bit." He hesitated as if he weren't sure how to bring up the next topic. "I also wanted to let you know that Killian will be stopping by a little later and he said he's bringing someone with him."

Liam's ears perked up at this bit of news, but since Nemo had been preoccupied with Cora all summer, he wasn't aware of everything that had happened. "I did hear he would be stopping by today. I'm hoping I get a chance to speak with them while they are here."

"Good, good." Nemo nodded his head as he stood up to leave. "I'll get out of your way now."

Liam watched him walk toward the door and thought maybe his steps seemed to be a little lighter, his smile a little broader. "I'm happy you found someone, Nemo. Dad would have been too."

Nemo smiled. "Thank you, son. Your time will come. We'll get together for dinner soon. Cora would like to get to know you."

With a tap on the door facing, he was gone, and Liam was left with a bemused expression on his face as he contemplated dinner with Nemo and his new bride.

After Nemo left, Liam tried several times to work on plans for a few projects, but he couldn't stay focused. Every time he heard Colleen's phone ring or the outer door open, he prepared for Killian and Emma's arrival. But when mid-morning was over and there had been no sign of them, he tossed his pen aside and decided to take a walk.
He had just walked in Colleen's office when the outer door opened. His heart picked up speed as he expected his brother, but when he looked up it was none other than the beautiful Elsa. His mind immediately superimposed an image of her in her red bikini over the actual image of her in her suit. "Elsa." His voice came out sounding husky even to his own ears.

"Liam," she smiled at him, "I'd like you to meet someone."

When she mentioned that she wanted him to meet someone for the first time, Liam realized that she wasn't alone, but standing there holding the hand of a child. A very familiar looking child, if he wasn't mistaken.

"Henry," she looked down at the little boy whose hand she was holding, "this is Liam, Killian's brother."

"And Liam," she grinned at him with twinkling eyes, "this is my friend, Henry. Or shall I say, your nephew?"

Yet another part of his brother's life that he had missed out on, Liam thought as he and Henry sized each other up before they stepped forward at the same time and shook hands.

"Where's Killian?" Liam frowned at Elsa wondering why she was bringing the boy into his office.

"Oh, he had to take care of several things and said he'd be about an hour, so I offered to hang with Henry, but," she said sheepishly, "I forgot about a call so...can he hang with you?"

Liam looked at her, knowing he probably looked as panicked as he felt. What did he know about kids? But if this child was going to be part of his family, then no time like the present to get to know him. "Aye. We'll get acquainted, alright Henry?"

Henry shrugged his shoulders, and after hugging Elsa goodbye they were left alone.

"Come on into my office, little mate," Liam invited Henry. "Do you have something to do in that backpack of yours?"

Once they were in his office, Liam watched the lad take out his hand held gaming system, knowing that if it were turned on, he would lose any chance of getting to know Henry, and he needed to jump in with both feet.

"So, Henry. How was your summer?" He was curious as to when Killian had traveled to Boston to get the boy and if he had taken him to Seattle with him to spend the summer with Emma.

"Okay," Henry answered, already engrossed in whatever game he was playing.

"Go anywhere fun?" Liam tried again.

"Portland." Again, Henry answered with one word, never taking his eyes off the game.

Liam frowned. "Portland? Like in Oregon?"

"No," Henry shook his head, "Maine."

That took Liam aback, as he was certain Killian had been in Seattle all summer with Emma. What had happened and why was Henry separated from Emma, whom Liam still assumed was his mother. "Oh, I bet you missed you mum?"

Henry still didn't meet his eyes, but stayed focused on the game. "My mom? My mom's been gone
since I was a baby."

Liam frowned, once again trying to process the bits of information that were being doled out a piece at a time. "I was talking about Emma. I bet you missed her."

Henry didn't answer right away as he had on previous questions, but when he looked up his eyes were swimming with tears. He nodded his head slowly. "Yeah, Killian misses her too, but..." he mumbled softly.

By this time, Liam was really confused as to why Killian missed Emma instead of going to her and why Henry was so sad talking about her. Something inside though told him that the information he learned next might not be what he expected. "But what, Henry?" Liam asked softly.

"Emma, Killian and I were going to be a family, but she's gone." His lower lip trembled, and he went back to his game.

"Gone? Henry, what do you mean by gone?" Liam asked him hesitantly.

Looking up, Henry frowned. "She died in May. Didn't you know that?"

As soon as he registered the words, Liam's knees buckled, and he landed on his desk. Dead, he thought? Killian thinks she's dead? How can that be? All summer long he had thought Killian was in Seattle with Emma and this morning, just when he thought he was going to be able to finally say he was sorry, he discovered he had been wrong.....once again. He didn't know exactly how he was going to fix things, but knowing he was going to try, Liam grabbed his briefcase. "I just remembered somewhere I need to be, Henry. If you need anything you can ask Colleen."

He was half-way out the door when Henry's voice stopped him. "Wait, where are you going?"

Liam sighed, "Seattle, Henry. I'm going to Seattle."

So what did you think of the Chapter? Stop by and let me know as I'm quite curious. And next week more unraveling will be done. See you then.
Welcome back. Last week we learned that Liam found out that Killian believe Emma was dead, instead of in Seattle as had previously thought. We also learned that Sister Blue was the one who contacted Mary Margaret.

Chapter 22

NID Offices
New York City, NY
Wednesday, Mid-Morning

After leaving the Human Resources Department, Killian had every intention of stopping by Nemo's office before going to talk to Liam, but instead of going right, he turned left toward the lunchroom. Since Nemo had been gone all summer, he was afraid there would be too many questions asked that he wasn't quite ready to answer. He hoped that once he spoke to Liam, he might be able to get a handle on some of the dots that wouldn't quite connect inside of his head. Until then, he was hoping to...avoid.

"Killian," he heard his name being called in that booming bass that could only be the person he'd been trying to elude.

"Shite," he mumbled under his breath as he turned in the direction of the speaker, only to see Nemo seated with a rather elegant looking woman. Giving the duo a smile that felt almost foreign to him, he made his way across the room. "Nemo." His smile grew as his father's best friend stood and wrapped him in his arms just like he had done when he was small. And just like had always been the case, Killian relaxed when in this man's company.

"Killian, my boy," Nemo murmured, his sympathetic voice causing the lump in his throat to start rising to the surface.

Catching a quick breath, Killian whispered back, "Not now, please," and just like always, Nemo didn't push, knowing that when he was ready, he would talk.

"Let me introduce you to my lovely bride." Nemo helped her to her feet, "Cora, this is Killian. Killian, meet Cora."

Killian shook her hand, and small talk was made before Cora made her excuses and departed, leaving him alone with the man who often saw more than Killian typically wanted him to see.

"Killian, can you sit with me?"

Looking into Nemo's expectant face, Killian had to clench his jaw to keep from making his own excuses to leave, but knew that first awkward conversation would have to happen sometime. "Alright."
They sat down and as they continued to talk, Killian could tell that Nemo was working his way around to...something. He just wasn't sure what to expect or when it was going to come, and so when it did, he was taken aback by what was revealed.

"Killian," Nemo started, bringing his head up, "have you spoken with Liam?" He gave a quick, negative shake of his head and Nemo continued. "Life has a way of making you think when you least expect it. And your brother, he's a man of many layers-

"I'm aware that..." Killian interrupted before Nemo barreled on.

"He's not been an easy man, but since May he's not been the same man."

Killian couldn't help but wonder exactly what that could mean. Since May? Was it because of the accident? Was it because of how Liam had felt when he had been in the coma? Or was there some other event that had triggered an unraveling of those layers that Nemo mentioned? Killian couldn't wait to find out.

Group Home
Boston, MA
Wednesday, Mid-Morning

Blue hadn't been able to stop the tears from falling ever since yesterday and her conversation with Robin and Regina. It had been such a huge relief to share her burden with someone who cared about Emma and Killian and yet...the journey wasn't over. In fact, in many ways the journey had just begun.

Blurtling out, "Emma's alive and working her way back to us," without much warning probably hadn't been the best way to approach the topic, but once it was out there, she dove right into her story.

Her journey to uncover the truth had all started that fateful day in May when family and friends had gathered together to celebrate Emma and Killian's graduation and marriage, and the day had ended with Elsa's words, "Emma's gone, Blue. Emma's gone."

Shock.

Sorrow.

Helpless.

Lost.

Just a few of the emotions that had washed over her before her knees had buckled and Elsa had to help her to a chair. Numb, she sat there for what could have been minutes or hours until something inside of her screamed, "FIX THIS." With her brain functioning once again, she had peppered poor Elsa with numerous questions, most of which she had been unable to answer.

Deciding the only way she would get answers, Blue put on her sweater and prepared to go to find Killian. When she opened the door, to her shock and surprise, she found him leaning against the door frame. Killian was pale, the cuts on his face still showing red against his light complexion. He appeared frail, as if he had lost weight, and his legs were barely able to hold him. With one hand wrapped around the door frame and the other holding onto Henry, he looked as if he were about to pass out.

She had looked into his eyes, which had been haunted and so sad and lonely that they just about
broken her heart, and although she tried to get him to answer a few questions, she had been loath to push very far. Unable to learn any specifics about the accident, she turned her attention to Henry and what his needs might be at a time like this. Once she uncovered those, her goal had been helping the man and boy find a way to be together so they could heal. And while they were together...healing...she turned her attention to the investigation.

The problem was that without knowing exactly where the accident occurred, she had to systematically work her way between Boston and Atlantic City, researching motor vehicle accidents all along the way. Once she found an accident, she researched the type of car involved and then tracked down victims at the hospitals, of which there were many. It had taken her five weeks to find the name of Doctor James Nolan, only to be told he was away for a few weeks. And once he returned from vacation, she had to fly to Newark to meet with him in person. But that hadn't gone the way she had anticipated, either...

"Doctor Nolan, please tell me if you treated Emma Swan back in May," she pleaded with him.

There had been a look in his eyes when she had asked him the question that she had been unable to decipher. "Sister Blue," he clasped his hands together as if to prevent them from reaching for something, "I wish I could help you. But there are privacy laws, and whether I treated someone or not, cannot be discussed."

She hadn't taken no for an answer, and forty-eight hours later she was back in his office, this time with a signed and notarized piece of paper giving him the ability to let her know that, yes...he had treated Emma Swan and, yes...she was gone...but not as in dead...as in she had been sent across the country to get the best care possible. All she heard, though, was that Emma was alive and her heart rejoiced.

Somewhere over the US

Wednesday, Late Morning

Throughout his transcontinental flight, Liam kept replaying his conversation with Henry, trying to figure out how he could have been so wrong about so many things. Not only had he been wrong about Emma and what kind of person she was, but apparently everything he had believed about Henry too.

Emma hadn't been the mother as had been suggested in that damned background report that he had commissioned on her, which would explain why he had only shown up in pictures after the first of the year. Where had he come from, though? And Elsa had referred to him as his nephew. Was he now living full time with Killian?

And the biggest mistake of all, how Killian had come to believe that Emma was dead?

"She died in May. Didn't you know that?"

Where had Killian gotten the impression that Emma had died? And why hadn't he asked? Because, he answered his own question, he had taken a page out of the Liam Jones Handbook and didn't want to talk about it, as talking about it hurt too much. Something you know a little about, don't you?

Liam knew all about that pain. He also knew...now...that not talking about it didn't make it go away. It didn't make it hurt any less. In fact, quite the opposite. It had only served to isolate him from his family and friends, making the pain even more extreme.

Liam shook his head disgusted with himself at how long it had taken him to learn that not talking about what hurt was the wrong thing to do. That, just as Nemo had pointed out, when you are in
pain...that is when you need your family. A tiny crack in the armor around his heart had appeared the minute he had opened up to Killian, forcing him to examine his feelings, piece by piece. And once that armor had disappeared, his heart could begin to mend, and now three months later, he could say that it was actually beating again. And just maybe...no, he couldn’t allow his thoughts to focus on himself until Killian and Emma were reunited.

They had been in the air over four hours and still had a few to go, but with the time difference, he was hopeful that he would be able to meet with the brother of the doctor that had recommended this hospital in the first place. He had been told that Doctor David Nolan was usually in the office until six, and with a little luck he could be having dinner with Emma tonight and they could be loaded back on the plane and ready to head back home tomorrow. He could just imagine the looks on Killian and Henry's faces as soon as they arrived.

Faces of joy.

Faces of love.

NID Offices
New York City, NY
Wednesday, Noonish

Elsa hung up the phone and pushed back from her desk, thinking that had to be the most boring call she had been involved in yet. It's just because Liam Jones wasn't sitting next to you, her inner voice taunted her.

"Oh, shut up," she snapped back. "You don't know what you're talking about."

I don't? She heard it say. I know more than you're willing to admit.

"Oh, really?" Elsa pushed up from her chair no longer able to sit still. "What do you think you know?" she huffed out.

I know he gets you. I know he makes you feel special. I know you've relived what happened in Key West at least a hundred times.

"Not quite a hundred," Elsa murmured as she leaned against the window and stared out at the street ten floors below. "Not quite a hundred," she repeated again as the memory of their encounter floated through her mind.

"I shouldn't do this," he whispered, his voice hoarse and edgy.

"Do what?" she asked, never assuming she would get the answer he gave.

"Kiss you."

"No?"

Instead of responding, he edged closer to her, his lips hovering precariously close to hers. Her sudden intake of air was all she had time for before their mouths met.

His hands framed her face as he pressed hot and hard against her. She gasped for air but never thought of pulling away. It consumed her. He consumed her.

His mouth inched upward until his teeth nipped and caught at her upper lip. His tongue licked and laved before he released her lip and moved to the corner of her mouth.
Forgotten was her sunscreen. Forgotten were all the reasons why she shouldn't be kissing this man because all that existed for her was him. His touch, his kiss, his very essence wound around her, filling her until everything else disappeared.

She reached for him, sliding her hands over his shoulders. Her fingers inched toward his neck until one hand cupped the nape of his neck, pulling him closer. She nibbled back at his mouth, meeting him kiss for kiss, lick for lick.

"Liam," she whispered as he let go of her and stepped back. "What?" She frowned up at him, unsure what had just happened.

"Okay, a hundred and one," Elsa admitted to herself as the kiss ended in the same manner as it had on Monday and she was once again left with questions. Why did he kiss her? Or better yet, why did he stop? "Didn't he like it?" she asked the empty room.

"Didn't he like what?" a British accented voice asked, nearly giving her a heart attack until she turned around and saw it was just Killian.

Just Killian, she thought, a nice looking guy but he doesn't make my heart beat double time like his older brother does. "Ugh, what?" Elsa asked as she walked back to her desk to close the files she had spread out.

Killian walked all the way into her office and leaned on the back of one of the chairs. "You said, 'Didn't he like it?" he told her patiently, "so I asked, 'Didn't he like what?'"

She shook her head slightly. "Nothing...much. Just something," she waved her hand over the files on her desk, "from my call," she quickly made up, hoping there wouldn't be anymore questions. "Sorry. What brings you by my office?"

He looked like he might say more for a minute, but then moved on. "I thought I would ask you to take Henry for a hot dog while I talk with Liam."

Elsa watched his body language, thinking that the conversation between Killian and Liam might be uncomfortable, but based on what little she knew about the past two years, it was past due. "I'd love to take Henry to lunch. Let's go get him."

On the way to Liam's office, Elsa explained why Henry was with Liam and Killian talked a little about running into Nemo and meeting Cora. Elsa wanted to ask how he was doing but was worried he wasn't ready. She still wanted to say she was sorry. That she missed Emma too and so much more, yet none of the words would come. They hung unsaid in the air around them, creating a barrier, almost as if Emma's presence was felt, but there was something keeping her out of the conversation.

They heard Henry chattering away as they reached Colleen's office. When they walked in, he was leaning over Colleen's shoulder, pointing at something on the computer screen.

"Looks like Henry's made a friend," Elsa whispered to Killian.

"Killian! Elsa!" Henry exclaimed, running around the desk giving them each a hug.

"Ahoy there, mate." Killian ruffled his hair. "Sorry I'm a bit late. Elsa's going to buy you a hotdog while I talk to Liam, if that's alright with you."

While Killian spoke to Henry, Elsa glanced into Liam's office, expecting to see him walking toward them, and when she didn't, she looked at Colleen and raised her brows. "Liam left?" she asked, a
little surprised.

Colleen nodded her head, the expression on her face one of concern. "He did. He was in there with Henry and then..." she shrugged her shoulder, "he walked out with his briefcase without saying a word."

Elsa felt Killian move in next to her, "Liam left? Where did he go?"

"I'm sorry, Killian. I don't know what to tell ye," Colleen apologized, "but Henry was quite nice company."

"He is that," He agreed with her, absentmindedly running his fingers through Henry's hair.

Elsa couldn't help but be disappointed with how the day had played out, but from the look on Killian's face, he was even more so. What was it he wanted to talk to Liam about? she wondered for the second or third time.

"I'm hungry," Henry interrupted her private thoughts.

"Okay," she smiled at him, "grab your backpack and I'll show you and Killian where to find the best hotdogs on the block."

Seattle Grace Hospital Preschool
Seattle, WA
Wednesday, Late Afternoon

Since she left Doctor Blanchard's office on Tuesday afternoon, she had been struggling with her identity. They said her name was Emma Swan, yet Emma Swan was still someone else. Her solution had been to come up with a name that she could relate to and she had become Kate Blue. But Kate Blue was a photographer, and now that her arm was free of the cast, she felt most comfortable sketching or drawing, and several times her hand itched for a paintbrush. Could the secret to integrating the two people who swam around inside her head be to step into Kate's shoes?

Since she had awakened from her dream on Monday morning, a dream that had felt so...real, she had been feeling anxious, desperate even, to rediscover who the person was that looked back at her each day. The feelings the dream left inside of her were so powerful...so overwhelmingly amazing that when she found them again...and she would find them again...she was grabbing hold with both hands and never letting go. Life was too short, and she wanted hers back.

Tossing a handful of pencils and a sketchbook into her bag, she left her room, making her way to the preschool located at Seattle Grace Hospital. The many faces of the children lined the hall that she walked down, some smiling, some pensive, some sad, but all captured by the camera wielded by Kate Blue. Her goal today was to see if they could also be captured by Emma Swan.

Once she arrived, she found a spot, unpacked her bag and started drawing.

Seattle Grace Hospital
Office of Doctor Mary Margaret Blanchard
Thursday, 9:00am PST

When Mary Margaret arrived at her office Thursday morning, she was surprised to see Emma pacing back and forth in front of her door. "Emma? I didn't expect you this early," she asked hesitantly.

Emma stopped pacing and frowned as if she were trying to decide what to say. "I'm sorry. I'm just..."
"Honey, why don't you come inside and tell me what's going on? Can you do that?" Unlocking her office door, she led the way inside, dropped her things on the table and sat down.

Watching Emma's agitation as she paced back and forth gave her some cause for concern until Emma spread out some drawings on the table in front of her. She recognized some of the children as those that belonged to colleagues as well as from photographs that Emma, or rather Kate had taken, but these were pure Emma. "Did you remember something else?" she asked softly, hoping some of the anxiety her patient was feeling would dissipate.

"Yes...and no." Emma answered just as softly as she sat down across from her. "I thought I might remember something about my life, as Emma, if I tried to take something I remembered doing as Kate and do it Emma style. Does that make sense?"

Mary Margaret looked carefully at the drawings in front of her. "You mean because your instincts lately have been to draw, and not to take photographs?" Emma nodded her head in agreement. "Then I say nicely done. It makes a lot of sense because when we engage in an activity, our memories are often triggered to remember the last time we did said activity. I'm interested to hear what it was that you remembered."

She watched Emma look down at the drawings spread out on the table. "As I was drawing these, I kept having this strong feeling of deja vu. Like I had done it before but that's all, just a feeling...until..." She picked up one picture and handed it to Mary Margaret. "This little boy is not someone who goes to the preschool. He's too old, and he looks like he might be ten or eleven.

Mary Margaret took the picture and immediately knew that Emma had drawn the little boy who had been part of the reason for some of the secrets. "Do you recognize him?"

"I don't," Emma answered sadly. "I feel like I should, but I just don't.

Watching her face, Mary Margaret could see the frustration and disappointment over not remembering him and was somewhat relieved about her decision to wait to share the news. She just hoped the memories happened quickly as time was running out. "Don't push it and try not to be too upset that you don't. Remember, pushing too hard can be just as hard on the brain as not pushing enough. We must all find that balance."

Emma sighed as she leaned back in the chair. "I know. It's just," she pulled a ribbon off her wrist and angrily tied her hair back, "there are so many questions I need answers for and all of them start with why. A big, fat w...h...y...why."

"I know, Swan." Mary Margaret threw out Emma's nickname to see if it brought forth any memories. "What did you call me?"

"Swan." Mary Margaret frowned at her. "Why? Does that nickname sound familiar?"

Emma closed her eyes and tilted her head as if listening to someone. "It's there, Doctor Blanchard," she told her quietly as a little smile played across her lips. "Like when you're making love and you are searching for that magical...place. But...even though you climb...and then climb higher...you can never fall over the edge."

Now, that's an interesting analogy, Mary Margaret thought. "Keep reaching, Emma. It's there waiting for you to grab it." She smiled as she pushed the last drawing aside. This one had no children in it, but was of Captain Hook and what could very well be Emma, locked in a heated embrace on a beach. "Is this new?"
"Aye, this morning," Emma murmured, seemingly unaware of her response. "I dreamed I was sitting on a beach alone and then...I wasn't." She met Mary Margaret's eyes. "In my dream, I looked up and there he was." Her voice faded as if she were reliving the moment all over again.

"And what did you do?" she encouraged her patient to continue.

Emma looked up, and with the biggest, most genuine smile on her face, answered, "I ran to him. Just as fast as I could run...I ran to him and when he caught me...I was home." She wiped the tears away, and then as if pulled by some invisible force, her fingertips trailed along her bottom lip. "I can still feel his lips. Still taste him." Her eyes suddenly focused, catching Mary Margaret in their net. "It was a memory, wasn't it?"

"I would agree with that assessment, Emma. Are you ready?"

Slowly, Emma nodded her head, "I remember feeling only fear when I first came here, when I heard the name Emma Swan. Now...I only feel anticipation, thanks to you." She stretched her hand in the doctor's direction.

"Oh, Emma," Mary Margaret reached forward and clasped Emma's outstretched hand. "I'm so happy for you."

"Me too," she sniffed, smiling through her tears. "Were you successful in finding the name to the song? I thought perhaps it would trigger..."

Loews Hotel
Seattle, WA
Thursday Morning

A string of thunderstorms across the middle part of the country had waylaid his plan of meeting with Doctor Nolan on Wednesday afternoon, landing him in a hotel with nothing to do but think. But with all the thinking he had been doing since May, he was ready for action, so much so that he found himself wandering the hospital grounds hoping to see Emma so he could plead his case. When that hadn't happened, he'd ended up back in his room where only the repetitive motion of push-ups and sit-ups had exhausted him enough for him to sleep.

Both the time difference and his anxiousness served to play havoc with his sleep pattern, which was how he found himself out walking as the sun came up. "It's a new day," he thought as the sun topped the buildings in downtown Seattle. Is it too much to hope it's going to be a new start for Emma, Killian and me?"

Pushing that thought aside, he stopped in one of those shops that sold souvenir trinkets to pass the time. When he spotted a globe with the space needle inside, he knew he needed to buy one for Colleen. She seemed to have several of them as there was always a different one on desk. He'd even seen her shaking one a time or two and when he questioned her, she told him it calmed her. As he turned it upside down and then righted it, he watched the bubbles clear and the tiny flakes settle on the ground once more and had to admit there was something slightly hypnotic about the process.

On his way to pay for it, he passed by t-shirts, magnets, rings, bracelets and delicate silver chains. It didn't take too much to imagine him buying one for Elsa and slipping it around her elegant neck. And it didn't take too much imagination to picture himself placing a kiss right there on her neck, over where the clasp would rest. He knew just how she would smell and, god help him, just how she would taste. Not willing to allow his thoughts to continue down that road, he turned away from the exhibit right into a stack of stuffed animals, knocking them everywhere. "Bloody hell!"
"Can I help you, sir?" A petite brunette materialized at his side.

"Sorry about that," he said sheepishly as he handed her a few of the animals he was trying to add to the stack. "I was looking for something for my...nephew," he settled on, but it sounded foreign even to his ear.

She looked around the store, full of items for children. "Tell me what he enjoys, as that may help narrow down our search."

He wasn't sure what to say, as the real answer was he had no idea, but didn't want to look like any bigger git than he already did. "I'm not really sure," he started, before prefacing it with, "he's just come to live with my brother."

"Ahh, okay. Well, I'm sure we can choose something."

She took him to a wall that held an assortment of items. There were models of the Space Needle, whales, seals and cars. Spy glasses for staring out to sea or into space. Pens, pencils, books, yet nothing really stood out until he spied an intricately designed totem hidden behind one of the Space Needle models. "This," he handed it to the salesperson. "This is perfect." He would suggest when he handed it to Henry that they research the meaning of it together.

"It's beautiful," she agreed. Taking it from him, she searched for a box to pack it in before leading him to the check-out counter. "Is there anything else?"

He didn't think, just went with his instinct and chose a delicate silver chain with a heart, his heart, he thought, hanging from it. "And this," he handed it to her, telling himself he felt guilty for knocking the display over and wanted to give her a good sale. If he could hear his subconscious laughing at him, he chose to ignore it until he was out of the shop and on his way to meet with Doctor Nolan.

Seattle Grace Hospital
Doctor David Nolan's Office
Thursday Morning

David finished his rounds and returned to his office with time to spare before his 9:30 a.m. appointment showed. "Liam Jones," he murmured, curious as to why Liam would be meeting with him after all this time. But then again, after the bizarre conversation he'd had with James and then what his wife had learned from Sister Blue, he wondered if perhaps that would be the topic of the conversation.

His assistant knocked on the door and ushered in a tall man with dark hair and piercing blue eyes. "Doctor Nolan, your 9:30 appointment, Mr. Liam Jones."

Standing, David met him halfway, holding out his hand. "Mr. Jones. It's a pleasure."

"Doctor Nolan, thank you for seeing me so quickly."

David noticed his handshake was firm but there was something about the body language that gave him the impression that Mr. Jones was nervous. Was there something going on with the brother that he has to fix? David wondered, as there were times in his and James' lives when David had intervened...before, that is, James finally grew out of his propensity for getting in trouble.

"No problem at all. I'm happy to meet anyone who donates so...generously to help someone in need." His visitor winced subtly and clenched his fists, which David did not expect, making him even more curious as to the nature of the visit. "Come sit."
David led Liam to a group of chairs next to the window where they sat down, and when Liam didn't immediately start talking decided to just toss all his cards onto the table, so to speak. "I'm assuming you're here because we, Emma's doctors that is, decided that it was best to keep her state a secret from your brother and the rest of her friends, except for Sister Blue, as she seems to be the one who figured everything out."

The way Liam tilted his head and frowned at little told David he had jumped the gun and there might be some explaining to do. "Sister Blue?" Liam asked. "What did she figure out?"

"Why, that Emma was being treated here and not dead. Although," he shook his head, "I'm not sure where that idea came from."

"Neither am I," Liam answered, "but I will get to the bottom of it. But that doesn't answer my question about Sister Blue and what she knows and why she didn't speak to my brother.

Because Mary Margaret had gotten Emma to sign the privacy papers, David felt comfortable sharing what he knew with Emma's future brother-in-law.

He told Liam what he knew about Sister Blue's search for information about the accident that finally led her to University Hospital and to his brother. Once she had shown him a notarized paper stating that she could get information regarding Emma's health, James had helped her understand Emma's injuries and why she had been sent across the country.

"But that still doesn't explain why Emma being here was kept from my brother," Liam pointed out.

"Mr. Jones," David asked, his voice laced with confusion, "shouldn't I be asking you the same thing?"

Liam wiped his hand over his face and pushed himself up. "It's just all such a mess."

The pain in his voice was evident, even to someone like him who wasn't trained to notice that kind of thing. Since Mary Margaret was the lead on Emma's case, David thought maybe she should be the one to explain her reasoning behind wanting the secret kept. "Walk with me, Mr. Jones. There's someone I'd like you to meet."

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Liam was having a hard time processing the pieces of information being tossed his direction. While he wasn't 100% sure, he thought Sister Blue was someone from Emma's past. Her name was familiar, as if he had read it in a report, but how she tracked down the doctor, what led her here, and why the bloody hell he wasn't notified and it was all kept a bloody secret, he didn't know.

"But isn't that what you wanted?" he heard as plainly as if the doctor he was walking with had uttered it.

"For maybe five minutes," he muttered silently, as he tried to put all the pieces together, kicking himself yet again for his arsehole behavior. He just hoped he could fix things and that there would be no more obstacles.

**Doctor Mary Margaret Blanchard's Office**  
**Thursday Morning**

Since Mary Margaret had just said goodbye to Emma and wasn't expecting anyone else for another hour, the sound of her husband's voice brought her to the office door. David was standing with his back to her speaking with Emma, but it was the look on the face of the man standing next to him that
drew her attention. David had just introduced Emma to him as Kate Blue and when she smiled and held out her hand, he was wrecked. If she hadn't been watching so closely, she wouldn't have caught the signs, but the slight flare of his nostrils, the way he struggled to swallow, and the way he kept shifting his weight from one leg to the other told her he was on the verge of falling apart. She hadn't heard his name but she'd bet her license he was someone connected to Emma Swan and had just discovered the secret.

Hoping to prevent all the progress that they'd made from being undone, Mary Margaret waded into middle of the conversation. "David, I didn't know you were coming by this morning." She positioned herself so Emma couldn't see her face and squeezed his arm while indicating with her eyes, *get the hell in my office!* Thankfully he took the hint and made excuses so he and his guest could follow her into her inner sanctum.

As soon as the door closed, she watched the mystery man deflate and thought to herself, *one of two responses will occur. Either he'll scream and yell or he'll fall apart like he appeared to be on the verge of a few seconds ago.* The emotions crossing his face were easily seen as she watched shock, sadness, fear, dismay and then something else...was it disgust? Or...was it guilt?

His eyes locked on hers, blue...similar to the ones in Emma's dreams, and they were awhirl with emotion. "She has amnesia, doesn't she?"

The fear in his voice hurting her in its intensity, and worried about what would happen once she answered, Mary Margaret approached him slowly. "Yes, I'm sorry."

"She remembers nothing?" he whispered brokenly.

"Very little."

He paced the room, like a caged animal who was being stalked and knew the end was near, but wasn't ready to give up without a fight. She kept expecting him to take that energy inside and throw something, yell, knock things on the floor, something...but he just continued to pace, mumbling to himself under his breath.

David seemed to expect it too, as he moved closer to her as if to shield her and the baby from this man's unpredictable behavior, his body taut, ready to jump in should the need arise, but the stranger hadn't gotten close enough to even touch her. In fact, just the opposite...he seemed to move away from...preferring to be alone with his feelings.

When he stopped abruptly in front of her table, she thought, *this is it* and worried he would pick up the drawings spread there, ripping them to shreds. As he bent over and picked up one of the pictures, she dug her nails into David's arm, anticipating its destruction and then...

He turned his tear stained face in her direction, and cried, "What have I done? Oh, what have I done?" Then, a broken man, he crumpled to the floor.

Mary Margaret stopped David when he would have crossed the room to help him, "I've got this. Let me guess. The brother?"

"Yes, Liam Jones," he told her softly. "You sure?"

She nodded her head. "We'll be fine. Tell Donna to hold my calls. This may take a while."

**Seattle Grace Hospital Grounds**

**Seattle, WA**
When Emma walked out of Doctor Blanchard's office, she had been humming the words to the song that still, after four days, refused to leave her head.

*When I say always*
*I mean forever*
*I trust tomorrow as much as today*
*I am not afraid to say I love you*
*And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye*

And now that she knew the title, "I'll Never Say Goodbye," her plan was to go back and find that song on the internet. There had to be a reason it wouldn't leave her head...words like trust...and love...and promises. And goodbye...was that what happened to her? Had she been running from something...or someone had been her last thought before running into Doctor Nolan and the man with the eyes.

The man with the eyes that were so tortured that even though she didn't know him, she knew him. She could feel his confusion...his sense of loss...his pain. Was he here for Doctor Blanchard's help, too?

His name was Liam Jones, which meant nothing to her, but his eyes...they were saying something. Unsure where such a thought would have come from, she continued her walk back to Anita's Place. But once she had returned and she couldn't shake the feeling that a message had been sent, she pulled out her sketch pad. If she couldn't receive the message as Kate Blue, perhaps she could as Emma Swan.

Pencil in hand, she drew.

**Doctor Mary Margaret Blanchard's Office**

*Thursday Morning*

When Liam Jones crumpled to the floor, Mary Margaret's first inclination had been to wrap her arms around him, giving him comfort. But the reality was she didn't know him, and he wasn't her patient, which meant she had no idea if he would be receptive or not. Settling on the sofa next to him, she laid her hand on his shoulder, silently offering support.

The longer he sat there with his face buried in his arms and his arms resting on his knees, his shoulders shaking, the more she wanted to jump in with both feet to see how she could help. But with his current body language saying back off, she was trying to be patient, even though ignoring someone in pain wasn't her strong suit. For Emma, she thought, as something told her there was more going on inside him than just finding out Emma had amnesia.

His arrival in the picture had come as a surprise, and she was a little worried about how it had affected Emma. As far as she knew, James had recommended them for Emma's care and Liam hadn't batted an eye. He had arranged money to be transferred to cover all her services as well as her rent at Anita's Place, allowing her to get the best treatment and live comfortably for at least a year, if needed. Where had the breakdown in communication occurred?

While waiting for Liam to talk to her, Mary Margaret mentally reviewed what had been discussed with Sister Blue. Between the basic information from the Sister and what she had learned from James and Doctor Hopper, there were many pieces that still needed to be connected so the journey could continue. And whether he believed it or not, this man next to her was as much a part of that journey as Emma and Killian. Helping them find their way out of the maze and onto the right path was the
next step in healing. And after promising herself and Emma that she would help her, finding the piece that they needed to get there was her goal.

From Sister Blue, Mary Margaret had learned that upon being discharged from the hospital, the fiancé told a friend that Emma had died. When she tried to get more information from him, he was unable to give her any answers, turning away from everyone except for a young boy, Henry. For weeks, she had put her grief aside and focused on helping the boy and man, but, not willing to accept help in any way, the man had asked if he could take the boy away. It had been weeks before she spoke to him again and in the interim started looking for answers to the questions running through her mind.

Once Sister Blue had received all the information possible from James, she had set her sights on getting to Emma, which led her to the phone call. Mary Margaret's session with Emma was just about over when the phone rang and on the other end...Sister Blue.

Without permission to divulge any information about Emma's case, their first conversation had been Blue doing all the talking, filling her in on Emma's background information, which included her love of Fairytales and Killian Jones, who was Emma's very own Captain Hook.

Needing more answers, Mary Margaret had contacted her brother-in-law, James, and asked him to find out what he could about the situation. His return call had given her no answers as to why Emma's fiancé had assumed she was deceased, but she did learn that for four days following the accident, he had been in a coma, reasons unknown. And the morning after he woke, he left the hospital against medical advice.

Probably pushing the privacy boundaries a little more than she should have, she contacted Doctor Hopper, Killian's neurologist, who, while he hadn't heard of Emma, certainly remembered the brother. Liam Jones had spent an extensive amount of time at his brother's bedside, telling him story after story in hope of bringing him out of his coma. But even he had been unsuccessful in getting his brother to stay in the hospital longer and, barely able to stand, Killian Jones had signed out and left. With the knowledge of Emma's fiancé's situation, Mary Margaret had to wonder how learning the person you love has no knowledge of you would affect him as in her experience there were often difficulties for the patient and the patient's family members.

Later the same day, Sister Blue had faxed legal paperwork and Mary Margaret had been able to discuss Emma's case with someone from her past. Upon learning of Emma's amnesia, Sister Blue had fallen apart and immediately volunteered to come out.

But after Emma's small breakthrough, Mary Margaret felt it was important for her to wait until the end of the month to see if the memories would return on their own. While it had been hard getting Sister Blue to stay home and keep the secret, there were also Killian and Henry to consider and what Emma not remembering them would mean to them. Loving someone who didn't know who you were could be a very lonely place to be.

Armed with background information, she continued her treatment with Emma, and today for the first time she seemed to have remembered Henry. Wondering if Liam's introduction would trigger a memory was something weighing heavily on her mind as she watched him lift his head.

"I'm sorry," he mumbled through his hands as he wiped his face, "I've just made such a mess of things." He shook his head with regret. "I just thought..." That you were protecting your brother? Don't go there, Man! You're beyond that now. "I'm such an arsehole," he spit out.

Handing him a tissue, Mary Margaret watched the emotions cross his face and the frustration he had directed at himself. "You're the oldest, aren't you?"
Her question surprised him. "Aye. There are eight years between us."

"Then being an arsehole is normal." He raised his eyebrow at her response. "I've not met an oldest sibling who didn't have a bit of assholeness in them."

"Oh?" His grin was easy this time, assuring her they were on the same path.

"You've met my husband David, right?" she deadpanned.

He pushed up off the floor to sit on the edge of the sofa, wondering why she was being so nice to him. "Now what?" He desperately wanted to be able to make things right but with his brother barely speaking to him and Emma not remembering and Henry...Henry...close to the same age he had been when the train incident occurred.

Mary Margaret didn't say anything for a few minutes as she watched him study Emma's drawing of Henry. "It's quite good, isn't it?"

"It's bloody amazing," he murmured, unable to take his eyes off the drawing. "I met him, you know? Henry, that is." He looked her direction. "Does she know who he is?"

She shook her head. "No, but feels she should."

He winced as if she had just punched him in the stomach and pushed off the sofa to pace around the room. "She should!" he shouted. "She should know him and be with him and it's my fault she isn't." He balled up his fists, needing to hit something, kick something...anything to make what he was feeling inside go away.

Watching him pace, Mary Margaret was once again reminded of the caged animal. "Liam," she waited for him to make eye contact before continuing, "let me help." Her request was simple but when he relaxed his stance and moved next to her on the sofa, she knew he was ready.

Liam stared at the woman who, with her kind eyes and soothing voice, gave him hope that the mess he had made of everyone's lives could be fixed. That somehow she would help him fix it. But where did he begin? Did he start from when he got the phone call? Did he start with Lily? In the end, he decided he was done making excuses for the man he had become and would focus on how to be a better one.

Mary Margaret watched him as he told the story of arriving at the hospital and going to his brother's room. Of how banged up Killian was, but his brother's only thought had been of Emma and what she needed. The tale of his first meeting with Emma and how he had made plans with James to get her the very best care possible and then...the innocent words that had sent him on a dark path. Words spilling from his mouth that caused him such shame and disgust that he couldn't believe anyone would dare to be kind to him.

After the deal was made, he had felt remorse, yet it had been too late. Not only was Emma already gone, but Killian had slipped into a coma. And when the miracle happened and Killian had awakened, but instead of being able to talk like brothers, Killian had turned into him; into the man who bottled his feelings, not listening or sharing at all. In other words, they had switched places.

"When I arrived to see Killian after he had woken, Doctor Hopper pulled me aside to talk to me about him. After listening to the doctor and then to Killian, I truly believed that Emma was the reason my brother was in such a hurry to get to the airport, Doctor Blanchard."

The hesitancy in his voice made Mary Margaret think that he was replaying those conversations over again and was still interpreting the message the same way. "I'm assuming you tried several times to
broach the subject."

"I did," he agreed, "but each time I tried to talk, he became more annoyed...agitated even." He frowned in confusion.

"You were worried he would lapse back into a coma, weren't you?" she asked pointedly.

Liam tilted his head, thinking about what to say. "Partly," he finally answered, "but there was more to it." He took a deep breath before continuing, "Mainly, I didn't want to push too hard." And because he felt he owed her more of a reason continued with his sad story. "My experience with a woman who was both similar, yet the antithesis to Emma, changed my outlook on life and love, and afterward every time Killian tried to talk to me, I just..."

"Pushed him away?" she guessed.

"Aye," he agreed. "I needed to figure out how I felt, and so for years I pushed him away. But now," he said softly, sitting back down on the sofa, "it's he who's doing the pushing. Except now there's Emma."

"And she needs you both," Mary Margaret whispered softly.

Liam shook his head, a sad look crossing his face. "I caused this. I sent her away. She doesn't need me, only Killian. And Henry, too."

"Liam," Mary Margaret responded firmly, "Emma's leaving wasn't all your fault." He gave her a sideways glance, telling her without words that he didn't quite believe her. "You gave Emma the means to leave, but you didn't escort her out of the hospital. Something inside Emma is what pushed her to leave and that is where the problem lies."

He was looking at her as if he didn't believe the words she had just uttered. "Not my fault?" But I...

She held her hand up to stop him from continuing. "I'm not saying that what you did wasn't arsehole behavior and you shouldn't apologize, but Emma leaving...that is on Emma." And, she thought silently, it seemed like a good possibility that the Killian had run in his own way too. "But I'll say it again, Emma needs both of you to help her heal, and you all need to work together to be a family."

That he wasn't the only one responsible for the mess was a nice thought, but Liam didn't think he could forgive himself so easily. "I wish I could believe that, Doctor Blanchard." He looked down at the drawing of Henry. "Right now, though, I want to help that little boy and my brother get back their happy ending. What can I do?"

Mary Margaret thought about the visits from Emma's dream lover, and while she wanted to give the words to Liam that she thought he wanted to hear, she also wanted Emma to face her fears on her own. While it might be the more difficult thing to do, it would ultimately make her stronger. "I am not going to tell you to keep Emma's whereabouts from Killian, because there's already been too much hurt between you. I will say that a part of Emma remembers him and is working her way back to him." She pushed aside a few drawings until she found the one of Emma in the arms of the man who had come to her on the beach. "This was a memory...as was this..." She picked up her phone, locating the song she wanted and hit play.

When Liam heard the opening notes, he was immediately pulled back to a time when life was easier. A time when all he had to worry about whether he could convince his mum into letting him stay up later or if he could have an extra bowl of pudding for dessert. He remembered he had been watching his new baby brother sleep and how he was curious about his dreams because his mouth kept
moving as he slept. Deciding to go ask his parents, he had rounded the corner into the kitchen to see them dancing in the middle of the day. The lyrics he heard were,

We're dancers on a crowded floor  
While other dancers live from song to song  
Our music goes on,  
On and on  
And if I never leave your arms  
I really will have traveled everywhere  
For my world is there

Liam cut his eyes to the doctor. "It was my parents' song." He looked back at the drawing of Emma and Killian on the beach. "They loved to dance to it. Killian must have played it for Emma."

"Emma heard it in a dream a few days ago," Mary Margaret told him quietly.

"That's good, right?"

"That's really good," she agreed.

Knowing the next step for him would be trying to explain everything to Killian, Liam stood up. "I think I know what I need to do."

Mary Margaret followed him to the door. "If you need anything, I'm here."

Liam shook her hand. "Doctor Blanchard, I'm really glad that Emma had you to help her through this."

Mary Margaret couldn't help the lump that appeared in her throat as Emma had become a special patient to her. When Liam let go of her hand, she surprised him with a quick hug. "I'm really glad I was there for her too."

As she opened the door, she smiled up at him. "Remember, Liam, love can save even the darkest souls. You just have to believe in it."

Liam left her office, not with Emma as he had so much wanted, but with a new understanding of not only himself, but also of why the Doctor Nolan in New Jersey had recommended this place. While he had no idea Emma would lose her memory, he did know that Mary Margaret Blanchard was the person she would need to help her work her way through her darkest hours.

His job now, while flying back to New York, was to figure out the best way to break the news to Killian.

Anita's Place  
Seattle, WA  
Thursday Late Afternoon

Emma tossed aside her pencil and looked down at what she had drawn. Four pictures. All of the man with the eyes, Liam Jones. The man whose eyes spoke to her, but until she opened herself up to Emma Swan's abilities, she couldn't read them.

Now four pictures.

Four emotions.
Messages for her.

Picking up the first picture, she looked only at his eyes, not ready to deal with the questions the rest of the picture raised. The eyes seemed to be showing concern. But for what?

The second picture, though, those eyes were a little scary, and that they came from the same man was surprising. Anger...or...rage were the only two words she could use to describe them.

And then...the picture that showed his eyes the moment he saw her in Doctor Blanchard's office. Shock...surprise.

The last picture showed the moment just after Doctor Nolan had introduced them. And those eyes struck a chord deep inside, pulling up feelings that she understood. Those eyes conveyed pain...sorrow...and remorse. Those eyes brought tears to hers.

With the makings of a headache knocking, Emma set the drawings aside and turned up the music that had been playing on a loop since she had returned.

*Say goodbye,*
*Why I can barely say goodnight*
*If I can hardly take my eyes from yours*
*How far can I go?*

Curling up on her side, she tucked her hands under her cheek and felt the music wash over her, creating a lethargy she hadn't realized she felt until just now. Closing her eyes, she anticipated the return of her dream lover. She to be wrapped in his arms and swept away to that place where everything was perfect, and their happy beginning was waiting for her to grab and hold onto with both hands.

*Walk away*
*The thought would never cross my mind*
*I couldn't turn my back on spring or fall,*

*Your smile, least of all...*

**Seattle Grace Grounds**
**Early Thursday Evening**

Mary Margaret tucked her arm through David's as they strolled across the grounds toward *Anita's Place*. A little farther than they usually walked, but she needed to clear her head after a day full of patients, and one non-patient, but he had needed her just the same.

"Why is it we're walking to Anita's Place again?" David moaned as they rounded a corner and the lights were still far in the distance. "I'm hungry."

Mary Margaret rolled her eyes up at him. "We won't be long," she placated him. "I just want to check on Emma."

He patted her hand lovingly. "I know. Was your talk with Liam Jones beneficial?"

As they continued along the path, she told him a little about what she had learned from Liam. Before she could finish her story, they were walking up the steps to the transitional residence and being greeted by the owner herself.

"Doctor Blanchard, I didn't know you had a group session tonight." Mrs. Lucas came out of the
kitchen drying her hands on a towel. "I was just finishing baking cookies but if you need the room..."

"Cookies?" David looked over her shoulder. "You wouldn't have a few to spare for a starving doctor, would you?"

"Oh you," Mrs. Lucas popped him with her dishtowel, "help yourself."

As soon as David wandered into the kitchen, Mary Margaret shook her head at her friend. "You might wish you hadn't offered."

"He'll be fine. Now what brings you by?" she asked quietly.

"I want to check on Emma. Did you see her when she got back from therapy?"

"No," Mrs. Lucas frowned, "in fact, she never came down for dinner. Let's go check on her."

Mary Margaret followed Mrs. Lucas up the stairs to Emma's room where, when they knocked softly, the door swung open. Raising her brows at that, they peered around the door and could see Emma sleeping peacefully on the bed. Surrounding her were remnants of what must have been a marathon drawing session.

Glancing over the drawings, Liam Jones was featured prominently in them all. Two of the pictures appeared to have taken place just outside her office earlier that day and the others... "Will you look at that?"

"What," she heard over her shoulder.

"Emma remembered a pivotal time in her journey, she just doesn't realize it's her."

She had drawn a picture of Liam Jones standing next to a hospital bed, but the face of the person on the bed couldn't be seen. Each picture conveyed emotions that Emma had read in her subject's eyes; concern...anger...shock...then sorrow. She's forgiven him, she thought as she gathered the artwork and set it on the dresser. "It won't be long now, before the swan flies back home," she murmured as they made their way back downstairs.

**NID Offices**

**New York, NY**

**Thursday Early Evening**

Elsa hadn't been able to get Killian's look of both surprise and disappointment when he heard that Liam wasn't in his office out of her head. He had wanted to speak with his brother, which made her wonder if it were Liam who hadn't wanted to speak to Killian. But that made no sense, either. Based on everything she had heard about Liam from Emma, he had gone out of his way to control Killian. Would he just walk away without a word unless there was a good reason? She didn't think so, but then again the dynamic between the brothers wasn't something she could say she had a lot of knowledge of currently, and it wasn't like she could just ask.

Yes, she wanted to know more about Killian and Liam's relationship, as did Regina and Robin. But even though they had worked closely together for almost a month, Killian's name hadn't been brought up. It was almost as if there was an unwritten rule about it, because he had asked her about Anna. He knew she was friends with Emma and Killian, at least she thought he did. After all, he had seen her having lunch with Regina and he had to know about them, didn't he? Too many questions about a relationship that, while it wasn't as if Liam were unaffected by her, he wasn't affected enough for it to go anywhere.
And that sucked, she thought, as he was the first man, in...oh, forever, to capture her attention. His blue-grey eyes, sexy chin dent, and to-die-for accent all combined to make her heart go pitter-pat whenever he was near. And his lips, she moaned, the sound loud in the quiet of her office, she could still taste him, even now days later. And if that weren't enough, there was his musky scent that nearly caused her to swoon when he was close, and always a look in his eyes that seemingly spoke to her in a language she was yet to completely understand, but somehow told her everything she needed to know. Question was...what was next? And was he even interested?

The look in his eyes said yes, but when he had her in his arms while they had been in Key West, he had pushed her away. And since they had returned, it was almost as if he had been avoiding her. "Men!" she mumbled, laying her head down and gently bumping the desk with it several times. "Why must they be so infuriating?"

Her phone buzzed just as she had decided to dive back into a contract and when she glanced at it and saw Regina was trying to facetime her, the frustration dissipated. "Regina, are you home?"

Regina shook her head. "No and by the looks of things, neither are you."

"Guilty," Elsa gave her a sheepish grin. "I'm only going to finish one more contract then I'll leave."

"All work and no play makes Elsa a dull girl, "Regina intoned, giving her friend a tiny smile. "But no lecture tonight. I'm too happy."

"How was Florida? And how is Boston?"

"Florida was wonderful and beautiful but we'll talk more about that later. I'm calling to invite you to a dinner at our place tomorrow. A little celebration. Can you come?"

"It's not like my social calendar is so full I can't come support my friend. Will it be just us?"

Regina made a face. "No, my mother and Nemo will be there, and I think Robin is going to see if Killian and Henry will come."

"Sounds good. Almost like old times. I miss those days," she sighed. This would be the first time they had all been together since May and she had a feeling it was going to be tough.

Regina looked over her shoulder and Elsa could see Robin and Roland strolling into the room. "I have to go. We're moving out of my apartment. I'll send you the details later. Bye."

"Okay, that was odd," Elsa murmured, wondering if she had said anything to trigger that response. Feeling rather unsettled by the call, she decided she'd had enough for the day and packed to leave. And if on her way out she just happened to go by a certain office, well...

~~~CS~~~

After the plane landed in White Plains and he drove out of the airport, Liam had every intention of going straight to Killian's apartment and telling him everything, until he realized he didn't know where his brother lived. Not ready to get into whys of that with Nemo, Liam opted to go by the office and look in the HR files. However, once he was at the office, he hadn't considered that the passwords had been changed, and since he didn't know where Colleen hid them, he was out of luck anyway. Unless...he asked for help. But whom did he ask?

Elsa.
"And why should she help me?"

_Surely you're not that daft_, his subconscious answered.

Pushing away from his desk, his foot caught the edge of his briefcase toppling it over, the bag holding Emma's things spilling out. "Bloody hell," he muttered, picking up the bag and remembering the piece of paper in the wallet with the address on it, but this time he couldn't make himself look at it. "What now?" he sighed as the melody of the song Doctor Blanchard mentioned once again flitted through his mind.

As a lad he had caught his parents dancing to that song many times. _A song for lovers_, he thought as he started the song and moved to stare out the window at the lights of the city far below. _Lost in the haunting melody of the music_, he allowed the memories to wash over him.

~~~CS~~~

Approaching the hallway that housed Liam's office, Elsa expected all to be dark, and when she saw the soft glow of light, her curiosity was piqued. Stopping at the doorway, just outside of Colleen's inner sanctum, she could hear music, playing softly, barely loud enough to make out the words. A song she had never heard before, but one that crawled along her skin leaving goosebumps in its wake.

Hesitant to take another step, she stood still and let them mesmerize her,

_When I say always_
_I mean forever_
_I trust tomorrow as much as today_
_I'm not afraid to say, I love you,
And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye_

A side of Liam one wouldn't expect, but one she was interested to know more about, unless he wasn't alone. But no, quickly dismissing that notion, Elsa took a step...crossing the threshold. Setting her bag on Colleen's desk, she took measured step after measured step toward the door to Liam's office. The closer she got, the more she felt something invisible pulling her along. It took from her any decision to back away. It took any decision to not stay.

The room was lit by a small lamp on his desk that cast a circle of light around it, leaving rest of the room in shadows. Leaning against the doorframe, she watched the man who captivated her with his existence. He was standing in front of the large window, hands in his pockets staring out into the dark New York night. _Lonely_, she thought. _He looks lonely, almost as if he has the weight of the world on his shoulders. Will he let me help? Should I even ask?_

Lost in thoughts that kept him from noticing her presence, she opted not to move closer and instead angled toward his desk. There was an old speaker sitting on the corner with lights flashing as it kept time with the music. As the song came to an end, she looked down, but it wasn't the screen of Liam's phone that caught her attention. That was caught by something gold glittering in the soft light. Unable to help herself, she picked up the bag and looked inside. She gasped, the bag falling from her hand to land on the desk with a thud.

"Now you know the secret," she heard Liam say softly from the shadows.

"Secret?" She frowned slightly. "What secret, Liam?"

"That Emma's alive," he said cautiously.
Elsa felt her mouth drop open at the same time her knees gave out and she fell into Liam's desk chair. "Wha...what did you say?" She could feel Liam's eyes cataloging every expression that crossed her face.

"Yes, sweet Elsa," he said softly, "your friend is alive."

"But..." she was afraid to believe what he was saying, but wanted it to be true for not only herself, but for Killian and Henry. She could sense that there was a lot Liam wasn't saying, but something in his demeanor told her that he wanted to tell her, but was worried for some reason.

His eyes bore into hers, sending her messages so quickly she was having trouble interpreting them before they changed. Messages she thought she understood, but the reason behind them she didn't know yet. Slowly, she started toward him, her eyes never leaving his, until she was close enough to touch. Taking his hand, she led him to the sofa tucked and pulled him down next to her. "Talk to me."

He broke eye contact and mumbled, "Are you sure you want to hear the story?" so softly she almost didn't hear him.

"Try me...trust me."

She didn't have to wait long before he leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees and began, "When I walked in her room, I had no intention of liking her. In fact, in my head the person in the bed was going to look like a monster. But then...I saw her and she was nothing like a monster. With her head and hands encased in gauze, she was anything but..."

As soon as he started talking, Elsa could hear the pain in his voice and wasn't sure she had made the right decision in asking to hear the story. Especially when he mentioned Emma's head and face being wrapped, seemingly like a mummy, as the thought of her friend being in so much pain hurt her, as if she were feeling the pain vicariously.

He continued, "I was pleasantly surprised when instead of the self-centered, weak person I expected to find lying on the bed, Emma's first thought had been of Killian and she showed me strength and courage. I was ready to take the step and meet her half-way, and then I spoke with the doctor about her and planned to help her all I could, but then..."

Without him even saying it, Elsa somehow knew that he had been hurt terribly by a woman at one time and had somehow associated Emma with that woman. What had the woman done to him? she wondered, as Liam went on with his story.

"...and things were going well until she uttered the phrase 'our happy beginning' and bloody hell, Elsa...it was as if my brain split in two and someone else was spouting all these horrible words." He pushed up and paced in front of her. "I made a bloody deal with her," he cried brokenly, "she could get fixed but she couldn't contact anyone. What was I thinking?"

"What?!" she exclaimed, pushing up to face him. "What did you say?" On one hand Elsa couldn't quite believe what she was hearing but then again...on the other hand, she could appreciate an older sibling who only wanted to protect their younger one. After all, she would do whatever she needed to do to protect Anna, but...

Her outburst seemed to be exactly what he expected because as soon as the last word was out of her mouth, his body crumpled into itself and he fell back onto the sofa. "Don't you think I've asked myself that thousands of times?" He looked up at her, his eyes pleading with her to understand, "but then I thought it didn't matter and Killian was leaving to be with her, until..."
The despair on his face gave proof to his words and to keep from going to him, she physically held on to a nearby chair. "Until...?"

"Until I met Henry," he told her softly.

"Henry?" She frowned. "What does Henry have to do with this?"

~~~CS~~~

He had watched her eyes go from solemn to shooting sparks at him, and then back to solemn when Henry was mentioned. How was he going to make her understand something in just a few minutes that he still struggled with? "He told me Emma had died." The feeling of being punched in the stomach still lingered even thirty hours later.

"But how could that even happen?" She frowned at him making him wonder if she thought he was the one who told Killian Emma was gone.

He shook his head. "I don't know. When I took Killian to the airport, I thought he was on his way to Emma and then...Henry... And once I heard, I left for Seattle to make it right but..." He let out his breath with a sigh.

"But?" She lifted her brows waiting for him to explain.

He winced, "Emma has amnesia."

"Amnesia?!" Elsa cried dropping down next to him on the sofa. "Is Killian on his way her?"

"Not yet-"

"Not yet? Liam," she exclaimed exasperatedly, "first you make a 'deal' with Emma, then Killian thinks she's dead and now..." she gestured around the room, "I get wanting to protect him, but when Killian wouldn't talk to you about Emma, why didn't you try harder?"

Liam pushed off the sofa "Communication had been tough between us for almost ten years, first with the death of our parents and then...I behaved like an arsehole for years after Lily crushed my heart. And then Killian trusted me to take care of the woman he loved and he ended up in a coma." Unable to stand still, he paced. "Do you have any idea how much it hurts," he cried, "to walk into a room and see your brother, whom you have protected your entire life lying there...still and quiet? And no matter how much you talk to him, he doesn't open his eyes." He wiped his face and continued, "When he woke up, I couldn't push him, because what if-"

"-what if it happened again?" she finished.

"Aye," he agreed, "I couldn't risk that, plus..."

"You thought Killian was going to her?" He nodded his head. "But why didn't you tell him when you returned from your trip?"

Liam gave her a sheepish smile. "I planned on it but realized I didn't have his new address. And I got here and didn't have the new passwords to get into the HR files."

"I can help you, Liam."

He gave her a hopeful smile. "You know the password?"

Elsa rolled her eyes and pulled him off the sofa, expecting him to follow "No, I know Killian's
address. Come on, let's go."

He held his ground, watching as she continued moving toward the door. "You're going to help me?" he asked her, in awe of her forgiving spirit.

Elsa turned around, and seeing that he was still next to the sofa, walked back his way. "Liam, I don't know exactly what you were feeling then and I don't know exactly what happened to create the communication mix-up, but," she took his hands, stepping even closer, "I know Emma, and if she hadn't believed she was going somewhere better, she wouldn't have gone." He smiled thinking that was similar to what Doctor Blanchard had said. She continued, "And I like to think that I know you pretty well, and that man wants to see his brother happy. Shall we go?"

Liam had to swallow before he could be sure his voice would work, and very slowly cupped her face. "Thank you, so much. I'm not sure I deserve...umf."

~~~CS~~~

Elsa still wanted to knock a few heads together and try to figure out where the communication breakdown had occurred, but she truly believed Liam when he said that he regretted his actions. She had been fighting the need to touch him all evening, to give him comfort...one friend to another, but then...he cupped her face...

His lips were soft and he tasted just as good as he had in Key West. She felt him relax, yet never attempt to take the kiss any deeper, just his hands on her face and their lips melding together as if they had done so hundreds of times. When he lifted his head, she slowly opened her eyes and the look on his face said he was just as wrecked as she felt. "Ready?"

"Aye, Sweet Elsa. We've much to talk about, I think."

"I'd like that," she whispered as she waited for him to turn off the music and gather his briefcase, including the bag with Emma's belongings. "On the way, why don't you tell me about that song?"

**Killian's Place**

**New York, NY**

**Late Thursday Evening**

Killian watched Henry crawl into the new bed that had just been delivered that day, and couldn't help the feelings of sadness that washed over him every time he thought about what might have been. But when Henry snuggled down under the brand-new comforter and gave him a hopeful smile, he shoved those thoughts aside, pulling out instead what would be. Sitting on the side of the bed, he tucked the blanket tightly around the little body. "What did you think of Uncle Liam?"

Henry bit his lip as if he wasn't sure of exactly what he wanted to say. "His eyes are sad."

Killian's brows shot up. "Sad? Are you sure that's the right word, Henry?"

He nodded his head. "Yeah, Killian...sad. Just like us."

Killian wasn't sure what to make of that because the last time he had seen Liam, he hadn't been sad, he'd been...confused was the emotion that came to mind but that didn't make any sense either.

"Did he say anything else?"

Henry nodded his head. "Uh huh. He asked if I missed my mum."
His innocent comment opened a door in Killian's brain that had been slammed tightly shut since May, and having no desire to revisit those feelings in front of Henry, he quickly turned off the lights and made his way out onto the balcony. Leaning on the railing, looking out at the city below him, he relived opening the folder in Liam's apartment and seeing that his brother had taken a step in a direction unexpected. There were so many questions he had wanted to get answers for, yet here he was...still waiting. More questions...no answers.

It was always like this after Henry went to bed. Too quiet. Too much time to live with his regrets. With his anger. His sorrow. His eyes were drawn to the brightest star in the sky as it winked off and on, almost as if it were trying to tell him something. "Will you come to me tonight, Swan?"

he whispered to the star. "I'll be waiting."

Making his way back inside, he closed the door to Henry's bedroom before reaching the kitchen. In one cabinet he found a glass. In another his bottle of rum. And then before giving it too much thought he had poured a generous dollop into the glass.

Taking the glass and bringing the bottle along for good measure, he dropped down onto the chair that gave him the best view of the painting of their cliff. With each drink a memory of his time with Emma floated through his mind until after a while all that remained were the words spoken beside the cliff, intermingling with those from his mother's song.

"I believe when two souls are destined to meet, when they become one, nothing can pull them apart. Today, with these beads, I thee wed for as long as this rock, this earth, this sea and the sky shall live. And I promise you that I will never forget these beads and our promise to each other and what they stand for. I love you Killian."

When I say always
I mean forever
I trust tomorrow as much as today
I'm not afraid to say, I love you,
And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye

And I promise to always be there when you need me and to never, ever say goodbye to you. I love you Emma.

When I say always
I mean forever
I trust tomorrow as much as today
I am not afraid to say I love you
And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye

How could I ever say goodbye?

"How could I ever say goodbye?" he repeated the last line of the song, knowing there was no answer and would never be an answer. Just as he lifted the glass, draining the last few drops, there was a knock at the door.

When he opened the door, he didn't expect to see his brother standing there and without thinking, Killian reared back and, with a strong right cross to the chin, knocked Liam to the floor.

"Killian," Elsa grabbed his arm, giving him his first realization she was there. "Stop that!"

"Give me one good reason why I should," he growled at his brother, who had picked himself up off
the floor.

Liam stated simply, "Emma's alive."

*I hope you enjoyed the chapter, it was long. And next week's is even longer. Let me know what you think.*
Chapter 23

Chapter Summary

The Brothers' Jones compare stories. Will they reunite or will it tear them apart forever?

In Chapter 22, the brothers' reunion started a bit explosively but Killian found out that Emma was alive. This is a big chapter... enjoy.

Chapter 23

Killian's Apartment
New York, NY
Thursday Night

"Wh...what," Killian pinned Elsa with a hard stare, "did he say?"

She smiled and her eyes glistened with unshed tears. "Emma is alive."

As soon as she said the words, he knew it to be true. Somehow a part of him had always known it to be true. "You said that?" he asked his brother who, upon rising, had moved closer to Elsa. Killian squinted slightly, reminded of his dream where she had been the one who calmed Liam and wondered...was something there between them?

"Aye, Killian," Liam nodded his head, "your Emma is alive, and," he took a deep breath, "she's waiting for you to come get her."

His words hit Killian like a punch to his solar plexus, causing him to fall back against the wall. His thoughts raced in a million directions at once, and when after a few seconds he couldn't organize them enough to say anything, he sent a panicked look Liam's way.

~~~CS~~~

Liam had come up with a dozen things to say to Killian but the minute the door was opened, everything he had planned seemed so inadequate. And while one part of him felt he deserved that punch, blimey it hurt. His little brother wasn't so little any longer and his punches packed a bit more, well...punch. But really, it was nothing more than he deserved for this debacle that had...somehow been created. And now, finally, thanks to the woman standing next to him-he could still feel her lips on his-no, he pushed the thought down, Killian and Emma...and Henry came first. Once their happy ending was on track, well...

~~~CS~~~

His eyes traveled over Killian's face, noting the shock his words had brought seemed to have added some color to his otherwise pale complexion. Likewise, his eyes were starting to sparkle again, as if they were returning to life after being long dead. He wouldn't look like death warmed over if you hadn't, his inner self started to say before he clamped down on the negative thoughts.

It was time for them to work together...as brothers...for until they did, the happiness of their family was in jeopardy. "Killian, we need to talk," he said quickly, worried that the door would be slammed in his face.
Killian was still leaning against the wall studying him, but as if making up his mind about something, he opened the door wider and indicated they precede him.

"Maybe I should go-" Elsa began.

"-No, please stay," both men answered in unison and then laughed...their laughter a little self-conscious, stilted even...as if the man standing before them were someone they hadn't seen in a while.

Liam wanted to reach out and squeeze her hand, not only to give him strength for what was to come, but to say thank you...once again.

She sent him a little smile and he relaxed slightly as she nodded her head in agreement and made her way inside. He relaxed even more once she crossed the threshold and, after a quick glance at Killian, followed her.

Elsa moved into the apartment as if she were familiar with the place, causing him equal parts shame and jealousy. Jealousy...not because he was worried that there might be something between his brother and her, but because he should have been the one who was familiar with Killian's place. And if it hadn't taken so long for him to realize that Emma Swan was the only woman for his brother, he might have been.

"Liam." His name spoken by a quiet voice served to bring him back to the present. "Here," Elsa held out a tissue, "you've a little blood on your lip."

He hadn't felt the sting nor noticed the metallic taste of the blood until she brought it to his attention. As he pressed the tissue against his split lip, he glanced down into Elsa's concerned eyes, "You okay?" she asked, sparking a warm, tingling feeling inside.

"I'm glad you stayed," he told her sincerely, thinking how she balanced him. "We might need a referee."

Liam watched Killian move closer, anger and something else in each step, but what that was, he wasn't sure. Dabbing at his lip, he pulled the tissue away to see that the bleeding had slowed but not stopped completely.

Killian pinned him with a harsh stare. "The hit was for daring to invade Emma's and my privacy, but we can discuss that," he spit out in a clipped voice, "later. Now, perhaps you can share with me why all of a sudden you're telling me Emma's alive when you were the one who told me she died.

Liam felt his head come up as if he had been hit again, and wondered if he was hearing things, "What did you say?"

"You heard me," Killian barked, "you're the one who told me she was dead."

"No," Liam shook his head, thinking back to that day in May, "I...why...what..." He couldn't remember what he had said but telling his brother that Emma was dead, that he knew didn't happen.

"What? Can't admit it now?"
"Killian," Liam took a step closer, "after I left Emma and came back to your room, you were sleeping...and then," he swallowed hard remembering the feeling of hearing his brother had slipped into a coma, "the doctor explained your situation, so...how could I have said that to you?"

"You said," Killian took a step closer and clenched his teeth, 'How am I going to tell Killian about Emma?' I might not have had my eyes opened but I heard you loud and clear. Of course, he had also heard the nurses in the hallway talking about the woman who had been in the Parkway wreck who had died but...

Liam looked away from Killian, turning anguished eyes toward Elsa. Her eyes were bright with unshed tears and even though just looking at her gave him peace, she was unable to give him any answers that would help him know how to explain what had happened. "But Killian, that's not..."

"But Killian, what?" Killian interrupted, "Are you going to toss more excuses my way?"

"No!" Liam shouted, "it's just..."

Elsa put her hand on his arm, halting any further speech. "Killian, listen to Liam."

She pleaded with his brother but not for herself, for him, he thought. But would it do any good?

~~~CS~~~

*Emma is alive*, he heard ricocheting around inside his head. *EMMA is alive*, bounced back a little louder. *EMMA IS ALIVE*, this time the need to see her and hold her in his arms flooded through him, staggering him in its wake. Why did Liam know this? Better yet, how did Liam know this? He found himself clenching and unclenching his fists, fighting the urge to hit Liam again and again until he told him the whole story. Perhaps patience would be the better approach than beating the hell out of him, he decided, even though he had a feeling it was going to be painful.

The more that was said, though, the angrier he found himself becoming at the situation until...Elsa stepped into the conversation pleading with him to listen...but not to her...to Liam.

His irritation immediately was directed her way. "Whose side are you on anyway?" he tossed at her.

Her eyes filled with tears that spilled over. "I'm on Emma's side," she told him brokenly.

Her plea deflated him, temporarily displacing his anger and he sank into the nearest chair, covering his face with his hands. "You're right, I'm sorry. It's just that..."

"Killian," she repeated, "just listen."

After giving her a subtle nod, Killian watched her slip her hand into Liam's and whisper, "Just start at the beginning."

As Liam began his account of that fateful Monday night three months ago, Killian was once again pulled back into that headspace of how helpless he had felt. How, still to this day, he cursed his impulsive decision to rush their wedding instead of just waiting...and talking to Liam. And how guilty he had felt as he watched Liam walk out of his hospital room while he lay in the bed, alone.

When Elsa slipped her small hand into his, Liam immediately felt a calm come over him that had fled when Killian opened the door. Finding the words that would truly explain why something like this had happened, when it wasn't something that he totally understood himself, was a seemingly impossible task, but he had to try. He missed his brother and he was committed to repairing his family, no matter what it took. Taking a deep breath and allowing the sight of Elsa's hand enclosed in
"When I got the call that you had been in the accident, I panicked as I didn't think I could live with myself if I wasn't able to try to make things right between us." Liam swallowed hard, thinking about his talk with Nemo and how his wise words had been what really started his self-reflection. "And once I saw that you were alive and asking me for help, well...I was relieved. When I left your room the thoughts and feelings bouncing around inside my head were all over the place, but your well-being was my priority."

"I walked into Emma's room expecting one thing, and was presented with a sight that caused pain in the vicinity of my heart that I hadn't felt in years." Feeling his eyes glaze over, Liam blinked rapidly trying to clear his vision but that didn't stop a few tears from escaping and rolling down his face. "I had been living, but unable to feel anything since that debacle with Lily, almost to the point that life...hadn't been worth...living." He met Killian's eyes, wanting to show him that walking into that room had changed him.

Killian winced at the amount of pain he could see in Liam's eyes, hear in his voice, almost embarrassed at just how much Liam was allowing him to see. But the realization that had Liam said those very things to him six months ago, he might have heard and accepted them for what they were, but after thinking that Emma was gone forever, he understood. He understood and had felt exactly the same way. The difference was he had someone to live for...Liam hadn't, as the child Lily was carrying hadn't lived to give Liam...life.

Liam stared off into the corner of the room, seeing Emma for the first time all over again, but not willing to sugarcoat anything. "I hadn't known the extent of her injuries until then...but Killian," he took a breath, "she resembled a mummy, as her head was covered with gauze bandages to the point that all I could see were shadows were her eyes were and a small portion of her mouth." Liam hated that his words caused the look of pain on Killian's face, but then he went on and finished telling of her hand and arm injuries.

When Liam got to the part of the story about his first meeting with Emma and he heard about the bandages that encompassed her head and hands, Killian's heart shattered. The thought that his swan had been in such pain and so...broken...and all because of him...was just about too much. How could she ever want him to be a part of her life after that? How could he ever forgive himself?

Pulled from his self-recrimination, he heard Liam say, "and the first thing she did was ask about you, Killian."

To think that with all that she was enduring, she could still find it in her heart to care about his well-being was such a selfless act, but intrinsic to the woman...that was Emma Swan. That behavior alone showed him how strong she really was, but knowing Emma, she probably felt the opposite; that by worrying about him she was ignoring her own needs because they were too much for her to handle. Yet...if this were so, couldn't the same be said for himself?

"Our talk was different than what I had imagined it would be," Liam remembered. "She was different. And then when her doctor arrived and started answering questions, I couldn't stay uninvolved." His confession, as painful as it was to relive, continued, "I actively found myself wanting to help her, wanting to make things easier for her, and so I quizzed the doctor until it was time for him to remove the bandages...then I stepped outside into the corridor."

As he told his story, Liam found he couldn't look at Killian too often, as the pain he saw on his brother's face hurt too much. That in thinking he was protecting him, he had caused unimaginable suffering. "As I waited for her exam to be complete, I found myself wanting to be wrong about everything. I kept thinking that perhaps, as Nemo had said, just as she had saved you, maybe she
Liam's mention of Nemo made Killian curious about that conversation, but he knew what was said was true. Emma's love had been vital in his growth and his ability to learn to put other's needs before his own. That was evident by the fact that he was here, in New York City...and Henry was his...when he could have been somewhere far away, living the life of an aging vagabond.

"What exactly did the doctor say about her injuries, Liam?"

"They were bad." Liam shut his eyes, thinking about the doctor's description.

"Tell me," Killian whispered, not really wanting to hear, but needing to know the consequences of his actions. "I remember trying to get a look at her when I was still trapped in the car and all I saw...in the place of her beautiful face...was blood. I thought right then that she was gone."

Liam couldn't help rubbing his hand over his heart, hoping he could ease some of the discomfort that retelling these events brought forth. He wished with almost everything inside that they could go back to a time when putting a band-aid on Killian's hurt knee was all his brother needed to heal. But then...he looked at Elsa, who had stretched out next to him, but was still watching him with gentle eyes, giving him comfort and support for the next part.

"The blood on her face was from flying glass, which was why the bandages covered her head, initially, and according to Doctor Nolan, an injury that would require only a minor procedure to fix." Knowing there was no easy way to tell the rest, Liam gritted his teeth and waded in, speaking quickly. "She had broken her jaw in several places, which required it to be wired shut. Her cheekbone was shattered, some teeth had been knocked out and she had broken her right arm," he finished breathlessly, and stopped to allow Killian a moment to review what he had shared.

Every word that came from Liam's mouth reverberated around inside his head until, leaning forward, Killian covered his face with his hands. He wanted to scream shut up, over and over, but knew that wouldn't help get to the truth. That wouldn't help the pain because as much as this hurt him to hear, it didn't scratch the surface of what his swan had endured. "Recovery?" he managed to ask.

"I asked what she would require and was told that she would need surgeries to repair her cheekbones after her jaw healed. Surgery to replace her teeth. A procedure on her skin, possibly therapy on her arm, and that was if nothing went wrong." And the worst possible thing had gone wrong, he thought as she had completely lost her way. "Doctor Nolan gave me a list of seven or eight different types of doctors and told me her recovery could possibly take six months or more."

Liam picked up a picture that had been taken for Killian's first birthday, looking at how happy his parents had been and how much they had loved their boys. Family, he thought, it's all about family. "I asked the doctor what he would have done, had it been his family, and with no hesitation he told me about his brother and his brother's staff in Seattle."

"The doctor was that convinced Seattle was the right place for Emma?" Killian asked.

"Aye," Liam shared, "told me if I could get nurses, he would get everything started immediately. I arranged the nurses, the NID jet and transferred money to get her what she needed, and then..."

As Killian listened to Liam's story, he tried to read between the words, to see what was missing. "How much, Liam?" He finally asked, knowing his Swan and remembering how he had wanted to buy her the world, and yet she hadn't cared about that. But in this case, had she worried about what her injuries were going to mean to others? Something told him his independent lady had been not
thinking of her injuries and how they affected her, but of how they would affect him.

Liam shrugged, thinking that if he would have needed to give more, he would have. "I wired $500,000 to the Doctor Nolan in Seattle to take care of everything Emma would need."

"But then," he heard Liam's voice trail off and when he closed his eyes, clenched his teeth and took a deep breath before continuing, Killian knew it was going to be bad. "It was all arranged," Liam uttered, his voice agonized, "and then she made a comment about it being your happy beginning, and god, Killian, I'm so sorry, but these words just came out of my mouth and by the time I realized how screwed up I was, it was too late.

Killian didn't know if he really wanted to hear the rest of the story because he could tell from Liam's voice that he was wrecked, but he pushed through the pain. "Tell me the rest of it. What did you do, Liam?"

Liam didn't answer right away, finally pushing up to alternately lean on a chair and then pace. "I made a deal with her, okay! There, you have it! I was so torn up inside that instead of being a decent human being and helping her, I made a bloody deal ensuring that she was across the country, alone. And by the time I'd pulled my head out of my arse, you were in a coma and she was already gone." Running out of steam, Liam dropped back onto the sofa, leaning forward onto his knees.

Killian tried to wrap his head around Liam's behavior. Had he really just heard what he thought? He wanted to say that he was surprised, but was he really? Or had he been expecting this since they had talked that day in May? Wasn't it that talk that had been instrumental in the fork their journey to a happy ending had encountered? But that it had occurred was...what? "So, you started to help her, but then what, Liam? She said something and you...oh, I don't know...snapped?" he taunted, needing to expel some of the steam rising up inside of him.

"Snapped, is a good word for it," Liam tried to explain calmly. "Her words pulled my mindset right back to Lily, and when she said those exact same words to me all I could think of was how, for years, I blindly went through life, essentially heartless...caring about no one except myself and...you," he took another quick breath before continuing, "Killian...only you. With those words I was reminded of the promise I had made to myself when I found you lying beside the train tracks. You were so still, and right then I made a vow that I would do anything...anything to keep you from being hurt." He shook his head giving a humorless laugh. "Some protector I turned out to be."

And he had, thought Killian. Liam had shouldered the responsibility for more incidences than he could count until their parent's death and then...what had happened? They had both run, but not toward each other...away.

"So, what were you planning on telling me when you came back to my room, Liam?" he barked. "Were you planning on telling me Emma was dead and out of my life for good? That's what you wanted wasn't it?"

Liam winced, but with Killian's last words, pushed himself upright. "NO!" he threw back, "that's not what I wanted! And no, I would never have told you she was dead! Cor blimey, Killian, what kind of a monster do you think I am?"

Killian watched Liam kneel in front of him, the look on his face beseeching him to understand. "I was going to tell you I had sent her to Seattle and let you decide."

Killian snorted. "You expect me to believe that? After everything you said and did..." That dossier and its contents still present in his mind. "What changed your mind?"
Liam bowed his head and murmured, "Emma...it was your Emma."

With his words, much of the anger Killian had been holding on to dissipated enough for him to ask quietly, "How?"

Liam shrugged his shoulder. "The way she handled herself and talked about you, and once my head cleared I finally," he gave a self-deprecating smile, "took a long hard look at myself and realized I didn't like the man I saw in the mirror each day."

Killian was reminded of what Nemo had said to him at the NID lunchroom, was it just yesterday? "Nemo said you had changed, but I didn't question him any further..." His thoughts turned inward as he remembered his time in the hospital after he had woken up. Had he asked Liam what he meant by his comment? Had he asked Doctor Hopper about the conversations he overheard from the hallway? No. The answer was no, he thought sadly. He had behaved exactly as Liam had for years, and that fault settled firmly on his own shoulders.

Killian watched Liam move back to the sofa, noticing for the first time how his brother's eyes lingered on the woman who had fallen asleep while they had been talking. Was she part of the reason his brother had changed, he wondered as he prepared to wade into the center of his own behavior in this entire ordeal. "I heard you talking to me, you know?" he went on quietly.

Liam's head came up. "Really?" Killian inclined his head in acknowledgment. "Doctor Hopper said you might. What else do you remember from that time?"

Killian remembered bits and pieces of what had been said around him but never full stories, which really was all he had heard from the hallway. Why then had he been so quick to jump to the conclusion that they had been talking about Emma? "Your words weren't the only reason why I came to the wrong conclusion about Emma," he grudgingly told his brother. "When I overheard some people talking about an accident on the Parkway and the death of a blonde woman and-

"-you automatically assumed they were talking about Emma," Liam sighed. "But why didn't you ask me, little brother?"

"Why hadn't he?" he wondered as he felt his shoulders droop with fatigue, and then answered his own question, because he was a chicken shite and conflict had never been his thing. "I wasn't strong enough to hear the words I thought you would say to me and so I ran...again."

Unable to sit still any longer, Killian moved to the mantle and stared up at the picture of the cliff. "I took Henry and we stayed close to the place where this cliff is located and I tried to heal, but I couldn't let go of Emma. She was always there." She had been there in his dreams every single night, but not in the same way as she had been that night in their apartment, just there...with him...waiting for him. "I, like you, finally looked in the mirror and decided we needed to talk, but when I got to your office yesterday..."

"I was gone."

"Aye. What happened?" Killian turned back to face Liam, waiting for him to fill in some more of the blanks.

Liam, apparently feeling just as restless as he, prowled the room. "When I picked you up at the hospital and you refused to talk to me, I could have pushed, but after our rocky few years and your health, I didn't want to risk it." Stopping close enough for Killian to see the sincerity in his eyes, he whispered, "I couldn't chance losing you again," before resuming his pacing, "and when you said you knew about Emma, I assumed you knew where she was and that's where you were going. I made plans all summer to ask for forgiveness as soon as you brought her home, but then Henry was in my office and when he said the words, 'Emma died in May,' I was stunned, and so," he paused, "I
went to Seattle."

Finally, he heard the words he had been waiting for all night. "Did you see Emma? Is she ready to come home?"

"I don't know how to tell you this but-"

"...just spit it out, Liam," Killian chided, "you've not had difficulty saying other things I might not like."

"I saw Emma," he said slowly, "but Emma has amnesia," he finished so quickly that it took several seconds before the sentence was fully processed.

Killian swung around until he was facing Liam. "She doesn't remember me, our love...Henry?"

Dropping back in the chair he listened as Liam filled him in on everything he had learned from Emma's doctors and how he had come away feeling completely confident that with Doctor Blanchard was where Emma was meant to be.

"Doctor Blanchard says she's remembering you, Killian," Liam told him. "She showed me a picture she had drawn on a beach and told me she remembered that song that mom and dad loved. I assumed you had played it for her."

Killian nodded, "You mean, *Heaven and Earth*? Aye, I sang that to her last Christmas."

"No, not that one. The other one," Liam clarified before moving across the room to dig through Elsa's bag.

"But I never..." Killian started to say he had never played the song for Emma, but then he remembered he had...sort of. She had come to him in his dream and the song had been playing over and over again. Was it possible that's where she remembered hearing it?

"Here, I've been holding this for you since May." Liam held out a clear bag and inside he could see Emma's things. "Go get her, Killian. Bring her home where she belongs."

Killian took the bag and opened it, pulling out her ring. When he looked back at Liam, he couldn't stop the tears from falling, thinking that in the time it took to fly to Seattle, he could once again have her in his arms.

Liam gave him the information on how to locate Emma's doctor and contacted the NID pilot who would have the plane ready to take off by 5:00am. He also promised that he and Elsa would take care of Henry until he returned home.

Killian knew that he and Liam had more that they needed to work through, but for now the most important thing was for him to get to Emma. After packing a bag, he walked back into the room to see his brother gently covering Elsa with a throw. "Is she part of the reason for your change?"

Liam looked back at Elsa, a small smile playing along his lips. "The change? No. A heart that once again beats? Perhaps," he finished, following him to the door.

Several things ran through Killian's mind of how to respond, but in the end he just smiled at the fact that his brother's cheeks had turned pink when he spoke about her. "I hope it works out, Liam. You both deserve to be happy," was all he said before running out the door.

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Liam watched Killian get into the elevator and with a last wave goodbye, shut the door behind him. He was tired but felt as if a huge weight had been lifted from his chest and that, with time, his family would be okay. And he owed a great deal to the beautiful woman asleep on the sofa in the next room. How could he ever repay her for all that she had given him in their short acquaintance?

On his way back to where she lay sleeping, he stopped off in the kitchen for a bottle of water. When he spotted Killian's opened bottle of rum sitting on the counter, he thought what the hell and poured a generous wallop into a glass. Sending a silent good luck toast Killian's way, Liam tossed back the fiery liquid, its essence burning all the way down. "Still tastes like rotgut little brother," he muttered as he turned out the light and made his way to the front room where his blonde goddess was waiting.

All was quiet as he rounded the corner, and without even glancing toward the sofa he turned off all the lights, leaving only the sconces surrounding the fireplace lit. "That was beautiful to hear." She spoke so softly he thought he had imagined it until he turned to see her sitting up, a gentle smile on her face.

His first thought upon hearing her statement was bloody hell, did she hear what I said to Killian about my beating heart? Fear almost had him wishing he'd had a second glass of rum, but the memory of the way she had initiated the kiss earlier in the evening kept his feet planted. Deciding he'd just go with the flow, he met her gaze. "What was beautiful?" he asked her, slowly making his way to her side.

She folded her legs under her and leaned in his direction, the smile on her face telling him she knew exactly what he was doing. "What you said to Killian."

His face felt warm as he gave her a little smile. "You'll need to be more specific, Sweet Elsa, as I said quite a bit to Killian."

Almost nonchalantly, she dropped her hand onto his shoulder, and as her thumb hypnotically moved back and forth his heart rate sped up. "Everything, Liam. I heard it all."

"I..." Her hand moved closer to his nape causing him to momentarily lose his train of thought. "You weren't sleeping?"

Her grin turned into a full-fledged smile as her hand cupped his neck and the hypnotic thumb movement was happening against bare skin. "No, I was playing possum. I thought you two would talk more freely if you thought I was asleep. Mad?"

Was he mad? No, he was actually happy she had heard what was said because if she heard the entire story, yet still wanted to be this close to him, then maybe... "I couldn't be mad at you. You have been a true friend."

She squinted at him as if trying to read his mind. "A true friend, huh?"

"Aye."

"Liam," she leaned even closer, "only a true friend or someone who has caused your heart to beat again?"

Her light floral scent surrounded them, and she was so close he could feel her breath wafting across his lips, making him wish he could pull her across his lap and taste her mouth again. Calling on the last of his strength, he squeezed her fingers. "Oh, Sweet Elsa, I so don't deserve someone as sweet and pure as you in my life."

Elsa lifted their joined hands, kissing his fingertips. "Liam, I'm far from sweet and pure," she sighed.
leaning closer still. "There are things I’ve done to protect Anna that haven't been very nice and if she found out," she shuddered, "I just hope she never finds out." she finished quietly.

He studied her face deciding he was done pushing her away. Tugging her across his lap with one hand and cupping her face with his other, he teased her lips with his until she opened them, allowing him to sink into the kiss like he had been dreaming of for weeks. She tasted like honey, smelled like flowers, and made his heart beat so damn hard it was in jeopardy of leaping from his chest.

His body hardened and only sheer will kept his hands from roaming and the clothes from flying. When she moaned and tucked her hand between the buttons of his shirt, he knew they had to stop, for he'd not be the wanker who took her to bed before taking her on a date. Lifting his head, he pulled her against his chest, tucking her against his neck. "I'm sorry," he whispered in her ear.

She lifted her head and he could barely make out her glittering eyes. "No, Liam, don't be sorry, but I agree, this is not the place."

She clambered off his lap, tucking herself against his side with her head on his shoulder. This feels right, he thought as he tightened his arm around her, deciding a change of topic was in order, when his eyes were caught by the magic of the painting. "Did Emma paint that?" He nodded at the picture.

"She did," Elsa hummed, "it was where Killian proposed."

"Really?" He smiled tenderly and, unable to stop himself, kissed the tip of her nose. "Tell me."

"Well, it's all quite romantic," she told him. "It all started with a rock and some blue beads."

Anita's Place
Seattle, WA
Friday Early Morning

When Emma opened her eyes on Friday morning, she was tired but anxious to try to make some sense out of the chaos that surrounded her night. A pounding head didn't help, but the fact that the pains weren't sharp like the ones that often accompanied the return of a memory gave her hope that a hot shower would be the only necessary medicine. She didn't need to deal with the lethargy from pain pills on top of everything else.

Her sleep had been restless with images of rain-slicked roads, which instilled fear and pain interspersed with other images creating feelings of love, hope and the future. The dichotomy between the two sides created such an internal struggle that she found herself searching for the one person who had been there for her...keeping her safe throughout this whole ordeal but...he was nowhere to be found. Her dream lover had chosen last night to leave her alone, and while that had sucked, she had woken with a new sense of purpose. Where she chose to go with it was on her...and only her.

What had caused the change was a question that she planned on discussing with Doctor Blanchard. Was it something that had changed within her, and if so what? Or was it something that had changed externally? Or perhaps, it was both? Drawing the pictures of the man whose expressive eyes had spoken to her floated through her mind caused her to wonder if he was a catalyst in some way.

She continually asked herself if she was different and if it were possible to forget who you were on the inside. Or had the change started because her very own Captain Hook hadn't been there, his eyes telling her she was safe and his arms holding her tightly while she slept? Or was there more? She had spent the summer trying to find out who Emma Swan was, but so many of the pieces were still missing. But last night, alone, she had finally come to the realization that ultimately she needed to
rely on herself for her own inner strength, which meant 'no one would save Emma Swan, but Emma Swan.'

Had she always relied on herself to solve her problems? Something told her the answer to that question was unequivocally yes, and while it might take a lot of hard work, the time was now. She had told Doctor Blanchard that she missed her life and she was determined to do everything in her power to get it back.

Since drawing was one way that she truly felt connected to Emma Swan, she pulled out her sketch pad and pencils. Without thinking, she quickly sketched a few pictures that had lingered in the front of her mind, but when she finished and looked at them, they didn't give her the satisfaction she needed. Taken separately they were still just a large rock, a necklace made of blue beads and waves crashing on a beach. Together, they were...what? Was there a deeper meaning that she was missing? And if so, how did she find the answer?

Leaving the pictures behind, she took a change of clothes into the bathroom to get ready for her appointment. While waiting for the shower to warm, she couldn't help but glance in the mirror at the remnants of the hickey her dream lover had left on Monday. It had faded from purple to light yellow but if she closed her eyes, she could still feel the weight of his body on hers. "Where did you go?" she whispered as she ran a finger back and forth over the spot. Not expecting an answer, she stepped under the warm water, hoping to wash the last remnants of her headache away.

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With her sketchbook under her arm, Emma left her room with enough time to stop by the kitchen for one of Mrs. Lucas' famous homemade bearclaws and a cup of hot chocolate. She was so lost in thought that she didn't hear anyone enter the kitchen until she heard her name and looked up into August's smiling blue eyes. "August," she exclaimed laughingly, "you scared me!"

"You were miles away just now," he observed. "Where were you?"

"I'm not really sure," she told him quietly, "I was just wondering about a few of the pictures I drew earlier."

He didn't say anything right away, but then inclined his head toward the empty chair. "Do you mind?"

"No, it's fine. Have a seat." Emma took a bite of her pastry while he sat down, pulling a large envelope out of his case and laying it on the table. "Is that for me?"

He tapped his finger on top of it. "It is for you," he confirmed. "But...does Doctor Blanchard know you asked me to get these?"

"She knows," Emma told him as he scooted the envelope across the table, "but I think I'll wait until I see her to open it. What were you able to get?"

His smile was easy. "A copy of your driver's license, your social security card and a credit card."

"Why a credit card, again?" She frowned at him as she couldn't imagine why she might need a credit card. "If I need something Mrs. Lucas usually helps me get it."

He shrugged as he stood up and tossed his empty cup in the trashcan. "You never know when you might need to take a trip." He winked at Mrs. Lucas, who had just walked into the room as he walked out.
Finishing her sweet roll and drink, she cleaned up after herself and left the group home for the short walk to Doctor Blanchard's office. It seemed she had several items to bring up in her therapy session today.

**Killian's Apartment**  
**New York, NY**  
**Friday Morning**

Elsa's body was ready to wake but her mind was enjoying the dream of being wrapped in Liam's strong arms too much to allow it. With his arms holding her tightly against his warm body and his smell surrounding them, she was exactly where she wanted to be, and it felt better than any dream she's had before. Which meant getting up and going to work could wait...for a bit anyway.

Adjusting her head a little on the pillow allowed her nose to settle perfectly in what she imagined was the notch in Liam's neck, where she could feel his heartbeat pulsing in time with hers. Wiggling her body just a little closer, she inched the pillow between her legs, just a little tighter, the realism continuing to grow until she could imagine her bare foot sliding up and down Liam's leg. With each movement, her knee was brought closer and closer to his hard body until in her dreams he moaned and covered her lips with his. But then, her subconscious reminded her, that was always where she woke up, alone...the good parts just out of reach.

Deciding the excitement of being in Liam's arms for even a small amount of time was worth the possibility of waking during the good parts, Elsa resumed rubbing her foot up...and down. Higher and higher her knee moved, closer to the spot that could be so hard, yet soft at the same time, until the rumble of his voice vibrated under her ear, startling her and causing her knee to jerk "Bloody hell, Elsa!" His hand clamped down on her knee, stopping its movement. "Give me a minute here," he groaned softly.

With the muttered exclamation, Elsa's eyes flew open, realizing that it hadn't been a dream at all, but a dream come true. "Liam, wha..." Was all she got out before the pain on his face registered and without thinking she put her hand over his...hand in apology.

His eyes darkened and the hand around her knee moved to clamp around her wrist, holding it in place. Letting a quick burst of air out through his teeth Liam whispered against her lips, "Sweet Elsa," his breath mingled with hers, "you've no idea how much I wish we were truly alone, but," a butterfly kiss landed on one corner of her mouth, "I've no desire to be caught necking on the sofa like a teenager."

Her fingers flexed against the denim and then slowly her hand moved to fist in his shirt. "Are you saying you've been caught before?" She grinned up at him demurely.

She could barely make out his facial expression in the low light of the room, but when his brow lifted as she had seen Killian's do dozens of times, she had to bite her tongue to keep from giggling.

"A gentleman never kisses and tells," he murmured.

He had shown her so many sides of himself tonight that Elsa found herself wondering which side of him was real. "Just who are you, Liam Jones?" She squinted at him while trying to read his mind.

She had a quick view of his eyes widening with what could only be described as delight before he moved closer to whisper against her mouth, "Wouldn't you like to know?"

There was no thought of denying what they both needed and before he could move away, Elsa answered, "Perhaps, I would," and then closed the distance that separated her mouth from his.
His lips were hot and sexy and with every movement of them across hers, her heart raced faster and faster. Liam palmed her butt, tugging her closer to his hard body, and the knowledge that he wanted her as much as she wanted him was almost more than she could handle...almost. Not wasting anymore time, Elsa allowed herself to sink into the kiss, forgetting where they were, her focus on him, only on him and how good it felt to be where she was.

"Elsa," she heard, as if through a hazy fog, "Elsa."

Liam groaned with frustration, as she buried her face against his chest. "Bloody hell," she heard him mutter quietly, before a little louder, "Henry, my lad, you're up."

"I'm up," she heard Henry answer. "Where's Killian and why are you and Elsa on the sofa?"

Elsa turned her head to try to see Henry's face, but thankfully it was still relatively dark in the room, giving her hope he hadn't seen too much. "Henry, are you hungry?" she asked him, thinking a change of subject might give her, and Liam, a little bit of time to regroup.

"A little," he started before continuing with, "Can I go look to see what we have?" and ran off down the hallway as soon as she nodded her head.

Once he was gone, Elsa slowly turned her head back Liam's way. "Are you alright?"

"I'll be fine, but," he kissed her softly, "we really need to have that talk."

"Agreed," her smile was shy, "but now..."

"I need to decide how to tell Henry about Emma."

Elsa slid into a standing position. "I'll go feed Henry and give you a moment, okay?"

He reached for her hand, squeezing her fingers. "Thank you. I'll just be a few minutes."

~~~CS~~~

Liam watched Elsa leave the room and as soon as he had his raging hormones under control, locked himself in the powder room and stared at the image looking back at him. It was as if he were looking at a stranger for, he hadn't seen this man in years. Same brown hair, same chin, but the mouth...that was different. The mouth in the mirror wasn't set in a hard line; it was curved into a smile. And the eyes were different too, as they were sparkling, almost as if they were hiding a secret. What could they be hiding, he wondered...

Was it happiness?

Was it love?

Or perhaps it was both.

Splashing water on his face, he tried to decide the best way to tell Henry that the woman he had spent the last three months thinking was dead, was actually alive. Would he scream and cry? Would he kick and yell? Would he be mad? Would he understand? Liam wasn't sure what to expect, but preparing to tell that little boy about Emma was a far more frightening prospect than telling Killian.

Killian...he knew.

Killian...he understood.
But Henry? He was a child and children, well...you just never knew.

After he left the powder room, Liam followed the sound of chatter and walked into the kitchen to see Henry standing next to Elsa, a towel tucked into the front of his pajama bottoms, stirring something in a bowl.

Elsa looked up and smiled. "We're making waffles. Are you hungry?"

"Waffles?" He looked over Henry's shoulder at the lumpy white batter in the bowl. "Looks delicious," he remarked as his gaze zeroed in on her lips.

Henry looked up at him with a grin. "How many do you want, Uncle Liam?" was asked before he turned back to the task of helping Elsa as he handed her some of the batter in a cup.

"I'm not sure, Henry. How about I start with one?" Liam's hope at the moment was that he could not only get it past the lump in his throat, but keep it down.

Needing to keep busy, Liam made coffee and poured juice, and even though he opened and closed his mouth several times, he was no closer to telling Henry the news than he was when he had first walked into the room.

What is wrong with me? he asked himself when he realized he'd rather stand in front of a large group of business men than be here trying to explain to a kid how screwed up adults could be sometimes. And watching how comfortable Elsa was with Henry brought back the guilt from earlier, as getting to know his new nephew was yet another miss on his list of screw ups. When Killian returned, Liam vowed to spend more time with his brother and new family, that was if they were still talking to him. No time like the present, he decided as he was given a plate holding a waffle smothered in syrup. "Henry," he began, "there's something I need to tell you."

Henry stopped in front him, a serious look on his face. "I know you have something to tell me, Uncle Liam," Henry glanced longingly at his waffle, "but is Killian okay?"

Liam put his hand on Henry's shoulder, "Oh lad, aye, Killian is just fine...maybe even better than fine. This is something else."

A huge grin filled his face. "Well, now that I know Killian is okay, can it wait 'til after we eat? I'm really hungry."

Liam felt both of his brows shoot up in surprise. "Uh, sure, we can wait."

Giving Elsa a huge smile, Henry set his plate on the table, climbed on a chair and proceeded to pour chocolate chips all over his waffle before then smothering it in syrup and dousing it with whipped cream. Liam grimaced at Elsa, noticing she too had wrinkled her nose up in distaste. "You're going to eat that?" he asked Henry incredulously.

Stuffing a huge bite in his mouth, Henry grinned around the pastry, chocolate and syrup and nodded. "It's so good," he exclaimed, stuffing his mouth again. "Try it."

There was no way he was going to add the chocolate and whipped cream to his already sugary sweet meal, but unable to say no, Liam cut a large bite and stuffed it into his mouth. "You're right," he agreed with Henry, "it's good."

"Told you so," Henry giggled as he cut another piece.

A family, thought Liam. I could get used to this.
Friday Morning

Mary Margaret checked the clock for the hundredth time and wondered yet again how seeing Liam might have affected Emma. Had it triggered any memories? Had there been any adverse reactions? The brain was such a mystery that anything was possible.

She also wanted to be prepared should Emma's fiancé appear suddenly. Something told her that Liam Jones had gone home and finally had the long talk with his brother that should have happened months ago. And if the brother appeared, how would Emma react? Would she be as happy as she had been to see her dream lover, or would she be upset that he hadn't been close all along? Yet more questions than answers.

Mary Margaret wasn't sure what had alerted her that Emma had arrived, but looking up she saw her patient standing in the door, her ever present sketch book in her arms, along with a large brown envelope. She looks different, was her first thought as Emma stood just inside the door waiting to be welcomed inside. She seemed more sure of herself, more comfortable in her own skin. "Emma, come in." She beckoned to their favorite chairs in the room. "How are you today? Any new memories?"

Emma tilted her slightly to the side, smiling softly. "Not much, really. Just the usual...more questions."

"Okay," Mary Margaret said hesitantly, "but you look different. More," she shrugged her shoulders, "confident, I guess is the word I want. Something happened, didn't it?"

Emma studied the floor for several seconds before once again meeting her eyes. "He didn't show up last night." she said softly, her fingers constantly running up and down the edges of her sketchbook. "And I realized that I had gotten too comfortable relying on his nightly visits. She's talking about her dream lover, Mary Margaret thought as Emma continued. "I need to take more of an active role in my healing, Doctor Blanchard, because no one saves Emma Swan, but Emma Swan." Emma dropped the sketchbook and envelope on the table and leaned forward, "Does that make any sense?"

After looking at the images of Liam that Emma had drawn last night, Mary Margaret had known that the time for the swan to fly home was quickly approaching, but now that it was here, she had to blink rapidly several times to get her emotions under control. "It makes perfect sense, Emma. Having people around to support us is important, but ultimately whom we choose to be is on us." She reached over and squeezed Emma's hand. "How can I help?"

When Doctor Blanchard didn't tell her she was nuts for thinking she could do it on her own, Emma felt some of the tension drain from her body. "Why now?" She frowned. "Am I different inside or are things different around me? What changed?" She blurted it all out, anxiously hopeful that the woman who had been so supportive could help her answer some of the questions that seemed to be piling up.

"We've talked about why you couldn't remember your life, right?" the doctor asked her quietly.

Emma nodded her head. "That there wasn't a physical reason? Yes."

"And...?" she was prodded for more.

Emma rolled her eyes and grinned. "Fear," she wrinkled her nose, "but what could have been so scary that I ran?"
"Oh, Emma," Mary Margaret smiled, "there are all types of fear besides just the obvious ones. We are the people we are because of where we come from and the things we've experienced."

Emma thought about what she said for a few seconds. "So possibly something from my past was the reason behind my fear?"

"Perhaps." Mary Margaret laughed when Emma rolled her eyes again at her cryptic answer. "It could be as simple as fear of happiness because you don't think you deserve to be happy or something as complex as fear of worrying you'll screw things up. We're all different but I think deep down we all want the same things, like happiness and love, but I also believe we're all worried we'll screw it up. It's how people handle conflict that makes us all unique."

Had that been her problem? Emma wasn't sure but was ready to find out. "And my dream lover?" she asked, "Where did he come from and why did he leave?"

As she was always wont to do, Mary Margaret turned the table on her. "What do you think?"

What did she think? Emma asked herself as she thought about the man who appeared in her dreams and how he made her feel, but when she drew him, he was a fairytale character. "Well, Captain Hook isn't real, but the feelings emanating from him felt real..." her voice trailed off, "...but do you think there's a man out there that loves me?"

Nicely done, Emma, Mary Margaret congratulated her patient silently before answering, "I would bet on it."

Emma tilted her head as she thought about the doctor's answer. "But...if that's true then...where is he?"

And here we go, thought Mary Margaret. "Perhaps, he's on his own journey and working his way back to you just..."

"...as I'm working my way back to him." Emma finished.

"Exactly. And now that you've come so far in your journey, including regaining your inner strength, you no longer need your pirate to keep you safe in your dreams.

"I miss him." Emma sighed wistfully, almost as if she could have been thinking about someone else.

The ease with which she was saying goodbye to her safety net was indeed a good sign toward her recovery and wanting to give reassurance, Mary Margaret quietly reiterated, "Perhaps there's another you love in the life you have lost."

Emma gave her a contemplative smile and then as if making a decision, bent over and picked up her sketchpad holding it close to her chest. "I thought maybe..."

When she hadn't finished what she was saying after a few seconds, Mary Margaret gently pushed, "What's the matter, Emma? You've never had difficulty sharing with me before."

And with that little push, Emma opened up and began telling Doctor Blanchard about her jumbled dreams of the night before, and using the doctor's suggestion to help put them into perspective. If an image scared her to the point where her mind wanted to shy away, she would stand back and view it like a picture show. That way she was the one in control and as long as she felt in control, the images couldn't hurt her. Using that strategy, she was able to flip through the images that caused pain rather quickly and move to the other ones that made her feel positive things...like those that spoke of love...hope...and most importantly, the future.
Once Emma felt as if she had a good handle on dealing with her dreams, she decided it was time to ask Doctor Blanchard about the pictures that had lingered the longest in her mind. Opening her sketchpad, she stared down at the three images she had made earlier that morning, hoping to get a memory of how they were connected or why. One thing she definitely knew about them was that when they floated through her mind, they brought feelings of love and hope, making her think that wherever they were located, was a place that was important in her life.

Emma found herself worrying her bottom lip as she studied them. "I'm...I'm just not sure," she confessed hesitantly.

Doctor Blanchard tilted her head slightly as she studied Emma's face. "You're not sure about what, Emma? You're not sure your drawings mean anything?"

"I'm not sure they're worth getting excited over," she finally admitted out loud. "They just seem to be so...I don't know...arbitrary."

Mary Margaret wondered where all the hesitation was coming from, especially with her new-found confidence, but she needed Emma to completely trust her. "Tell me what I can do to help."

Emma couldn't get the thoughts out of her head about how she had felt when she woke up, and looking down at the pictures, that feeling hadn't changed. "I do want your help." She picked up the first picture and handed it over.

Mary Margaret looked down at the picture and then back up at Emma with a slight frown between her brows. "You drew a rock?"

Emma nodded and handed her a second picture. "Yes, and a necklace made of blue beads." And then she handed the last sketch to the doctor.

It was a simple scene of waves crashing onto a beach, but the way the beach ended created a different feel than the beach where Emma was hugging the pirate. This one could very well have been the bottom of a cliff or a hill, but not wanting to put images into Emma's mind, Mary Margaret didn't say anything. Trying to keep her expression neutral, she looked up from the drawings. "You remember a rock, a necklace, and waves crashing onto a beach, but have no idea how they are connected, right?"

With her words, Emma relaxed. "Exactly," she acknowledged, "but I know there was more, except for some reason I can't quite grasp it. Do you think you can help?"

Doctor Blanchard just kept watching her carefully and evidently approved of what she saw as she gave a little nod. "Let's try a little imagery, alright?"

She tried leading Emma around each of the pictures, looking to come up with ways that they might be connected, but after several failed attempts, all Emma felt was a headache. "Nothing connects, Doctor Blanchard," she told her dejectedly.

"Don't give up, Emma...but," she emphasized the word, "don't push too hard. Often the things we need to remember come when we least expect them."

Emma gave a slight nod and tucked the drawings back inside her sketchpad before holding up the envelope. "August came by Anita's Place earlier today and...gave me this."

She held it out to Mary Margaret as if it were a ticking bomb, and once she was no longer holding it in her hands she eyed it warily, as if the information it held was something to be afraid of. "Do you want me to open it?"
"Please," Emma nodded, holding her hands tightly together.

Unhooking the envelope, Mary Margaret dumped the contents onto her palm. "He got a copy of your license, a credit card and your social security card."

Emma took the social security card and the credit card and looked them over. Nothing out of the ordinary she didn't think, but then the Doctor held up the driver's license. Emma could tell that her picture was on it, which meant she was going to see what she had looked like before the accident. Would she look different or the same?

"Are you ready for this, Emma?" Mary Margaret asked, concerned that seeing her picture before the accident or her home address would cause pain.

Emma nodded and taking the license, gazed at the face similar to hers, but not the same. The face on the license was fuller, its cheekbones less pronounced and the teeth not as pretty, but it was her. When she realized that, tears sprang to her eyes, but they were accompanied by big smile. "It's me," she sighed happily.

Mary Margaret agreed, "It is. But," she frowned a little, "whom did you expect?"

Emma was still studying her face. "I'm not sure. I guess," she shrugged her shoulders, "since I feel differently, I assumed I'd look different too. And this," she ran her finger along the embossed card, "is my address?"

"It is," Doctor Blanchard agreed.

"I'm from..." her eyes met Mary Margaret's, "Boston?" Both brows went up as she studied the address located on the street where she lived, but of which she had no recollection. "I don't recognize it, but I feel like I should."

"Emma, these pieces of your old life provide a little independence to you, however I don't anticipate you ever having to deal with them on your own. Do you have any questions?"

"No," a slight headache was working its way through her head and she didn't want to push too hard. "I think I'd like to look them over some more and talk about them later."

That was abrupt and not expected, thought Mary Margaret, but Emma's eyes had glassed over and she was a little pale. "Just relax and don't push, promise?"

"I promise." Quickly sticking the cards back inside the envelope, Emma said her goodbyes and left the office.

Mary Margaret watched her go and jotted a quick note to call her later in the afternoon, as she was a little worried about her. Her fear was that something big would happen with Emma's memory and if that happened, with Emma's returned confidence, who knew where that might lead?

**NID Private Jet**  
**Somewhere Over the US**  
**Friday Morning**

Killian had given up on sleep, finding it impossible to settle his mind. All he could think about was holding Emma in his arms again. They had lost so much time, loving each other, learning how to be a couple and depend on each other. And yet mistakes were still made, and after missing her all summer long he was finally looking inside himself to see what he needed to do to grow up and become the man that Emma needed. After everything he had gone through since May, he really
wanted to lay the blame totally at Liam's door, but to do that wasn't fair. And while he couldn't completely exonerate Liam from the fiasco that this had become, the same could be said for himself. There was plenty of blame to go around and while he hadn't known the whole story when Emma had come to him in his dream Monday, now her words made much more sense.

"What's done is done. We need to do what we do best, my love. Fight for each other...together."

Together, he thought. That was the key element in getting the happy ending he wanted for all of them. One of them couldn't do it for the other, but they had to work as a unit, and the unit no longer just involved him and Emma, but also Henry and Liam...and possibly Elsa.

Killian vaguely remembered the long-ago train incident Liam had mentioned, and while he couldn't recall exactly what punishment had been handed down, Liam had taken the blame. Admitting that Liam had, indeed, shouldered more than his share of responsibility for his own misdeeds as a lad wasn't something new for him. But this he was determined that he would not fall back into the habit of letting it happen. Once Liam had started to take on the responsibility for the wrongs in his life, allowing it to continue had been easy, until their parents' death when Liam could no longer be blamed. After their service, Killian hadn't felt strong enough to handle his feelings of helplessness and had slunk away like a prat and then very nearly stalked the family that had caused his parents' death before almost flunking out of school. Ultimately, it had been Liam who had somehow gotten through his thick skull and had pulled him back far enough from the edge so he could graduate. But even then, he hadn't been ready to take on the responsibility of adulthood, and so once again, what had he done? Run.

"See a pattern, here, Jones?" He mumbled, draining the last of his morning coffee and moving the breakfast tray aside.

He ran...through Europe...through feelings...through women...with only his best mate Robin by his side, somehow keeping him from sliding too far into a bottle and ending up washed up on the side of the road.

And yes, once he'd heard that Lily and Liam had split up, he'd tried to help his brother, but with Liam not willing to accept help and him not willing to push...the pattern was there.

Have a problem.

Close yourself off.

Don't talk.

Don't listen.

Run.

"And where did that get you?" he mumbled before answering his own question. "Alone."

Exactly. And then?

Liam had reached out and eventually Killian and Robin had made their way to Boston and he had met the love of his life.

From the first time he had heard her laugh she had captured his attention, and while it had taken months before he had found her, the first time he held her in his arms at The Burren had certainly been worth the wait.
He pulled her closer until they touched from chest to thigh, and her eyes widening slightly told him that she could feel exactly how she affected him. "Unforgettable," he took a quick breath and went for it. "From the moment we met, not a day has gone by that I've not thought of you, Emma."

And her whispered, good, had caused his heart to soar, and there had been no question of if he would fall in love, as he had already fallen and fallen hard. Their courtship had been something from a fairytale, from kisses, walks, movies, and each time he kissed her sweet lips, saying goodbye became more difficult until he often woke hard and hurting from spending time with his dream lover.

Taking things to the next level had been tricky, as initially they had been waiting for the right time and then there had always been something or someone in the way. By the time the Halloween Party had arrived, he was tired of his hand and her low-cut bar wench gown created needs that could only be satisfied one way.

He had scouted the perfect spot to spirit her away to, and had proceeded to get up close and very personal with her soft, pink girly parts.

"Emma, this is not how I envisioned our first time together," he sighed into her mouth, "but I don't think I can wait."

She moaned in agreement, "Hurry, please hurry," she begged as he scooped her up, pinning her against the door.

And then, he remembered, Ruby had arrived and they had once again been interrupted until...he grinned, deciding that reliving their first time in the broom closet was a memory he would save for a later time. Skipping over the memories that made him needy, he thought about those that just made him happy, like the Holiday Ball and their first Christmas together, and then Henry and getting engaged. Perfect, everything perfect, he thought, bringing Emma's ring out of his pocket to imagine sliding it on her finger once again.

With Emma, every moment was special in its own way and every moment with her easy. Their relationship lacking conflict, easy for them...and through their relationship, his pattern for handling conflict didn't change. In his own way he had run.

Liam refused to meet him.

He had responded by ignoring it and assuming it would go away.

Liam refused to acknowledge that his brother was in love and going to get married.

Killian dreamed that Liam would cause problems for his relationship and he had taken Emma and run.

He heard Liam say something that he assumed meant Emma had died.

He had ended up comatose.

Liam had wanted to talk.

He had refused to listen and shut himself away with Henry for months.

But over the summer he had changed and much of it could be attributed to Henry. The boy had come into his life because of someone from Emma's past, but that wasn't why he had stayed. He had stayed because the three of them had become a family, and without Emma he had relied on Henry, just as Henry relied on him. Someone had needed to be the adult at that moment, too bad it just
hadn't come sooner.

But he was done running. He was done not listening when there was conflict. His promise had been broken, but once he found his swan, he was slipping the ring back on her finger and it was never coming off.

*And I promise to always be there when you need me and to never, ever say goodbye to you.*

"It might not be the ends of the earth, Swan, but here I come," he whispered, lightly kissing the diamond before tucking it safely back into his pocket. Reclining in the seat, he felt his body relax, allowing him to drift off hoping that his Emma would be waiting for him in his dreams.

**Killian's Apartment**  
**New York, NY**  
**Friday, Noonish**

Liam wiped down the cabinet, hung the cloth over the faucet and dried his hands. Breakfast was over, the kitchen put back to rights and when Henry returned from dressing there would be no more reasons to wait. He poured himself another cup of coffee, leaned back against the counter and tried to decide the best way to handle the situation.

~~~CS~~~

Elsa hated leaving Liam alone too long, but she had learned the Henry lesson the hard way, and now, over two hours later, she was still waiting for him complete the 'getting ready' process that even she, as a female, could accomplish in less than half the time.

It had started out simple, at least in theory, when after he had finished his waffles with sticky syrup, chocolate and whipped cream and had been sent off to wash up. Twenty minutes later when he hadn't returned, she had gone looking for him.

"Henry?" Elsa called when she hadn't found him in his bedroom as expected.

His "I'm in here," from behind a closed door gave her a little concern, but not as much as when she had opened the door and almost slipped on the wet floor. Henry, on the other hand, had no concerns at all as he was sitting in a bathtub full of water that was overflowing with bubbles.

"I didn't know you were going to take a bath, Henry." She grabbed a towel off the rack and tried to mop up some of the water.

He gave her a sheepish grin and shrugged, "You said clean up," before resuming playing with his boats and whatever else could find.

Letting out a sigh, Elsa picked up the wet towel, spread a dry one on the floor and gave him a time limit of ten minutes and took the sopping wet towel to the laundry room.

His ten-minute bath had turned into forty-five, with another fifteen to get him out and wrapped in his robe.

Once she had gotten him into his robe, she sent him to his room thinking he should be dressed in fifteen minutes, however twenty minutes later, she found him sitting on his bedroom floor, still dressed in his bathrobe building something with his Legos.

"Henry," she really tried to keep the exasperation out of her voice, "you aren't dressed."
He looked up from his construction with what could be interpreted as a surprised look on his face. "Oops?"

"Oops?" She worked to keep her voice level. "Where are your clothes?"

He dropped his blocks and picked up his jeans and shirt, holding them aloft proudly. "Here. I picked them out all by myself."

"I can see that. Now," she mimicked getting dressed, "think you can put them on by yourself?"

Henry rolled his eyes. "Sure, Elsa. I'm not a baby."

And, as she had suspected, ten minutes later he only had his socks and underwear on and was playing on his DS.

Fifteen minutes later, he had only added his jeans, but still no shirt and she found him tossing a small ball into a basket that was hanging on the wall.

She had stayed, watching him pull his shirt on, but after he had pulled it down, they discovered a large stain on the front of it. "Henry, I thought you said this shirt was clean."

He studied the stain and before she could stop him, he had smelled it and then swiped his finger through it and tasted it. "I remember now," he grinned at her, "I dropped ketchup on it and, well…" He shrugged his shoulders as if that answered everything.

"I see," even though she has no clue what he was talking about, but didn't want anything else to slow them down. She helped him pull it over his head, toss it in the dirty clothes basket and find a new one. "Now, did you brush your teeth when you were in the bathroom?"

Henry gave her a quizzical look. "You told me to get dressed." His voice was long suffering as he sauntered into the bathroom to brush his teeth.

Elsa shook her head indulgently. "I'll meet you in the front room." After hanging his robe on the hook in his closet, she went looking for Liam.

~~~CS~~~

As soon as she was out of sight, Henry picked up his new electric toothbrush, squeezed his bubblegum toothpaste on the brush, added a little water and pushed the button. The vibration from the bristles threw the water droplets everywhere, some landing on his face, others on the mirror and the blob of toothpaste...his shirt. "Oops," he giggled, scooped it off, pressed off, smeared the paste back on the brush and repeated the process.

~~~CS~~~

The second, or was it the third time, Elsa stopped back to check on him, Liam had offered to help with Henry, but she had assured him that she had it all 'under control.' However, when an hour had come and gone, and he was still alone, Liam had decided that there wasn't much more he could do in the kitchen and had moved back to the front room where they had spent the night. The beautiful cliff picture still hung above the mantle, yet that wasn't what garnered his attention the minute he crossed the threshold. That honor belonged to the sofa.

The sofa where he had spent part of the night with the woman responsible for restarting his heart and who seemed to cause it to race faster each time they were together. He dropped down onto it, stretched an arm along the back and one leg up on the cushions sitting in just the right position to
admire the painting. Or, if he closed his eyes, he could almost feel the weight of Elsa in his arms, smell her light floral scent surrounding him and taste her lips. And when she had started sliding her bare foot up and down his leg, her knee encountering his...parts, bloody hell, it had been closer than he'd been to heaven in forever.

His lips lifted in a smile, as without opening his eyes he knew she had entered the room. She hadn't made a sound, but as barmey as it sounded, he could sense her...almost as if there was a subtle change in the air. Slowly, he allowed his eyelids to lift, his gaze landing on her slightly disheveled hair, tired, but very beautiful face, and slightly wrinkled clothing. "Still no Henry?" he asked quietly watching her shoulders droop with fatigue.

"No," she leaned against the door frame, "he's quite easily distracted. But, he's brushing his teeth and then we should be able to have that talk."

Liam pushed up and sauntered toward her. "You know," he stopped and took her hand, pulling her slowly his direction, "you can take a little nap and I can have that talk with him."

"You don't need me?" Her eyes went wide, causing a little piece of his heart to quiver.

Unable to stop himself Liam pulled her flush against his body. "Oh, Sweet Elsa," he cupped her face, "I need you more than you could know, but..."

Elsa placed her finger over his mouth, stopping his flow of words. "No buts, Liam. I'm exactly where I want to be."

His eyes bore into hers and the air around them crackled with tension. "When Killian and Emma return, will you go out with me?"

He relaxed when a huge smile graced her face. "I would love to go out with you."

"Really?" Liam was trying to behave sensibly but his insides were jumping up and down, practically singing the Hallelujah Chorus.

"Really." She smiled shyly. "Think you can help with Henry this time?"

He chuckled at her request, pulling her into his arms for a comforting hug, thinking about how confident she had seemed earlier. Apparently, her abilities to get Henry dressed in a timely manner had been tested and this round went to the lad. "Of course. Lead the way."

"Thank you, Liam." And as if it was the most natural thing in the world, she kissed him.

*Heaven,* he thought, *I'm in heaven.*

~~~CS~~~

In the end it took both of them to make sure Henry's teeth were brushed, his second shirt of the day had been exchanged for another clean one and he was sitting next to them for their talk. "Okay, Uncle Liam. What do you need to tell me?"

Liam studied Henry's face as he gazed up earnestly and then glanced at Elsa for courage. "I'm sorry, Henry, but I'm not sure how to tell you this," he began, only to be interrupted.

"Just spit it out," Henry shrugged his boney shoulders. "It's what Sister Blue always said if I did something wrong."
"A wise woman, your Sister Blue." Liam gave him a half-smile. "Remember when you came to my office the other day?"

Scrunching up his nose, Henry nodded, "Yeah, I told Killian your eyes were sad...just like us."

That comment brought Liam's head up and once again his gaze landed on Elsa. Swallowing the lump that kept getting bigger in his throat, he turned back to Henry. "Aye, little lad, I've missed my brother."

"Yeah," Henry nodded his head, "I knew there were," he made air-quotes with his fingers, "'issues' between you two."

A laugh burst forth before he could stop it. "Oh? How did you know that?"

Henry stared off, his expression turning sad. "I might have overheard something, but that you and Killian would be friends again was one of the last things I told Emma. I just wish she was here to see it happen."

Liam rubbed his hand over his face as that innocent comment acted as another reminder of the arsehole he had been to Killian and Emma. "That's what I want to talk to you about, Henry...Emma. See, I thought Emma was your mum..."

He took a breath to continue only to be interrupted by a single word, "Why?" and as much as he wanted to come clean about everything, he didn't think Henry would understand the investigator. Hell, he didn't even understand, and from the look on Elsa's face she was curious to know what the story was too. Later, he tried to convey to her with a simple look.

She blinked and sent a sweet smile his way. I trust you, it seemed to say, causing the breath he had been holding to slowly leak out.

Unknowingly he winced and wasn't sure how to get out of his predicament until Henry saved him yet again. "Grown up stuff?" As soon as Liam nodded his head, Henry continued, "That's okay, Uncle Liam. You can tell me when you're ready."

"Why Henry, that's very grown-up of you," Liam thanked him for that tiny reprieve.

"I know," Henry agreed with a smile. "Sister Blue says I'm precocious."

"I can see that. But let me try again." He shook his head. "In my office when you told me that Emma was dead, I didn't know why you would think that. I thought Killian had been with her all summer in Seattle," he finished breathlessly.

Henry didn't say anything for a few seconds, but Liam could tell by the expressions moving across his face that his message had been received. "Emma's alive?" he asked cautiously.

"Aye, Henry. Emma's alive and Killian is on his way to get her and bring her home."

Slowly, the lad's face broke into a smile and, as if not quite believing Liam, turned to Elsa. "Did you know?"

She shook her head. "No, Henry. Liam just told me the story last night when he got back from Seattle."

"So," he looked back at Liam, "you knew she was alive, but Killian, and everyone else," he added incredulously, "thought she was dead?"
Without getting into areas that he had no clue how to explain to a child, Liam answered honestly, "Aye."

Henry's smile made Liam feel as if the sun had come from behind the clouds and warmed him. "Alright," he fist pumped before launching himself into Liam's arms.

Tears sprang to his eyes as, without hesitation, his arms closed around the little body and his heart that had only recently resumed beating filled with a love that was so pure and powerful that if it was a dream he hoped he never had to wake.

Henry released him and sat back. "You know, Uncle Liam, if you would have just talked to Killian this wouldn't have happened." Liam shot a surprised glance Elsa's way and shrugged when she just raised a brow. "Now, if we're done, can I go play?"

He scampered off the sofa, and on his way out of the room Liam heard him whisper, "Geez, adults don't know anything," leaving two very bemused ones behind.

"That was..." He had no words to express the way he was feeling.

"Special," Elsa answered, "and you, Liam Jones, are a very special man."

"You make me feel that way, Elsa. Thank you for being here." He took her hand and with a little tug, she was tucked in the circle of his arms.

"I'm where..."

His finger halted her speech. "Just say 'you're welcome.'"

With a tiny nod, he removed his fingers long enough to hear her say, "You're welcome," before replacing them with his lips and a more thorough show of thanks.

Anita's Place
Seattle, WA
Friday, Noonish

On the way back to Anita's Place, Emma really tried to keep her promise to Doctor Blanchard about not pushing the memories, but she couldn't keep from asking herself question after question. She had drawn several pictures that she somehow knew were important in her life and...she had an address...in Boston...on the other side of the country. So why then was she here...in Seattle?

Thankful that Mrs. Lucas hadn't been around when she returned, Emma climbed the steps to her room. Turning on the song that had been continuously on her mind since Monday, she spread the pictures out before her, and as the music poured from the speakers she let her mind wander.

Say goodbye,
Why I can barely say goodnight
If I can hardly take my eyes from yours
How far can I go?

As Emma listened to the words, more images flashed through her mind. Some meant nothing, others were scenes that she had drawn before and then...he was there. She remembered sitting at a table, surrounded by others and he was singing, but what, she wasn't sure and then suddenly as if it were yesterday, she heard:

"Ruby, you see the resemblance too, right? I'm not dreaming, am I?"
"I see it. You know what this means, right? It's fate. He's your destiny."

"My destiny?" she repeated, rifling through the work she had drawn in the last month and there he was...her dream lover. Standing behind a microphone stand, one hand holding the mike...and the other wrapped around the stand, but...not a hand at all...a hook. "Captain Hook is my fate? My destiny?" It made no sense and so she shoved it aside and went back to studying the rock and the necklace and the beach scene with the waves.

**Walk away**

*The thought would never cross my mind*  
*I couldn't turn my back on spring or fall,*  
*Your smile, least of all*

Emma let the song play through a few times until another scene formed in front of her eyes. She was standing on a beach, a bag holding her art supplies in one hand and a towel or beach blanket tossed over the other arm. She could see the sand stretching for miles in both directions and the rolling waves covering the sand, but the fact that the beach was empty made her think it was fall or winter.

In her memory she was sketching, and when the scene was revealed she wasn't really surprised that she had drawn a schooner in the distance flying a pirate flag, and closer, on the beach, a pirate, apparently Captain Hook, locked in a steamy embrace with a blonde.

"And you stayed with me, didn't you, Captain?" she whispered to the picture of the embracing couple she had sketched earlier in the week. But when the couple in the picture talked back, she knew the words were ones she had heard before, but the when and where, she couldn't quite grab hold of...

"I've missed you so much, Captain." she whispered against his shoulder.

"And I you." He tightened his hold around her trembling body, binding their bodies closer together just as their souls were bound, for together they were stronger. "I'm sorry, Emma. I never meant to leave, but..."

"Shh," she laid her finger on his lips. "Mistakes were made by all."

A dull ache was starting to form behind her eyes, but unwilling to give up just yet, Emma hit play and let the song play all over again.

**When I say always**

*I mean forever*  
*I trust tomorrow as much as today*  
*I'm not afraid to say, I love you,*  
*And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye*

With the last line of the song, one word stuck, echoing over and over...promise...promise...promise, until a sentence coalesced in her mind.

*I promise you that I will never forget these beads and our promise to each other and what they stand for.*

And as if she were watching it happen on a video, she saw the beads being dropped into a shallow hole and the rock pushed back into place. Emma grabbed the drawing of the blue beaded necklace and ran her finger around each bead, imagining how they felt...smooth glass or were they made of stone? Around and over each bead her finger flew, trying to grasp the memory as it tickled the edges
of her mind.

And then suddenly, as if a Polaroid photo was developing before her eyes, it was there. Dropping the picture of the beads, she flipped through her sketchbook for a clean page and drew an image, an image that had to be important to the discovery of her identity as Emma Swan.

Holding the sketch up in front of her, Emma once again could see the rock being rolled away and the beads placed beneath. Her finger trailed the simple lines of the cliff, the trees and the path, wondering where the place was and how she had gotten there. Had she walked? Or...had she been in a car?

Had she walked along the beach and then climbed up the cliff? Had she walked along a road and then turned on the path? Or...

And then she saw it.

An answer...

A sign that called to her.

Leading her to that place.

The place where promises were made.

The sign read...

Fort Williams State Park.

Thoughts? Likes? Dislikes? Tears? Expectations for the next chapter? It pops up next week. It appears that there will be a total of 26 chapters to this story. Just a few more weeks.
Chapter 24

Chapter Summary

Killian and Emma continue their journey. What will happen now that Killian knows Emma is alive?

I really hope you enjoy this chapter but before you start, you might want to grab a tissue...or two.

Chapter 24

SeaTac Airport
Seattle, WA
Friday noonish

As soon as he was cleared to deplane, Killian grabbed his bag, and made his way through the terminal, hoping the car rental agencies in Seattle were much more efficient than in other cities. As he exited the secure area, his attention was caught by a lone man holding a sign, KILLIAN JONES written on it in block lettering. Before he even introduced himself, he knew who had sent him.

"I'm Killian Jones." He nodded at the sign, "Let me guess, my brother sent you."

The man smiled and shook his hand. "Eric Prince, and yes, Liam thought it might be easier to be driven when you aren't familiar with the area."

"Appreciate it." He held up his small bag. "Just this, so I'm ready."

Killian followed Eric out to his car and when he saw the congestion around the airport he was even more relieved that he didn't have to focus on the traffic. Unable to resist, he pulled out his phone:

K: You just couldn't help yourself, could you?

He didn't have to wait long before his brother answered,

L: Sorry?

Killian just shook his head, almost fondly, he thought as trying to make things easier for him was SO Liam.

K: I appreciate it this time, Liam. I really do. How's Henry?

L: Henry is a spitfire who pushed Elsa's patience to the limit but his response to the news was something I'll never forget. We'll talk when you get home.

And I hope I'm home soon with my swan, floated through his mind.

K: I'd like that. How do you know Eric?

K: That's younger brother and alright.

He clicked off and pocketed his phone, thinking about Liam's comment. What could Eric Prince have to say that I might need to know? That it might be something about Emma's doctor flashed through his mind as he watched the scenery flash by. The fact that Liam felt Emma's doctor, Mary Margaret Blanchard, was the perfect person to help her was something he wished to know more about. What was the basis of those feelings and when he met her, would he agree?

According to Liam, Seattle-Grace had been recommended based on the reputation of the surgeon Emma needed to repair her face, as just after the accident her memory had been fine. And while, as far as he knew, she had not suffered any type of head injury, here it was three months later and she didn't remember her life. Or him. Or Henry. He needed to know why.

As the SUV moved out of the heavy airport congestion, Killian glanced sideways at Eric. He looked relaxed, content to drive in silence, but if he had a story about the doctor, Killian wanted to hear it. "Thanks again for picking me up. I wasn't looking forward to having to navigate the traffic."

"No problem. I was happy to help," Eric answered but didn't elaborate.

So," Killian tried to think of an innocuous topic that wouldn't take too much attention away from the road, "how do you know my brother, Liam?"

"Oh, I don't really." Eric gave him a half smile. "I just helped Doctor Blanchard out yesterday and well..." he shrugged his shoulder.

His ears perked up at the mention of the doctor and hoping to learn more about her, he waded into the minefield. "That was nice of you but...can I ask how you know Doctor Blanchard?"

Eric gave him a somber smile. "She saved my life."

Killian's gasp shattered the silence, as that hadn't been the answer he expected. "Whoa man, sorry to hear that. I'll understand if you don't wish to talk about it."

"Oh no, it's okay," Eric tossed him a small smile, "it's actually kind of nice to talk about, as it helps me realize how far I've come."

Killian was intrigued as the man next to him looked...and sounded perfectly normal. "Really? How?" he blurted out rapidly, then realizing how rude he might have sounded, reiterated again, "That is...if you wouldn't mind sharing."

Eric didn't say anything for a few seconds and then when he started talking, Killian finally understood exactly what Liam had meant. "About six months ago, I was out on the boat - I'm a fisherman," he clarified, "when an unexpected storm popped up. The waves were choppy and while I still don't remember it all, I was told I lost my balance, hit my head and fell overboard...unconscious."

Killian winced as Eric continued, "I was rescued and taken to Seattle Grace Hospital and when I woke up," he glanced sideways and grimaced, "I didn't remember anything."

"Nothing?" Since learning that Emma had amnesia, Killian had marveled over the possibility that someone could just wake up one day and not remember whom they were. He and Emma loved each other. In fact, their love was so powerful that he had dreamed of her and she had been...there...in his arms. How could she forget them? Or him?
"Not my name, my life or," Killian saw him bend his left hand to lightly touch his wedding ring, "my wife."

"But..." Killian asked, perplexed, "you're saying that when your wife was standing next to you, you couldn't remember her? Or...your life together? Ever since Liam told him that Emma had amnesia, he'd had this rose-colored glasses idea that one look at him and Emma would immediately get her memory back. "You finally recovered?"

"I did," Eric agreed, "but it was a long road."

"So...you're saying that even with your wife in the same room as you...you didn't know her? Killian couldn't help feeling a little responsible for the situation they found themselves in, and that not being by her side might have played some part in what had happened to her.

"My wife, Ariel," he hesitated as he merged onto the interstate, "tried to be supportive, but...she couldn't understand how I could have forgotten her, or our life together."

"Really?" Killian didn't think that made any sense, as having your family, especially the woman you loved and who loved you, close to help you remember would be important.

"It's hard to explain," Eric began, "but as the person who didn't remember, when I was with my family, especially with my wife, I felt so guilty that...I pushed her away." He shrugged. "Doctor Blanchard has been instrumental in helping me put my life back together."

Was this the reason that Liam wanted him to hear Eric's story? To understand that his reunion with Emma might not be as easy as he had imagined? That because not a day had gone by since last May that he...hadn't thought about her, didn't mean that she would know...him. If that happened, how would he feel?

"You pushed your wife...away?" Killian asked, still trying to wrap his head around the fact that Emma might not want him close.

Eric rubbed the back of his neck as if talking about the way he treated his wife made him uncomfortable, "Ariel and I...it was always easy between us and then suddenly...she wanted her Eric and I..." Killian watched him smile and take a deeper breath, as if this part of the memory was difficult, "I didn't know who that Eric was. I would look at her and see the pain on her face that she was trying to hide and seeing that...was more difficult than not being with her."

"So, what did you do?" Killian asked the question even though he had a pretty good idea of what Eric was going to say.

"I moved out and into Anita's Place for a few months. Doctor Blanchard helped both of us in more ways than I could ever express. But the time apart, with me there and Ariel in our home, gave us time to solve the problem inside of us and then...we were able to recover us."

As he navigated a particularly busy stretch of the highway, Killian thought about what he had said. Did he understand that reasoning? Yes. Did he understand the behavior? Frustratingly enough, he had to say yes, he did...for in his own way, he had done the same thing. He had been so broken when he thought she was gone that he hadn't wanted to be around those that loved her...as he thought they would expect him to act a certain way; feel a certain way, even, and so he had taken Henry and they had gone to a place...alone...where they could pretend.

"But your memory is back and everything has returned to normal?" Killian hoped so for both of their sakes.
Eric smiled. "I did get my memory back except for those few moments around the accident and I am happy to say everything worked out with Ariel." He laughed as if thinking of a private joke. "I tease her that I was rescued by a red-headed mermaid, and she jokes that you never know what's out there in the water...but I've learned not to take her or our relationship for granted. Doctor Blanchard and her group sessions helped."

"I'm happy for you," Killian told him quietly as Eric exited the Interstate toward Seattle-Grace. "And thank you for sharing your story."

"No problem. Doctor Blanchard is treating someone close to you, isn't she?"

"She's treating my fiancé," Killian told him, "but how did you know that?"

He shrugged, sending a half smile Killian's direction. "I'm no mind reader, if that's what you're thinking. It was just something your brother said yesterday. He was obviously distraught when I took him to the airport and he told me and asked me about Doctor Blanchard."

"And you told him your story?"

"Yes," Eric nodded, "and asked him about his."

Killian wondered how much of the real story Liam had shared but decided this wasn't the time to rehash, and instead asked more about Doctor Blanchard. "It sounds as if you admire Doctor Blanchard a great deal."

"Oh, you'll not find anyone more experienced in dealing with amnesiacs, or...more caring. She has credentials longer than your arm and has written dozens of well-respected articles, yet she's very hands-on, wanting the very best for all of her patients. What did you say your fiancé's name was?"

Killian looked at the large hospital as Eric rolled to a stop in front of the building. "Her name is Emma. Emma Swan."

"Hmm, no, that name doesn't sound familiar," Eric said as Killian opened the car door. "I thought perhaps she was in my group but there's no women named Emma, just a Meg, Eve, Ginger and the new girl...Kate."

Killian pulled his bag out of the back seat. "Thanks again, Eric. You helped me in more ways than you know."

"I'm glad." He handed Killian a piece of paper with his phone number on it. "Give me a call if you need anything while you're here. Good luck to you and Emma."

As he drove off, Killian couldn't help but send another silent thanks Liam's direction. Somehow Liam had known what he needed to hear when he hadn't even known it himself. And now that he had met someone treated successfully by Emma's Doctor Blanchard, he just hoped she lived up to her reputation, for the idea of not getting Emma back was...unacceptable.

~~~CS~~~

Once he had located the wing that housed the offices of Emma's doctors, Killian could feel Emma's presence. He would have been hard-pressed to explain what he was feeling, but there had always been that invisible connection between them, and he could feel it surrounding him...pulling at him. But this time it was different, as this time the force was leading him into the fight...and not away from it.
But since talking to Liam, his emotions had been all over the place. Anger, pain, guilt, sadness, happiness, and the list continued and now...after talking to Eric, he could add fear to the list. He had to wonder if Emma would feel pressure with him here. Would she feel that his presence was hindering her recovery instead of helping it? Another question was Doctor Blanchard and what she would think of his showing up in Seattle. Would she agree with his being here...or...would she request he leave?

When he had nowhere else to go but through the double doors directly in front of him, Killian reached for the handle...and stopped when he saw his hand was shaking. Grasping it tightly, he closed his eyes, imagining his reunion with Emma, and as a peace washed over him, he pulled the door open...and as if his feet were glued to the floor, he couldn't move. He wasn't sure how long he stood there before he realized that the room was vacant - no receptionist or secretary, and the one visible desk was empty and the computer shut down, as if they had started their weekend early.

Another door, on the far side of the room, was partially open, and the soft music emanating from it told him the doctor was inside. Ten steps, give or take a few, and he was finally going to be close to the woman who had been treating Emma for months, but with that thought...the fear returned. "I'm bloody terrified," he sighed dropping down onto a chair as his bag landed on the floor with a thunk.

Seattle Airport
Seattle, WA
Friday, Early Afternoon

After Ariel left her at the airport, Emma walked inside, and the crush of the people, the noise from the sound system and the enormity of the choices she had served to send her to the lady's room to hide. Realizing that there were no comfortable chairs to rest on in this retreat, she had eventually made her way out into the atrium, found a seat and watched the airplanes land and take off. Eventually as her nerves had settled and the people faded away, the noise over the sound system became just a buzz and she moved to another seat where she could sit and formulate a plan.

"Perhaps I should have asked Ariel for help," she sighed, pulling out pen and paper to write the flight numbers and times. She just hoped the credit card August gave her actually worked.

Offices of Doctor Blanchard
Seattle-Grace Hospital
Seattle, WA
Friday, Early Afternoon

It had been several hours since Emma had departed from their session, but something about the way the session had ended just felt...off. Mary Margaret wanted to forget the dreaded paperwork and go check on her patient, but that might be pushing past the patient/doctor relationship and straight into a mother/daughter one. And if that were the case, something told her that Emma Swan, the real Emma Swan, was not only confident but independent as well, and might not appreciate the interference.

"Emma can wait, paperwork can't," she muttered to herself as she pulled out yet another chart. Hating paperwork was one thing, neglecting it was completely another. "And if you did the paperwork as you saw the patients, you wouldn't have to spend Friday afternoons catching up," she scolded herself, probably for the millionth time in her career, but why listen this time when she had never listened before? At least Fridays were half days, which meant she wasn't having to cancel anything important.

She had just gotten into the zone when she heard the outer waiting room door open and wondered if Donna had forgotten something and was returning for it. However, after several minutes had passed
and there was no 'hey it's just me' greeting, her curiosity got the better of her. She closed the file and pushed her ungainly body out of the chair just as her Fitbit buzzed, signaling an incoming call. A quick glance at her wrist told her it was Ariel, but when her curiosity over her mystery visitor won out, she let the phone go straight to voicemail.

Mary Margaret was halfway to the door when she heard a thunk from the outer room, and hurried, as much as a woman eight-months pregnant could, to see what awaited her. The scene that greeted her tugged at her heartstrings, immediately causing her eyes to water, as she knew that it meant the time would soon arrive when she would be setting one of her patients free, something that was always bittersweet. After Liam left, she had expected the brother would show up, however she had expected to see a man who was bursting with eagerness and fight to get back to Emma, not this broken man who was looking so alone. Perhaps, just as she had been able to help Liam understand some of the missteps that had occurred, she could also help Killian. Lucky for him, she was more than ready to help this family reunite.

He didn't immediately see her, giving her the opportunity to study him unobtrusively, and even though she could only see his profile, his body language told her everything she needed to know. He was sitting, bent over with his elbows on his knees and his head bowed, giving the impression of a man who had lost everything. And while Mary Margaret wanted to give him the words that he was hungering for, Emma was her priority and...she needed to make sure seeing him would be in her patient's best interest. Too much pressure to remember could send Emma running...again.

Stepping into the waiting room, she quietly cleared her throat. "You must be Killian Jones," was said softly, as she didn't want to startle him. When he lifted his head and looked at her, she couldn't help but smile. She would have recognized those eyes anywhere. The expression in them quickly sobered her as the turmoil he was feeling was alive and running riot behind them.

She saw fear, a feeling not uncommon in the families of her patients, but she could see so many other emotions too. Sadness, guilt, worry, love, hope, and even anger - all healthy and to be expected in a situation such as the one that this family was experiencing. But, just like she had with Emma and then again with Liam, her plan was to help him understand his feelings as well as Emma's. That he and Emma should be on the same path was imperative to the future of their journey. That they would get there was not the question...the question was how they would get there.

"Aye, I'm Killian Jones." He slowly pushed himself out of the chair, moving closer to where she was standing.

His voice was a mixture of both hope and sadness, causing her heart to hurt, but after meeting his brother, not totally unexpected. "Let's talk." She inclined her head toward her office door and waited for him to precede her into her private space. "Have a seat," she indicated a chair as she lowered her heavy girth onto the sofa. He didn't sit but prowled the edges of the room, almost as if he were trying to learn more about her, but just as she had with Liam, she allowed him his space. He could only be helped if he was ready.

She watched as he prowled the room spending extra time looking at the picture of her and David on vacation at the beach, gently touching her seashell collection before moving to her credential wall and studying her degrees and awards, almost as if he wanted to assure himself that she was qualified to do the job she had been doing for years. That too wasn't unexpected but the smile that crossed his face when he fingered the pink yarn hanging from her crochet basket was tender and surprising. "I had hoped to make a blanket for the baby…but..." she shrugged her shoulder, rubbing her hand over her stomach.

"Run out of time?" he asked as he took a step closer to where she was standing.
She smiled, wrinkling her nose. "Lack of talent."

He didn't say anything right way, just nodded and tipped his chin in acknowledgment. "Your office is very…warm," he told her softly.

"Thank you," Mary Margaret answered just as softly, maintaining eye contact with him, hoping that he would see just how much she wished to help.

Finally, taking that last step in her direction, he gazed at her solemnly, "Did I cause this?" his voice breaking on the last word.

While she didn't know Killian's side of the story, she felt secure enough to alleviate some of his fears. "Did you cause her amnesia?" He gave a quick bob of his head, to which she answered, "I can say with fairly good confidence that it wasn't you who caused this."

His brows drew together in a frown as he processed what she said. "Did Emma have a head injury that I need to know about?"

"No," she shook her head, "Emma has no neurological reasons behind her amnesia."

When he heard that, he felt his body slightly relax but if there was no medical reason for her amnesia, he was still brought back to the why. "Why does something like this occur?"

A shrug of a shoulder before she answered, "Fear of something. The what is where the answer lies. But," she hesitated long enough to make sure that he understood that what she was about to say was very important, "you can't tell her what that is or...fix it for her. She has to do that on her own."

~~~CS~~~

Killian gave an agitated snort and ran his fingers through his hair. "What could she be afraid of?" He left his spot by the window and sat down in an over-sized chair. "We had it all," he whispered, "and then I pressured her to go away with me. If I hadn't done that..." He wasn't sure he would ever feel that his decision to go to Atlantic City wasn't that first brick in the ripple.

"Killian," Mary Margaret's soft voice broke through his self-recrimination, "for you all to be able to complete the journey of life...you have to forgive yourselves, and fight for what you want...together. But, you also must be on the same path and moving in the same direction.

Kilian studied the doctor as she talked about being on the same path as Emma and moving in the same direction, and fighting together. But wasn't that what he had done when he spent a year searching for her? And fighting wasn't something he wanted to do with her; her heart's desire was all he wanted to give her. "I fought for her, Doctor Blanchard, for a year I searched and then once I found her things were perfect. She was perfect. Isn't that how a man is supposed to treat the woman he loves?"

As he was talking, Mary Margaret could hear the pain in his voice and see the love in his eyes, and knew he would do anything for Emma Swan. But her experience professionally gave her the insight to see that the 'perfect' relationship he had described, it wouldn't have been so perfect while Emma was healing, and was possibly one of her fears. "I think," she said softly, "that a lasting relationship is built on equal ground and, yes, it's wonderful for a man to shower a woman with love, but it's also important to understand that love is not perfect. Life and love are not all rainbows and unicorns. They are full of highs and lows, and how you respond during the low times is what makes that relationship stronger. That goes to any relationship, whether it's as lovers or friends or brothers," she said pointedly, knowing he would understand that analogy.
And he knew all about his experiences during conflict, as his self-reflections on the plane had spelled those out vividly for him. "My running days are over," Killian told her earnestly. If I could just see her and tell her that..." His voice trailed off.

"This isn't like in a fairytale. It's not something that can be fixed with True Love's Kiss," Mary Margaret responded, almost a bit too sharply, but her patient was her primary concern and what Emma's reaction would be wasn't quite clear.

When she flippantly responded about it not being a fairytale, Killian felt his anger rise. "I bloody well know it's no fairytale," he spat out. Pushing himself out of the chair, he went back to prowling around the room. "But shouldn't I have a say in this?" His agitation propelled him forward several steps before he turned back in her direction. "I love her," he jammed his thumb in his chest, "I miss her. Doesn't that count for something?"

His burst of anger wasn't anything that she hadn't expected, and knowing it would play itself out, she waited. Once it did, she gave him the only answer she could, "No, not this time. This time it all depends on Emma."

Killian closed his eyes, hating the fact that she was right and that if this was how he behaved when he saw her for the first time, he would be putting too much pressure on her, and then what? He didn't think he could handle it if she ran away from him again. Feeling he had more control on his emotions, he opened his eyes. "I get it," he told her quietly, taking a seat once again. "How can I help get my Emma back?"

Mary Margaret had watched the play of emotions cross his face, seeing when the anger transferred to fear and finally understanding. She also didn't think she had seen the last of his anger yet because once he knew about Sister Blue, she expected it to show up again.

SeaTac Airport
Seattle, WA
Friday, Early Afternoon

The crush of all the people around her threatened to make her run out of the airport screaming, but with deep breathing exercises she regained her strength and managed to make it to the front of the line. When it was time to give her documents to the officer, her hand was shaking so badly she worried he would ask her something she didn't know. Thankfully, there were no hold-ups and as soon as her ticket was checked, she was sent to the next station.

She put the backpack she had haphazardly packed into one of the bins, her jacket and boots into another and slid them onto the belt to be x-rayed. As they were going through the machine, she walked through the metal detector, only to panic when she came out and saw the security officer holding up her backpack.

"Officer Herman, ma'am," he said as she slowly took her boots out of the bin. "Is this your bag?"

Emma's insides were going ninety-miles-per-hour, and she was sure she had that deer in headlights look when she answered, "Ye..." She cleared her throat, "Yes, officer."

"I need to look inside..."

"Oooookay," she agreed, wondering what he could have seen that he needed to inspect up close.

She watched as he stretched the top wide, peered inside for a few minutes and then held it open for her to see. "Please remove those two items," he pointed at the lids of her shampoo and conditioner
bottles.

Emma said a silent prayer of thanks that she had stuck those in there at the last minute and that he wasn't after something at the very bottom. She would have been mortified to have her silky underwear spread across the security table, she thought as she handed them to him.

He took the bottles and set them off to the side. "They're too big for the plane," he told her as she handed her backpack to her and moved off to deal with someone else.

Emma gazed longingly at the bottles with her favorite shampoo and conditioner in them, but since there was nothing she could do, she closed her bag and sat down to put on her boots. Once those were on, she tossed her jacket over her shoulder, grabbed her pack and went in search of her gate.

Office of Doctor Mary Margaret Blanchard
Seattle-Grace Hospital
Seattle, WA
Friday, Afternoon

As Killian shared his story of what had transpired between him and Liam last May, he could see that his first mistake had been shredding the file that Liam had so callously tossed onto the table. Had he confronted Liam then, standing up for what he wanted and needed, things might have been different. The first block in the chain reaction of events could have all been nullified with a simple conversation.

But...he hadn't, and here he was in the office of Emma's doctor hearing about her first days with his love. How immediately upon arriving she had been whisked into surgery, waking only to ask who was Emma Swan, her only means of communication a whiteboard. When he had listened to Liam's explanation of her injuries, every word spoken had hit him like a knife to the heart, but this time was worse. This time she had been on the other side of the country, alone...and lost.

As Mary Margaret continued her story of the first few days with Emma here, she kept wanting to skip over the worst parts, but Emma's Killian wouldn't allow it. Every time she got to a part in the story about a new surgery or Emma's pain, he physically winced as if he were currently experiencing exactly what she had felt.

"I should have been with her," she heard him lament, not the first time since she had started her dissertation.

"Oh, but Killian," she pushed up, going to retrieve her large portfolio of drawings and pictures Emma had shared with her, "you were there. There's obviously a powerful, almost mystical connection between you two because you were always there." On the table in front of him she spread out drawings with depictions of the eyes watching over her.

Killian watched her lay out the drawings, each showing a scene and then his eyes there, as if he were watching it all happen. "I dreamed of her, too, you know?" He turned water-filled eyes up. "Every night I dreamed of her. Some of those dreams were..."

"Graphic?" Mary Margaret's brow went up with her question. When his cheeks tinted pink, she lightly laughed. "Oh, you're not the only one," she pulled out one of the cleaner pictures of them from their encounter earlier in the week, "Emma was there too."

Killian stared down at the drawing of himself and Emma locked in a heated embrace, her arms around him, nails scouring his back with every movement of their bodies. While there was no bloody way he was going to tell the lady doctor that he had woken that morning with scratch marks on his
back, he knew they were there. "Why didn't you contact me?" His frustration had returned and this time, it was directed at her as well as at himself.

"Many reasons," she explained, "but initially all we had were the papers she signed agreeing to come here. With all the privacy rules, we were given her consent and that was it. But then after I got a call from Sister Blue..."

Killian didn't understand all the privacy speech, but she was a doctor and he assumed he wouldn't get her to admit anything anyway, but then… "Wait," he barked, "you spoke to Blue? When…and I'll ask again, why wasn't I contacted?"

And there was the anger she expected over this very situation as she told him a little about Sister Blue tracking down the accident, the hospital and eventually her. "It was my choice, as Emma's doctor, to convince the Sister to wait until the end of this month."

"And what were the specific reasons behind the wait?" His irritation caused his speech pattern to be very clipped, a staccato rhythm to it.

Very simply she said, "You, Henry and Emma. You're an adult and you've felt fear at the possibility that Emma might push you away, but imagine what Henry would feel. Would Emma not knowing who he was leave him unaffected?"

And just like that his anger evaporated, as the answer was no. If Emma pushed Henry away, he would be devastated, plain and simple. "So, where do we go from here?" He didn't like it, but he agreed that the doctor seemed to have Emma's best interests at heart.

"I saw her this morning and it seems," she rifled through the artwork looking for the newest additions, "she's had some more memories. She arrived more confident than I'd ever seen her before, and drew these."

Killian took the pictures she handed him, and the first glance brought tears to his eyes. "She remembered," he breathed. "Did she say anything?" he asked her, unable to take his eyes from the drawings.

"Not really," Mary Margaret answered. "No matter what we tried, she couldn't connect them. Obviously, you recognize them."

"Aye." Killian carried that vision of what had transpired on that cliff in his mind...still. "I proposed to her on that cliff, and then she took this beaded necklace I gave her and we buried it under a rock and made a promise."

Should she take him to *Anita's Place* without warning Emma? She had to admit she was torn, as her last few sessions with Emma had given her a different picture of the woman that she had known for three months. The woman she saw this morning had been strong enough to handle seeing her fiancé, and she felt that Killian also understood the importance of guarding his need to push the memories, and then his quiet plea interrupted her thoughts, but gave her the answer she had been looking for.

"Please, Doctor Blanchard," Killian swallowed the lump in his throat before continuing, "I just need to see her...to see with my own eyes that she's truly...alive." Her subtle nod warmed his heart, and with much lighter feet, he took his bag and followed her out the door.

*SeaTac Airport*

*Seattle, WA*

*Friday Afternoon*
Sitting at the gate waiting to board, Emma found herself feeling guilty about how things had been left with Doctor Blanchard. The doctor had done so many wonderful things for her over the past few months that she wasn't sure how to say thank you, but at this very moment, what were her choices? Remain passive in her therapy and let it come - 'when it was time' - according to her doctor, or take a more active role and follow the clues?

She remembered waking up in the hospital and seeing Doctor Nolan and writing the question, 'Who is Emma Swan,' and since that moment, support from him and his staff had been there when she needed it. They never put pressure on her to be someone she didn't know, but encouraged her to follow her heart and mind, wherever they led. Some days had been lonely, some quiet, but the longer she had been in the hospital and looked in the mirror, the more disconnected she had felt...until that night when she had dreamed about Kate.

"Hello. What is your name?" a disembodied voice called quietly to her right.

She turned quickly to ask them whom they were talking to before they faded from sight, just like the other scenes she had pictured, and then lost just as quickly. But before she could give voice to her question, from her left another voice filled the air, "My name is Kate."

And then upon waking she had drawn the picture declaring her name as Kate Blue. But where had the name Blue come from? She had assumed it had to do with the color of the eyes that were always there, but somehow that didn't feel right. Did she know someone whose name was Blue? On her drawing, she had labeled one girl Red. Perhaps there was another child whose name was Blue?

It hadn't been too long before Doctor Blanchard had shown up with the picture she had drawn. Her face had still been bruised, her jaw wired shut and her right arm in the cast, and yet Doctor Blanchard brought with her no judgment. No criticism. No anger. She brought only support. Only a willingness to help. Acceptance.

Emma looked up from the magazine she had been slowly flipping through to see Doctor Blanchard stroll into the room, a smile on her face, her arms full of books. "Good morning, Emma." She had laid the drawing with the new name on the bed. "You still can't remember being Emma Swan?"

Shaking her head no, Emma picked up her sketchpad. "No, not yet."

"Did you remember being called Kate Blue?"

Emma had shrugged, then nodded her head and written, "Not sure. But safe."

"Kate Blue makes you feel safe?" she had asked Emma curiously.

Nodding her head, Emma just agreed, but didn't offer any further information.

"I want you to feel safe and if Kate Blue is the name that gives you those feelings then we'll go with that for now, okay?"

And as easy as that, she had temporally become Kate Blue and Doctor Blanchard had been the one to help ease the transition. She had even helped her discover a side of herself that she was unfamiliar with; a side that liked photography.

Emma watched the doctor pull out a small camera. "I know this isn't much, but," she handed the camera to her, "I want to explore your artistic nature, but since your arm is in a cast I thought this might be easier. It's simple, just point and shoot."

And just like that she had started taking pictures of everything and anything she could find. It had
been a time of exploration and new discoveries that had brought her some happiness until her cast could be removed. Once there was no cast, though, there had been no reason for her to stick exclusively with photography. Her hand had itched for a pencil or a piece of charcoal, and her craft as Emma Swan had slowly returned.

Once that happened and the memories and dreams had become more vivid, it had been time to ask the really hard questions.

Who am I?” she asked the face silently.

"Your name is Emma Swan," the doctor with the kind blue eyes told her.

But did she believe him?

"Are you sure?" she asked again, the pain and frustration evident even inside her own head.

"Yes. Trust us." This time she could hear another voice added to his. Mary Margaret, the woman with the kind eyes and the gentle voice had joined them. "It will come, Emma. We will work on it together."

Together? Why did that sound so familiar?

"We will do it together, Swan. Just like everything else."

And who was it that said those words to her? Had they been the mystery man that Doctor Blanchard had mentioned?

"...but do you think there's a man out there that loves me?"

"I would bet on it."

"But...if that's true then where is he?"

"Perhaps he's on his own journey and working his way back to you, just..."

"...as I'm working my way back to him," Emma finished.

Emma looked around her as men and women of all sizes, shapes and colors hurried to their destinations. Was the man who loved her close or was he in Boston waiting for her return? Was he her dream lover?

"You're here," she jumped into his arms as if she had no doubt that he would always be there to catch her. "You're really here."

"I've missed you, love. So much."

And then he kissed her and even though it had been five days, she could still feel the imprint of his lips. She could still taste him. And if she closed her eyes, she could even smell him. And she had changed, gotten stronger, more curious.

"I remember feeling only fear when I first came here, when I heard the name, Emma Swan. Now...I only feel anticipation, thanks to you."

And started to try to unravel the reason as to why she had lost her memory in the first place.

"We've talked about why you couldn't remember your life, right?" the doctor asked her quietly.
Emma nodded her head. "That there wasn't a physical reason? Yes."

"And...?" she was prodded by the good doctor.

Emma rolled her eyes and grinned. "Fear," she wrinkled her nose, "but what could have been so scary that I ran?"

"Oh, Emma," Mary Margaret smiled, "there are all types of fear besides just the obvious ones. We are the people we are because of where we come from and the things we've experienced."

Emma thought about what she said for a few seconds. "So...possibly something from my past was the reason behind my fear?"

"Perhaps." Mary Margaret laughed when Emma rolled her eyes again at her cryptic answer. "It could be as simple as fear of happiness because you don't think you deserve to be happy, or something as complex as fear of worrying you'll screw things up. We're all different but I think deep down we all want the same things, like happiness and love, but I also believe we're all worried we'll screw it up.

There are no physical reasons why you can't remember."

Fear? But if there was someone who loved her, why hadn't they worked together? Had they each run because of fear, but for different reasons? Was there adversity or conflict that they couldn't handle? Or was it that they didn't even try to handle it, but chose to run instead?

When she woke up this morning after spending the night without her dream lover, she had felt sad, but stronger with the person she was. Doctor Blanchard said she looked more confident, which would explain why she was considering getting on a plane, alone...to fly to Boston...for what? Over the loud speaker she heard,

"Flight 815 to Boston will begin boarding shortly."

Was she ready? Should she get on that airplane when it was her turn or should she go back to Anita's Place?

I promise you that I will never forget these beads and our promise to each other and what they stand for.

And as if she were watching it happen on a video, she saw the beads being dropped into a shallow hole and the rock pushed back into place. Emma grabbed the drawing of the blue beaded necklace and ran her finger around each bead, imagining how they felt...smooth glass or were they stone? Around and over each bead her finger flew trying to grasp the memory as it tickled the edges of her mind.

And then suddenly, as if a Polaroid photo was developing before her eyes, it was there. Dropping the picture of the beads, she flipped through her sketchbook for a clean page and drew an image, an image that had to be important to the discovery of her identity as Emma Swan.

The cliff scene had been familiar and she remembered where it was, but was it worth the search? Fort Williams Park was a ninety-mile park. Could she truly find the same rock without any other memories? And even if she found it, would it make a difference? Would she be any closer to remembering her life?

Emma reached into the pocket where she had stowed the picture, thinking perhaps if she looked at it again, another memory...or two, would occur. When her hand encountered nothing but air, her pulse.
sped up and the memory of what happened caused her to second guess her decision to go to Boston.

Rushing down the outside steps of Anita's Place, Emma slung the strap of the backpack over her right shoulder, just as she had done hundreds of times. What she had failed to take into consideration was that this time the backpack was heavier, and as she swung it up it caught on something sharp. Unwilling to make her ride wait too long, she had tugged it loose and continued on down the steps.

"And even though I didn't see it happen, apparently my drawing fell out during my run," she murmured quietly just as they started the pre-boarding announcement. Was that a sign that I shouldn't go? She wondered. And if she did go, was going to Boston running from...or was it running to?

Anita's Place
Seattle, WA
Friday Afternoon

When Doctor Blanchard drove up in front of the place where Emma was staying, Killian was surprised. "Eric told me about this place, but," he frowned, "he said he didn't know Emma."

"He knows her," Mary Margaret stopped the car and opened her door, "he just doesn't know her as Emma."

She got out of the car before he could ask for any clarification, but he was much quicker than she and met her at rear of the car. "Meaning?"

"There was a time," she began as they started walking toward the house, "when she needed to feel safe and wanted to be called Kate Blue. I believe she had a doll named Kate when she was a child, and so here, at Anita's Place, most of the people know her as Kate. Only the caretaker, Mrs. Lucas knows her real name."

"And now?" he asked softly, as he followed her in the door.

"And now," she started up the steps, "she answers to either." They went up four or five more steps before she stopped and looked down at him. "Don't overthink it. She answers to either name these days and in our sessions, she's Emma. She is working her way back to you." With a gentle squeeze of his shoulder, she continued on up.

Killian didn't say anything else until they reached the landing, outside of the rooms. "Do you think she remembers who I am?"

She tilted her head sideways, as if she wasn't sure what to say, but then with a smile, nodded her head. "She doesn't remember your name. In fact, she thinks of you as Captain Hook, but she remembers the feelings that come from you.

Killian was immediately brought back to the very real dream, when she had called him Captain. Had she not known who he was?

Doctor Blanchard stopped in front of a door. "I need to check on her alone first." She knocked several times, but when there was no answer she tried the knob, surprised when it turned easily, and slipped inside the room.

Killian heard her walking around, calling Emma's name, but there was no response from his swan's sweet voice. After the opening and closing of several doors, the footsteps grew louder, and then,
"Oh, no! Killian, come quick."

He had already pushed the door open before the 'no' was even out of her mouth and was hurrying toward her. "What?" His look took in the small room with its nondescript bedding, but he could see signs of Emma around. There were several sketchpads, pencils, a pair of sandals and a hat tossed on a chair and, most of all, a smell that was pure Emma. He would have known her scent anywhere.

"Look," she pointed to an old computer sitting on a desk.

The monitor held the remnants of the last search she had performed. Unable to help himself, Killian impulsively hugged the doctor, smiling around his tears. "She remembered Fort Williams State Park."

"That's what it looks like, but would she..." And then she remembered the call that had come in earlier...that she had ignored. "Hold on." Digging her phone out of her pocket, she was shocked to realize that another call had come in from Ariel about thirty minutes ago.

Ariel had called at 12:28, leaving a short message.

*Emma asked for a ride to the airport. I'm on my way to pick her up. Just letting you know.*

"Damn, why didn't I answer?" she muttered as she opened the next message.

A call left an hour plus ago.

*I just dropped Emma off at SeaTac. She said you knew and understood. I have a few errands but will be at Anita's Place around three to pick up the rest of Eric's things if you have any questions. Bye.*

*Oh and before I forget, Emma gave me a note to give to you.*

When she looked up at him, Killian could see the worry in her eyes. He didn't know what to say, but this was Emma. This woman he knew, and for the first time since landing in Seattle, he felt as if he were right back at Harvard, searching for the woman who, after one look, he had known he was going to marry. He gently squeezed the doctor's fingers. "That's my Emma, Doctor Blanchard. Taking charge, and if she finds herself, she just might save us all. Now, how about a ride to the airport? I'm going after my girl."

With a little smile, she shook her head and led him out of the room and down the steps. As they were walking down, Killian had to grab onto the doctor when she lost her footing, slipping on a piece of paper. Her gasp worried him as he thought perhaps he had grabbed her too tightly, but when he saw what she was looking at, he understood. Killian bent over, picking up the page, and slowly opened it. "Look, Doctor Blanchard," he showed her the page, "Emma remembered." She had drawn a small-scale rendering of the cliff picture hanging on his wall at home.

~~~CS~~~

As soon as Ariel drove off with Killian, Mary Margaret took the letter that Ariel had handed her and sat down on the front steps to read. Knowing it was from Emma made her nervous for some reason, which made the task of unfolding the paper more difficult because of her shaking hands.

*Dear Doctor Blanchard,*

*During our time together, you stressed that if I listened to my heart, it will lead me where I should go, and while I often thought you were crazy, I always tried to do just that. And then one morning I*
woke up and realized that you were right, if I listened, my heart was leading me in the right direction.

I want to thank you for believing in me until I was strong enough to believe in myself. Just know, that this is not goodbye forever, just goodbye for today.

I will be back,

Your friend,

Emma Swan

Mary Margaret dashed the tears from her cheeks with the back of her hand as she smiled at her very own Prince Charming walking her way.

"Honey, are you okay?" David hurried the last few steps, worry evident on his face.

She folded the letter, tucking it back in her pocket for another read later. "I'm alright, David. It's just been an emotional day."

"Anything you want to talk about?" He held out his hand to help her up off the step, pulling her close for a quick kiss.

She leaned against his chest briefly, trying to decide if it would be better to talk about it or to put it behind her for the evening. When her stomach rumbled, she decided a cheeseburger might help her make up her mind. "Buy me dinner?"

David grinned. "And then you'll talk?"

"Perhaps." She tucked her arm through his. "Lead the way."

SeaTac Airport
Seattle, WA
Friday, Afternoon

Luckily, Ariel had driven up just as Killian and Doctor Blanchard had been climbing into her car, and upon finding out Emma's fiance was trying to get to her, Ariel had volunteered to drive. He had spent most of the drive staring at the cliff drawing he was holding in his hands and reliving the moments he had spent with Emma there in May.

His day just kept getting more and more surreal, he thought, as the airport came into view. With a little luck, he would find her before she boarded a plane, because if he missed her, finding her just became much more difficult.

"I'm going to drop you off in the same place I let Emma out a couple of hours ago," Ariel interrupted his mulling as she pulled up to the curb and prepared to stop. "I told her to check Southwest and American."

As soon as she stopped the car, Killian threw open his door and tossed over his shoulder, "Thanks, Ariel. Wish me luck," before practically running inside to search for the departures board. There were three possibilities and with nothing to lose, Killian joined the long security line.

~~~CS~~~

Emma had taken the missing picture as a sign that she was once again running, and had started
walking back up the corridor to the security station. The hallway had been crowded, and with every step she kept asking herself the same question, *Am I making the right decision?* But for some reason it was as if there was static in her ears and she could never quite hear the answer.

When the announcement for continued boarding of her flight came over the loud speaker and she still felt unsure as to her decision, she moved out of the flow of traffic and asked herself, "What do I want?"

"In my dream, I looked up and there he was," her voice faded as if she were reliving the moment all over again.

"And what did you do?" Mary Margaret encouraged her patient to continue.

"I ran to him. Just as fast as I could run, I ran to him and when he caught me...I was home."

Home, she thought, he was her home. Someone had once said to her, "A man unwilling to fight for what he wants, deserves what he gets," so the question really was: was she willing to fight for the home that she found in the arms of her dream lover?

~~~CS~~~

Standing in line awaiting his turn, Killian found himself switching his weight from one leg to the other as well as crowding the person in front of him; anything to try to make it move faster. Finally, he reached the front, presented his documents, and was allowed to move to the x-ray line. With only a small bag to dump in one bin and the contents of his pocket to dump into another, he set them on the belt and walked through the metal detector. As he was removing his belongings from the bin, his sense of urgency was ratcheted up a notch as the loud speaker came to life-

*Last boarding call for flight 815 to Boston at gate 22.*

He didn't know how he knew, but there was no doubt in his mind that Emma was on that plane...and he had missed her. He closed his eyes as a sense of despair almost consumed him that he was so very close, yet not close enough for him to hold her in his arms. Suddenly...he could detect Emma's fragrance, as if she were standing next to him wrapping her body around his, promising to never let him go. "Emma," he murmured as his need for her caused his knees to buckle and he had to grab onto the side of the table to remain on his feet.

"Sir, are you feeling okay?" he heard someone ask.

Killian opened his eyes to those of one of the security officers hovering next to him, but he found couldn't formulate the words he needed to use, because Emma's scent kept getting stronger...and stronger.

"Sir," he asked again, "are you okay?"

Blinking several times, trying to clear his head, Killian finally was able to respond, "That smell," he whispered, "where's it coming from?"

The attendant shook his head and his face took on a pinkish tint. "I knocked over a bottle of shampoo that was left behind. It's quite pungent."

"No," Killian breathed almost reverently, as he knew who had left it behind, "it's wonderful. The bottle?"

The officer gave him a curious look, but without any questions he reached into the garbage bin and
pulled out a bottle. The minute Killian saw it, he knew he'd been right and that it had belonged to his lady. Slowly, he reached out to touch it, not really knowing what to expect but the second he did...she was there.

"I miss you," he heard her say.

And I miss you, he thought as he tossed the bottle back in the garbage bin, picked up his bag, and with a tip of his head, walked in the direction of gate 22.

~~~CS~~~

Emma listened to the flight attendant with only half an ear as she stared out the window at the airport as it faded from sight. She was hesitant to put a name to what exactly she was watching for, but felt almost as if she were forgetting something...or leaving something behind.

Was she willing to fight for the home that she found in the arms of her dream lover?

Before she could answer that question though, she also asked herself again:

If I follow this memory and go to Boston, am I running from something or am I running to it?

Once she had given words to that question, there had been no hesitation, as she knew what she wanted. She wanted those feelings that she had when she was in the arms of her very own Captain Hook. He was her home. She just hoped that Fort Williams Park wasn't so big that she couldn't find those beads, as once she found them her hope was that he wouldn't be too far away.

~~~CS~~~

Killian watched the plane taxi away from the airport, wishing he had gotten here earlier, wishing he were right now holding her in his arms. He unfolded the picture that he had been keeping in his pocket since he had found it at Anita's place. It might be smaller than the painting, yet it was just as inspiring...magical...theirs.

He knew where she was headed. Question was, did he meet her there? Or did he wait and let her come to him?

Liam's Apartment  
New York, New York  
Friday Evening  

When Elsa had invited him to accompany her and Henry to a party at Regina and Robin's he had to admit that he was positively giddy. However, now as he waited for her to finish dressing, he was having second thoughts, as what did he know about socializing? In fact, he couldn't remember the last time he had actually socialized, much less been in the company of a beautiful woman for an evening out. He just had to get through the evening without showing what an uncouth git he was and then perhaps he would set his sights a tad higher.

He was standing in front of the mirror tying his tie when Henry popped his head around the corner. "Uncle Liam, why do I have to wear this?" He was holding his toe aloft and making a face, as if the tie had a horrible smell. "Killian says it's important to let your chest breathe."

Liam slowly turned Henry's direction, "Well, Killian does have a point. It is important to let a man's chest breathe, but," he held up a finger to forestall Henry's next argument, "it's also important to look good. And don't I look good?" He winked at Henry before looking up into the eyes of the woman
who had suddenly appeared behind him.

"Very good." Elsa's eyes conducted a slow appraisal, which somehow embarrassed him. And the fact that it embarrassed him was surprising, as he'd never had difficulty talking...even flirting with women. Why did this particular woman leave him feeling tongue-tied?

Lucky for him, she turned her attention to Henry before he said anything that would humiliate himself even more. "If you don't want to wear it tonight, Henry, that's fine. I just thought you would look so grown up."

Liam had to bite his lip to keep from laughing when Henry gave her a look that said, 'I can totally see past what you're trying to do,' but then he handed over the tie, almost disgusted that it had worked anyway. "Okay, for you." She helped him clip it on and sent him off to Liam's guest room for shoes and socks.

He watched Henry scamper off before turning his attention back to Elsa. "You look lovely." She had on a blue dress that hugged her body like a second skin and he was suddenly very glad they had brought Henry back to their apartment building. "I have something for you."

"For me?"

She watched him walk to his dresser where he took the delicate silver necklace from the box. "Aye, sweet Elsa. While I was in Seattle, I saw it...and thought of you. Shall I?"

Her response was a simple nod as she turned her back toward him, lifting her hair. As he stood behind her fastening the chain, he couldn't stop himself from leaning closer to inhale that scent that made him feel as if he were in a field of flowers. Looking over her shoulder at their images looking back, he was once again in awe that someone as beautiful as she could be so giving and would want to be around him at all.

She turned to face him and smoothed her hands over his chest to his shoulders. "Thank you, Liam. It's beautiful."

Unconsciously, his arms tightened around her waist, his eyes boring into hers, trying to see himself through her eyes, until what she saw was too intense...too much. He closed his eyes, trying to distance himself from the feelings that she stirred deep inside of him.

"Liam," her soft voice brought his gaze back to hers, "it's time to start forgiving yourself. It's like Emma's doctor said, you might have started it, but Emma walked out. Killian chose to not to ask questions because he was afraid of the answers. The past is done and can't be changed. What matters is the man you are now."

"I want to believe that," he whispered hesitantly, letting her pull him into a hug. "I want to believe this is real."

She reached up, kissing him lightly. "Very real. But we need to go, or we'll be late."

She moved out of his arms, but capturing her hand between both of his he brought it to his lips, kissing the back softly. "Thank you, I..."

"Guys, come on," Henry interrupted them, "I need to go show Roland how good I look in my tie."

He put his hands on his hips and preened as if he were a model on a runway.

"And you do," Elsa took his hand to lead him from the room, "you look very good."
Liam couldn't help but smile at himself one more time before following them. He hadn't forgiven himself completely but with her by his side, he thought perhaps he had started.

Robin and Regina's Apartment  
New York, New York  
Friday, Evening

Robin watched Regina flutter around the kitchen, redoing things that had already been done, but no matter how many times he told her it was all perfect, she still couldn't settle. After the sixth time she realigned perfectly straight silverware, he snagged her hand as she tried to move past him, pulling her down onto his lap.

She shrieked at his unexpected tug. "Robin, I need to..."

He couldn't help himself, as when she turned on that prissy voice, it turned him on and covering her mouth with his, he proceeded to distract her quite thoroughly. "Isn't that better?" he asked after several minutes of bliss.

She looked at him like she had no idea what he was talking about. "Isn't what better?" A tiny frown appeared between her perfectly arched brows.

"Why, kissing me, of course. Isn't that better than worrying your pretty head about some silly silverware?" When she had landed in his lap, her skirt slid up, exposing a perfectly sexy thigh that his hand couldn't help but to explore.

"Kissing you is perfectly wonderful, and you know that, but," she pushed out of his arms, tugging her skirt into place at the same time, "how 'bout I go check on Roland?"

"Go ahead. I'll let the guests in if they arrive before you return." She gave him a little smile and turned to walk away, but just before she was out of sight, she looked back in his direction. "Thank you," was barely out of her mouth before she was gone.

The tap-tap of her heels faded and then he heard Roland squeal something delightfully, before he too quieted and only the gentle murmur of their voices could be heard. He had a feeling that if he were to spy on them, he would see Regina sitting on the bed with Roland on her lap, their dark heads close together. It felt so natural, normal for them to be in his life that he still couldn't believe it had been only two days since they had signed the paperwork making Roland truly theirs. And Regina had taken to motherhood as if she had been waiting for it forever. So many changes in such a short time made him feel like he was dreaming.

"But if it's a dream," he whispered, "I don't want it to end."

He still marveled that he had taken one look at her and known that she was the one for him. And while it hadn't been easy, they had survived the semester, and after he left the hospital, he had moved into her place. With his casts removed and physical therapy behind them, making her his wife had been a priority. He just wished that Killian could have been there with him. They had gone through a lot together and he hadn't seen his best mate since the crash. And after the news that Blue had shared, well...it had to have changed him in many ways. How was he?

"Robin," Regina walked into the room and handed him her phone, "read this."

The tone of her voice piqued his interest, but not as much as the text from Elsa,

**Elsa:** *Liam didn't know Killian thought Emma was dead. He had sent her to Seattle for her*
surgeries, but now she has amnesia. Killian is on the way to Seattle to be with her. Bringing Henry and Liam with me tonight, I hope that's alright.

"Liam knew she was alive?" Regina nodded her head. "How did Killian not know this?"

She shrugged. "I don't know, Robin. Are you okay with Liam coming tonight?"

Robin looked inside, remembering the mess that Killian had become after the death of his parents and how it had been Liam who had finally gotten through to him. And yes, Liam had been a prat for years, but that he loved his brother had never been the question. "I am," he smiled at her softly. "We both love Killian and will be there if he needs us. And now..." The peal of the doorbell interrupted his thought.

"They're here," Roland squealed as he careened around the corner.

"Slow down, little man." Robin hoisted him into arms. "Let's go see who's at the door."

~~~CS~~~

As soon as they stepped off the elevator, Liam's phone buzzed, and while he didn't want to be rude, he had been hoping for news from Killian. What he read wasn't quite what he had expected, but he was going to look on it as a step in the right direction.

K: Emma had a breakthrough and is on her way to Boston. Am going to follow. Will keep you posted.

K: Spoke with Doctor Blanchard. You were right, she was just what Emma needed. Perhaps what we all needed.


Three texts, all positive messages for many reasons. Assuming Killian had sent the messages just as he was boarding the plane, Liam quickly sent a reply:

L: I get that two wrongs don't make it all right, but am happy to help. Good luck with Emma.

He just hoped that in a city with over half-million people, Killian knew Emma well enough to locate her quickly.

"Killian?" Elsa turned back to ask about the message when she realized he hadn't followed.

"Aye," he handed her the phone to read the messages, "but I know he'll find her."

Elsa squeezed his fingers. "He will. In fact," her laughter calmed his nerves while they waited for the door to be answered, "have you heard the story of how they finally got together?"

Had he? He was ashamed to say that if he had, he didn't remember, but found himself interested in learning more about his brother's courtship of his Emma. "I haven't. Will you share it with me...later?" His voice sounded husky, even to his ears.

Her glance at his lips, caused a warm glow in his chest. "I'd like that," she promised just as the door was opened by the hosts.

~~~CS~~~
Regina had finally gotten over her trepidation and they had made it through the meal and dessert without any incidences. Throughout the evening, she had been keeping a close eye on Liam and Elsa, and while she had to admit that he was rather charming, that didn't mean she wasn't worried about her friend. Since their arrival, she had been waiting to get Elsa alone, and with her mother and Nemo off somewhere, and Robin and Liam talking, she thought perhaps this was her chance. "Come help." She linked her arm with Elsa's, steering her into the kitchen.

"Is this where I get the talk about not falling for the bad boy?" Elsa laughed at her.

"If it were, would I be too late?" she deadpanned.

Elsa tilted her head and gave a smile that Regina could only describe as dreamy. "He's a good guy, Regina." Her smile grew and...her eyes sparkled. "There's a story from his past that I don't know yet, but we're a lot alike and..." she leaned forward and whispered, "he's a good kisser."

A snort burst forth before Regina could stop it. "He is...easy on the eyes." She winked at Elsa, whose face was turning red. "But seriously, Robin seems okay with him and I have to admit that Liam sure seems...smitten with you."

"Really?" Elsa hugged herself. "He makes me feel things I've never felt before." Her voice trailed off, as if she were lost in thought.

"Oh, girlfriend," Regina hugged her, "seems like I thought the very same thing about Robin, and look at us now."

Elsa sighed, "A family."

"Speaking of," Regina continued, "you, Liam and Henry looked quite like a family when you arrived."

"I'm just helping..." Elsa started to say just as Roland and Henry came rushing into the kitchen, giggling.

Regina raised a brow. "What's so funny, boys?"

Their giggling slowed down long enough for Roland to whisper, "Granma Cora was kissing Granpa Nemo." And the giggles started again.

Regina winced as she still hadn't gotten used to this new person who seemed to have taken over her mother's body. "Oh, they were, were they?" Both boys nodded vigorously. "I guess we better go chaperone, then." Each boy grabbed a hand, tugging her out of the kitchen, just as the teenagers returned. Nemo's color was high and she really didn't want to look too closely at her mother.

"Saved by the newlyweds," Elsa murmured.

Sticking her tongue out at her friend, Regina stopped and poured a shot of whiskey. She needed a bit more courage to face her mother, and allow the image of her mother and boss necking.

~~~CS~~~

Liam was leaning on the balcony railing, staring at the New York skyline, when he heard the door open and footsteps heading his way. The footsteps were too heavy to be Elsa's, but something told him it wasn't Robin. "Nice party, isn't it?" He turned toward Nemo, the person he had expected as he drew closer.
Nemo nodded his head, "It is." He was quiet for several minutes, but Liam knew the man. He knew the quiet wouldn't last, but was surprised by what was said, "She's good for you, you know."

"You expect me to disagree, don't you?" Liam hadn't expected to say those words but once he did, he realized they were true.

"And you aren't going to," Nemo turned to face him. "I say that is progress."

Thinking about everything that had occurred in his life in just three days was almost overwhelming, but strangely enough, he was...almost alright with it. "She's...been there for me, Nemo, and having her beside me feels...right." He gave him a little smile. "And she's been wonderful with Henry."

"I'm happy to hear this, Liam." Nemo patted him on the shoulder. "Don't let mistakes from the past create problems for the future. Learn from those and let Elsa in."

Liam gave him a lopsided smile. "She may be already there. I'm just not..." The door opened before he could finish and Cora called Nemo to leave.

"You deserve love, Liam. Never doubt that." His dark eyes held his for an extra second before he continued, "Now come say goodbye to my wife and then take Elsa and Henry home."

Home with Elsa, he thought, that felt right.

~~~CS~~~

With the departure of their guests, Robin and Regina had tucked Roland into bed, and then instead of leading her toward their bedroom, he led her back to the front room. "Voila," he gestured to the room where he had lit a fire, spread out a blanket and popped a cork on a bottle of champagne.

"Oh," she smiled slightly, "are you trying to ply me with alcohol?"

He winked, leading her down onto the blanket. "If I was, would it work?" He handed her a glass of bubbly.

Regina took a sip, giving him a coy smile. "Perhaps..."

Robin watched her relax back onto the blanket and stare into the flames. He loved how the light from the fire heightened the color in her cheeks, caused her hair to shine and her eyes...they were so dark and fathomless that he felt himself drowning in them every time he gazed at her. "You were wonderful tonight, you know? There was no reason to worry."

"It was easier than I expected," she gave him a tiny smile, "and it was wonderful to see Elsa, and Henry again." Turning over on her stomach, she propped her chin on her hands and leaned on his chest. "What do you think of the Liam and Elsa development?"

Robin didn't say anything as he absently ran his fingers through her hair. "I told Liam," his smile grew causing his dimples to pop, "that if he hurt her I'd kick his arse, even if he's the brother of my best mate."

"My hero." She batted her eyes at him. "Elsa is smitten, but...they look good together."

"Well," he pulled her up until her lips were within kissing distance, "we'll keep an eye on them." He pulled her snug against his body, gently kissing each eye closed. "But now," he whispered, gently kissing her lips, "I have a few plans that only involve the two of us."
"Show me?"

"My pleasure, Mrs. Locksley," he barely got out before their lips connected and there was no talking for quite some time.

**Liam's Apartment**
**New York, NY**
**Friday Night**

All the way back to their apartment building, Elsa kept wondering how the night would end. Would Liam and Henry say goodnight at their door and she walk to her door alone? Would they walk her to her door and say goodnight then, or...

"Elsa," Henry grabbed her hand, pulling her through the door to Liam's apartment as soon as it was open, "come tuck me in."

"Oh? Are you sure you need me?"

She was looking at Henry, but when Liam's voice reached her ears saying, "Very much," his whispered reply sent chills down her spine and when her eyes met his, she was really surprised she didn't melt onto the floor in a puddle.

"Come on," Henry broke the spell, "I'll show you which pajamas I brought." Before she said something she shouldn't, she followed Henry down the stairs to his room.

In the end, Liam followed them, and after Henry was in bed she followed him back upstairs where, taking her hand, he led her out onto the balcony. It was a warm night but up this high the light breeze stirred the air and his presence stimulated her senses.

His hands cupped her elbows and slid slowly up her arms until he grasped her shoulders. He overwhelmed her, but in a good way...in a really, really good way. She was ready when he kissed her, so gentle but yet...she could feel him in every nuance of her soul.

She slid her arms around his waist, splaying her hands over his muscled back as his lips moved from her mouth to her jaw then her neck.

Elsa could feel how she was affecting him and it was almost too much...too fast. She stepped back an inch and stared up into his face, absorbing the way he looked at her, as if she were the only woman who'd ever mattered. The unguarded emotion she saw on his face completely transfixed her, sending a host of butterflies winging their way to her stomach.

"I love how you look at me," his warm breath drifted over her face.

She cocked her head. "How am I looking at you?"

His blue eyes blazed as he returned her gaze. "Like I'm special." His voice softened, "Like I matter to you."

"Oh, Liam," she cupped his cheek, "I was thinking that I loved the way you looked at me."

He arched his brow, "And how is that?"

"Like I'm beautiful," she whispered. "Like I'm the only woman who's ever affected you this way. Like in a room full of other women, you'd only see me."
"All true," he stepped even closer, "you make me feel alive."

I'm gla..." was all she got out before her lips were busy in other ways, and it was quite some time before she got around filling in the blanks about Killian and Emma's journey to find each other.

Fort Williams Park

Portland, MA

Saturday Morning

Emma had checked out of her nondescript hotel, and as she stood waiting for her rental car she thought about the address on her driver's license. What would it hurt to drive by and just look...but in the end, she had opted to drive straight to Portland. That was where her memory was leading and her heart wanted her to follow.

The traffic out of Boston was relatively sparse and she was making good time, until she crossed into Maine and the number of cars increased substantially. She didn't have to wait long to figure out why, as in the distance she could see a multitude of large colorful balloons peppering the sky, telling her she had arrived at precisely on the wrong day. By the time she crossed into Portland's city limits, her nerves were frayed, and she wanted nothing more than a cup of hot chocolate. When she saw a sign for a food ahead, she only had to jockey for position with a couple of cars before she could pull off and park, taking a much needed timeout.

Stepping out of her car, Emma stared at the beautiful Victorian home, the sense of deja vu so strong, she was temporarily thrown off balance. Once her equilibrium had returned, she entered through the front door, but not into a diner as she had anticipated, but a gallery of sorts, one that sold everything from pottery to jewelry. Her initial thought was that she had gone in the wrong door, but then the smell of yeast tickled her olfactory system, and asking no questions, she followed her nose.

Her eyes lit up at an interior that was light and airy with booths along the wall, tables in the center and a counter equipped with tall stools in front of the kitchen. The sounds...the smells... all served to remind her of...but then she lost the memory...just as quickly as it had appeared.

"Have a seat anywhere, honey. I'll be right with you," a gum chewing waitress with bright pink hair said as she disappeared behind the counter.

Emma shrugged a shoulder and grabbed a small table in the corner, where she could both see out the large windows as well as observe what was happening in the room. Watching the waitress quickly move from table to table, she realized she wasn't feeling anxious at all. She had surprised herself, actually, as her emotions had been all over the place in the Seattle airport, even leaning toward panic for a minute...or two. But since arriving in Boston...she felt different. Would she have felt this way a week ago? No, she didn't think so, as until her dream lover had been a no-show, she had been content, but once he was gone...a fire burned inside of her to find him again...and not let him go. And as the time wore on and she was getting closer to her destination...something...something was happening in the air. It crackled with electricity, giving her goosebumps and creating chills that zipped up and down her spine.

Once she had ordered a cup of hot chocolate and a cinnamon bun, Emma pulled out her ever-present sketch book. There were several paintings hanging around the room and she would bet they were depictions of scenes around the area. Had she been to any of them before?

Her danish complete, she pushed aside the empty plate and roughly sketched the room, focusing on the many personas of the pink haired waitress, quickly moving from table to table. Flipping to a new
page, a new drawing started to take shape under the quick, almost unconscious movements of her pencils, but when she was done, she wasn't surprised. There was the cliff, the waves rolling against its base, the large rock waiting for her at the top, covering her blue beads.

"That's quite good," she heard from behind her.

Emma gave the woman a half smile. "Thank you."

"Do you only sketch?" she asked.

Did she? She didn't really know. As Kate, she took photographs, but as Emma Swan...what? Sketches and...what? Anything? "I...I'm not sure," she told the woman, hesitant to say too much.

The woman studied her carefully as if she was trying to make up her mind. Finally, she pulled a business card from her pocket and laid it on the table in front of Emma. "Let me know if you're ever interested in showing your work. Name's, Fox. Cleo Fox."

*Just like she did at Ariel's gallery,* she thought as she looked down at the card, "I'm K..." She almost said Kate, but that no longer felt right, so she covered her hesitation by clearing her throat and finishing with just Emma. However, when the woman didn't say anything, Emma glanced in her direction to find her studying the drawing of the cliff. When the woman asked her several questions about lead hardness and shading and she was able to answer, she was left to wonder where that information had been hiding.

"Enjoy Sonata cliff," Cleo told Emma as her help was requested behind the counter.

Emma gave her a confused look. "Sonata cliff?"

Cleo laughed, "Oh you must not be local." When Emma shook her head no, she disappeared for a brief time, returning with a brochure for Williams State Park. "It's on page 4." She grimaced when her name was called again, "Guess I'd better go put out the fire. Nice meeting you." And just like that, she was gone.

Emma watched her walk away, feeling slightly bemused by the entire encounter. Taking a last drink of her hot chocolate, she opened the brochure and read,

*Sonata Cliff, one of the higher peaks in the park, is well-known for its tale of reuniting lovers by luring them with music created by the wind through the trees.*

*Sonata Cliff,* she thought as she repacked her sketchbook and pencils, *will you sing to me?* Taking one last look around, she made her way back to the car, but unable to climb inside without taking a last look at the exterior of the diner. Old Victorian home, large porch, turrets, and familiar...almost as if it was on the tip of her tongue, but when she tried to spit it out...it was gone. With another longing sigh, she tossed her bag into the passenger seat, and continued her journey forward.

The closer she drove to the park, the more anxious she became. Wondering...hoping that the beads would still be there. Praying that, with only a gentle touch, she...would once again be whole. Wanting the answers that only those beads could give her. Needing the wind to sing, sending her to...him.

The park loomed ahead, seeming to beckon, welcoming her back from her absence. As soon she drove through the gate, there was an immediate change in the atmosphere; it came alive.

*We missed you,* the trees called to her.
Emma no longer felt as if she were steering the car. It was as if an invisible force had taken over and was guiding it to where she needed to be. Knowing that the feeling was too strong not to be real, Emma allowed the car to bring her along for the ride. Deeper and deeper, she drove into the park, wondering where she was going. Wondering if she was crazy, but the goosebumps covering her arms were from anticipation—not of fear.

She had been inside the park for no more than fifteen to twenty minutes when the wind whipped around the car, and she swore she could hear the tinkling of notes. The farther she drove, the louder the music, until—it was if a single ray of sun shone just for her—providing a guiding beacon.

The wind swirled around the car.

The notes were joined by voice, guiding her with a force stronger than simple gravity.

Emma followed the path between the trees, gliding to a stop when the view spread out before her, bringing with it such strong emotions that her throat clogged, and tears sprang to her eyes. Slowly, she turned off the engine, unbuckled her seatbelt and opened the door. As she stepped from the car, a wave of such pure love encompassed her that she had to grab hold of the door with one hand and the car with the other to keep from falling. Wave after wave crashed over and around, circling her with music and song, bringing her hope—bringing her home.

She shut the door and started walking...toward the edge of the cliff, one step...and then another. With every step, the wind lifted her hair, bringing forth words. The words rushed by, swirling in the wind, bringing with them the smell of the sea and the sand. The closer she came to the edge, the louder they were, pulling her nearer and nearer to a large rock that she just knew, had been waiting for her.

Emma circled the rock and bent over with every intention of pushing it aside...but, it had already been moved. She reached into the tiny space beneath, just large enough for her hand, but it was...empty. Without conscious thought, her fingers sifted through the sand, searching...seeking the beads, but...it was true...they were gone.

She had to ask herself if it was the right rock, but...it felt right. And while her memories were faulty about some things, just...not this memory. At least that didn't feel right, unless...it was a movie she had seen. Was that where the memory came from?

But...the feelings. Those were real. Those were hers.

And this place...there was magic.

She couldn't stop herself from reaching back into the space. Hope that she hadn't been wrong. That some of the magic she felt put them back, made them real. That the beads were...there.

But no...still empty.

A lone tear dropped, landing with a splash on the rock and the thought that perhaps she had been wrong once more flitted through her mind.

Until...

An invisible force pulled her up...

And her heart stopped.
It was him.

"Hook," she sighed, her voice nearly inaudible, so quiet a mere mortal shouldn't have heard...but then his quirked brow gave her pause.

Looking for these? His eyes seemed to say a she lifted his hand...the beads dangling from his fingers.

One step...then two, she moved toward the man, his eyes calling to her. The closer she drew, the clearer the words until she could hear, "when two souls are destined to meet..."

Three feet away, his heat radiated outward, surrounding her...warming her...chasing the loneliness away.

So close she could almost touch him...allowing her to hear, "I promise you that I will never forget these beads."

A half-step, and...she stopped...her eyes drawn to the beads before immediately being pulled back to his eyes...and the look in them caused her whole body to tremble...nearly taking her down...to her knees. Every thought she would have shared disappeared, and all she could hear were the words, our promise to each other and what they stand for echoed inside her head, each word louder than the one before. A quick inhalation was all there was time for as his arms closed around her and their lips were pulled together, as if each half had met its whole.

His gasp reverberated throughout her body, bringing with it more chills that climbed her spine, and as the wind swirled around them, bringing the music to a crescendo, it also brought...her. Her...Emma Swan, memory after memory crashed through her system, invading her mind, cleansing her soul.

Her life...Blue...Ruby...Ashley and Elsa.

And...her precious love...Killian, meeting, kissing and falling in love, Unforgettable...and...she pushed back, just enough to free her lips, "Killian," she whispered through her tears, "I remember."

He cupped her face, unwillingly to let her get too far away and whispered, "Welcome...home...Swan..." Each word followed by a kiss...her right eye, her left cheek...her nose. And then, as if unwilling to wait any longer, the distance between them disappeared and finally...after months of being lost, she had truly come home.

~fin

Well...do I deserve some love? Hit me with all your thoughts. The good, the bad, the high, the low... Only 2 more chapters let and possibly an epilogue...depending on the muse...
Chapter 25

Chapter Summary

In Chapter 24, Emma and Killian exchanged a TLK and all of her memories returned. See how the reunion continues.

Chapter Notes

There is a M rated version of this chapter on my FF.net site.

Close Your Eyes by Michael Buble can be found here.

Through the Eyes of Love by Melissa Manchester can be found here

Chapter 25

Fort Williams State Park
Portland, ME
Saturday Morning

As he had walked along the base of the cliff on his way to their spot, Killian couldn't believe how fast his heart was racing. Almost as if he were running a race instead of just walking in the sand, and then once he had climbed up to the top…fear returned that he had somehow…missed her. But with the wind bringing the soft music, he had pushed the rock aside and underneath the blue from the beads gleamed back at him…his fear dissolved into excitement. And excitement was a word that didn't even really explain how he was feeling…that couldn't be put into words.

He was feeling elation.

And wonder.

Bliss and pure euphoria.

He knew that Emma had arrived long before he ever saw the car, as the music he had been hearing, grew louder. The minute her car turned onto the lane, his heart had stuttered…and then took off galloping as he watched her step from the car. When she staggered, he knew that their hearts were still…after almost three months apart…in sync. That they both were being serenaded by the wind…and holding her in his arms was the only thing on his mind. He had wanted to run to her, and while he mind was screaming run…RUN…his feet wouldn't move. They were stuck in place…leaving him with no option but to watch…and all the while the beads in his hands almost vibrated with a longing for its owner...or was that him?

It had been as if his feet were pinned in place and then…she looked up, and his heart stopped. She was so beautiful and he couldn't believe that she was there; that she wasn't just a figment of his imagination. And then her mouth moved and when she called him Hook, and his breath stopped with
the knowledge that she didn't remember him, that he was someone she had created in his mind, and that hurt. But it was if her heart recognized him...drawing her closer and closer into his arms, bringing her home. When their lips touched he didn't care what others would say, there was magic at work. It was in the air...and between them and because of it...her memories returned.

He was powerless to describe how good she felt...how familiar she tasted, and the time apart melted away. He cupped her jaw, finding that he couldn't stop looking at her, cataloging the minor changes to her face...because of him. He wanted to say so many things to her and yet...every sentence that floated through his head seemed inadequate. All he wanted to do was look at her and love her, and with every kiss the thought of letting her go became more difficult, until...

"Emma, do you trust me?" he asked her hesitantly.

"Of course, I do." She covered his hands with hers. "Why would you even ask that?"

"I need you," he peppered her face with kisses, "need you now. Come with me?" As soon as she nodded her head, he took her hand, leading her to her car and helped her into the passenger seat. Running around to the driver's side, he hopped in, started it and they were on the road back to the cabin. He needed to assure himself that she was really...here.

The energy inside the car was intense and skittered along his flesh, bringing with it anticipation and an urgency unlike any other time they had made love. Were they going to make it? Was he?

The engine hadn't even completely stopped before he was out of the car, flinging open her door, pulling her out directly into his arms. The instant his lips touched hers, his body jerked, threatening to go off like a horny teenager, but...Emma...was back in his arms again. "Tell me if I'm too rough, Swan," he whispered when he managed to wrench his lips away briefly.

"Never," was what he thought he heard before she slammed her mouth once more against his. He didn't get another breath in as their lips mated, at first hungry then searching, relearning after all their time apart, testing for familiarity. Killian swallowed Emma's moan, shoving her lips farther apart with his own. His arms twisted around her body, jerking her more tightly against him, a shudder working its way through his system...desire...love...relief...happiness...all bubbled to the surface at once, forcing him to take a step back.

"Best not to give the beach goers too much of a show." Over her shoulder he could see people spread over the sand, brightly colored umbrellas and chairs behind them.

"No?" Her green eyes sparkled as she stepped back into his space, wrapping her arms around his neck. "Then what do you propose we do," her hot breath glided across his lips, "make sand castles," her lithe body arched against his, "or...?"

_The little minx_, he thought as he kissed her lightly and backed them up enough to shut the car door, turning them toward the cabin.

"Where are we?" She turned questioning eyes his direction.

Killian pushed the door open, and without giving her any time to look around, pulled her flush against his firm body. "Our place. Now, where was I?" was mumbled against her lips.

~~~CS~~~

Emma hadn't had any time to process everything that had transpired, but she found that now...she didn't care. All that mattered was him...and them...and what his lips were doing right now. Because,
blimey, the man could kiss and it was way better than any dream could have been.

He lifted his head, changing the angle and when his lips touched hers, her breathing sped up, her heartbeat raced out of control as his hand slid beneath her hair to cup the back of her neck. He held her closer as he parted her lips and began sipping from the hunger that raged through her.

The fire between them had always burned hotter than anything she could have imagined but this time, she realized she didn't just want him...no...she needed him. Her body, her heart, her mind came to life as never before, her flesh tingled in anticipation...and that place deep inside of her that longed for his touch. The pleasure of being in his arms was so intense a moan whispered between her lips each time he touched her.

So many thoughts at one time rushed through her brain that she wasn’t sure which one to follow first, until a raging storm began to rise inside of her and instinct and hunger took over.

Sliding her hands up his chest to his shoulders, she held them with desperate hunger as Killian's head tilted, and his lips slanted over hers again with a groan.

The sensation of his hands moving down her back to cup her rear and lift her into the cradle of his thighs stole her breath. His hands guided her knees to his hips as she found herself pressed against the door, the hard wedge of his body pressing firmly between her thighs.

His kisses were hungry, deep, his tongue flicking over hers, tasting her as she tasted him, a haze of heat and need enveloping them as his lips became harder, hungrier.

She couldn't remember it ever being like this between them before, almost as if they were trying to imprint the other onto their skin...their souls. The very essence of one entwining itself so tightly with the other, it was impossible to determine where one stopped...and the other began.

Her jacket fell around her hips as she felt him tugging at the shoulders of it, working to get to skin. Terrified of losing his kiss, she lowered her arms long enough for him to jerk it from her, allowing it to fall forgotten at their feet.

His groan vibrated against her lips as his fingers slid into his hair, feeling the heavy warmth against her flesh. As though in retaliation, his hand slipped under her shirt, reacquainting himself with the feel and weight of her body, sending a current of need straight to her core.

"Can't wait," he mumbled, pushing her pants down just enough to bare one leg, her body his to explore.

"Bloody hell, Emma." His fingers were a whisper stroke of pleasure against her silky thigh, reaching toward the soft material that covered her heat. Her muscles clenched at the sweeping sensation of static heat and aching want. Every nerve ending tingled with awareness and need.

Gripping his shoulders, Emma surrendered to him, to whatever he wanted, her body his to command...for now, anyway.

While his fingers tormented her body, pulling from her feelings that she didn't think she possessed, his other hand gently cupped her face, as if...she were a treasure...one meant to be savored.

"My love." His lips trailed across her cheek to gently suck her lobe between his lips.

He slipped his hand from her face, returning to cup the weight of her breast, causing her heart rate to ratchet up another notch and her body to squirm against his ministrations. The feel of his finger gripping her through the thin cotton of her bra with firm pressure brought a cry from her lips.
Arching into him, her body tightened more when the hand that was caressing her thigh tugged at her panties, until she helped him rid her of the offending material.

Pulling her leg back to his hip, his hands returned, stroking...caressing...gently priming her…pulling from her every ounce of pleasure she had to give.

"Please..." she whispered, moving against the probing caress. "Killian...feels...so…good."

He could feel her body seeking, searching, until finding the peak she arched back, crying hoarsely as pleasure only he could give her bathed her entire body. Waves of pleasure pounding at her, making her crazy for the feeling again...and again.

His lips settled at the bend of her neck and shoulder, the rasp of his scruff pulling a moan from her mouth. He kissed the flesh gently, taking a lazy, sensual taste of her as her breath caught in her chest.

She was only barely cognizant of his movements. The release of his jeans, her awareness that he had freed his hardness, and then, without warning their bodies were connected. The heavy, fierce penetration was almost a shock to her senses, a pleasure bordering on agony as the sensual storm pulled at her again.

~~~CS~~~

Killian was on fire, but bloody hell she felt good, and while it might kill him, he was determined to hold on until she was, once more, along for the ride. When her head fell forward against his shoulder, he used his torso to anchor her to the door, allowing him to get enough leverage so that every time he moved, the pleasure was so great it nearly blew the top of his head off.

Beads of sweat broke out across his forehead as his body established a rhythm, meeting her stroke for stroke, faster and faster their erotic dance moved.

Killian buried his hands in her hair, tugging her head up. "Emma, open your eyes," his beseeching cry torn from inside. "Look at me." He wanted that connection with her when they fell over the edge.

His hips were moving, almost uncontrollably and then...he felt it...that quiver of her body that pulled his over the edge. Over and over, his body jerked against hers, wringing everything he had from inside, pulling him outside his body and laying it all at her feet.

He hadn't been aware of the tears running down his face until she cupped his jaw, smoothing the wetness aside with her thumbs. Her eyes too, were wet...their connection too intense to stay bottled inside. "I love you, Emma." It didn't seem enough, just mere words but so...so...much more.

Her whispered, "I love you too...so very much," soothed his soul, allowing his heart to heal.

As his body softened, and his senses returned, he realized his muscles ached from his position of holding her against the door. Hoping his legs held them both, he cupped her arse and headed for the bedroom where round two would commence.

Liam's Apartment
New York, NY
Saturday Morning

A loud crash above his head brought Liam straight up in bed, causing him to wonder who the hell was in his house and what the hell they had broken. And then...he remembered, "Henry!" He tossed
the blanket aside, quickly making his way down the hall and up the stairs to the main level, encountering a rather surprised Henry standing in the center of his kitchen.

Ignoring the broken shards of pottery and glass, Liam reached out to help Henry up. "Blimey, lad, that's a lot of racket. Are you hurt?" he asked as he busily checked for bumps, bruises or blood in the places that were noticeable.

When Henry didn't immediately answer, Liam worried that perhaps he had hit his head. "Henry, answer me, lad. Are you alright?" When he leaned over to check on the boy, he discovered, he wasn't crying after all...but was giggling hysterically.

Henry looked up at him, his eyes dancing in merriment. "I'm fine, Uncle Liam. But I see your willy." Then he covered his mouth, resuming his giggling.

Liam frowned down at the lad, "My what?" as he hadn't quite heard what was said over the giggles.

"You know," he waved his hand toward Liam's midsection, "your di..." he got out before he was stopped by Liam's hand over his mouth, as Henry's hand gesture had clued him in to the fact that in his haste to check on the little firecracker, he had run upstairs without...anything.

"What's all the commotion about?" Elsa exclaimed, running into the room from the direction of the study where she'd been sleeping.

Liam looked up into her shocked face, which was checking out his...goods, and immediately let go of Henry's mouth, grabbed a kitchen towel and held it in front of his hips. His face afire, he met her blue-eyed gaze expecting to see humor but was met with something much different.

Interest.

Lust.

Excitement...as her pupils were huge and her cheeks sported identical red spots.

Liam arched a brow, but the attraction between them was so strong that his body decided to join the discussion, and when one had only a kitchen towel that covered barely half of him, that bloody poor timing. He was trying to think of something to break the spell, but he shouldn't have worried as they had a ten-year-old chaperone.

Henry pointed to the mess on the floor, "Oh, hi Elsa. The noise was me. Look what I did." He stood there with his hands on his hips, ostensibly waiting for her to comment.

While Elsa made appropriate noises about the mess on the kitchen floor, Liam relaxed slightly, thankful his body's response to her had too, and sidled around, hoping to make a quick get-a-way.

As he moved past her, her gaze nearly burned a hole in his chest, and only a quick glance in Henry's direction prevented him from pulling her flush against his naked...and needy body.

"Will you...?" he indicated Henry. "But you should slip on some sandals.

~~~CS~~~

"I will," she whispered, and then a little louder, "Henry, don't move. Let me get some sandals and I'll be right back." She turned around to head back to the study and got an eyeful of Liam's...very fine...ass. When he stopped, and turned back toward her, she realized her thoughts had presented themselves in a very breathy moan.
He stalked toward her, as if she were the prey he was hoping to devour, and just like the chicken she was, she ducked down the hall. The pad of his bare feet against the hardwood floors sent her heart rate skyrocketing as she watched him advance on her. He was within touching distance when, letting go of his towel, he presented her with a view that very nearly had her swallowing her tongue. With a flick of his wrist, the towel was tossed around her neck, and with a hand on each end, he drew her flush against his hot and very...hard body.

"Oh my heavens," she murmured before his lips met hers, in a kiss meant to scorch...singe...sear...char...ruin her for life...for any other man. Just when she had gathered her wits enough to put her arms around him, his lips retreated...and he took a step back, bringing the towel with him. He tossed her a wink, and with the precision of a soldier performed a perfect about face, flipped the towel over his shoulder and disappeared down the stairs, his perfectly, fine...ass flexing with every step.

Elsa sagged back against the wall, fanning herself furiously, until Henry's, "Elsa, hurry," reminded her of what she was supposed to be doing. Slipping on a pair of shorts and grabbing her sandals from where she had tossed them, she made her way back to the kitchen.

Henry hadn't taken kindly to having to stand still, but not wanting to risk cutting his bare feet, he had hopped up on the counter. Elsa found him where he had landed, sitting and swinging his legs, eating from the Captain Crunch box that they had bought on their way over yesterday afternoon.

"Henry, what happened?" she asked, listening with half an ear as she located the broom and dustpan and went about picking up the debris.

"Well," he started his story around a mouthful of cereal, "I woke up and was hungry and came looking for my Captain Crunch." He held his box aloft, "but when I reached for the box, there were dishes in front of it and somehow," he shrugged a shoulder, "they fell." He looked around where Elsa had picked up the tray, placing it back on the counter. "It made a really loud noise, that's for sure."

Else found herself wincing when he mentioned the things in front of his cereal, as she knew exactly what had been on that tray. The remnants of a late night talking session with one Liam Jones, gah—it had been intense, and putting everything away had been the last thing on their minds.

"No injuries?" She dumped the broken crystal and china in the garbage bin, then put away the broom.

"Nope. Want some?" He held the box out in her direction.

She wrinkled her nose. "No thanks. How about I make a bagel run while Liam's showering?" When that earned her a fist pump, she picked up her things from the study and left with plans to stop by her place, finish dressing and run to the bagel shop up the block. With a little luck when she returned, Liam would be dressed and she would be able to move beyond the image of his nude body that had been burned into her brain...and she assumed, it would be there...forever.

The Cabin
Portland, Maine
Saturday, Late Morning

Emma was barely aware of Killian moving, walking the distance from the front door to the bedroom, as he lowered her to the incredibly lush support of the mattress, his lips sliding to the curve of her jaw before he lowered himself to his knees.
Lifting from her, she watched as he hurriedly unbuttoned his shirt, tossing it aside. Emma's gaze was pulled away from his perfect chest as she stared around them in awe, taking in the incredibly romantic candlelit bedroom. The soft light gleamed off his shoulders and chest as he toed off his boots and pushed down his jeans, leaving his body open for her perusal.

She sat up, running her hands along his chest down around his waist to cup his tight butt cheeks, pulling him close to bury her face against his firm abdomen. She could feel him tremble in her arms, her nearness affecting him...just as his was affecting her.

Tilting her head back to look up at him, she could see so many emotions in his eyes, his blue eyes searing into her until she pushed up, wrapping her arms around his neck. She thrilled when Killian took the hint, angling his head to nudge her lips apart, opening her wider to him.

"Get this off," he growled, pulling her shirt over her head and tossing it over his shoulder to join his on the floor.

The rasp of his whiskers against her soft skin was so familiar...so comforting...so sensual that goosebumps broke out, scattering their way toward her core.

Killian had one arm around her waist and the other was working at the clasp of her bra while his lips painted a sensuous pattern around her face. She pushed the remaining pant leg off, and as her bra fell to join the rest of their clothes on the floor, pulled him down onto the bed with her. Pulled him so close that every single hard...inch of him covered every part of her. He surrounded her, so close, she felt cocooned by their love.

"Bloody hell, you feel good," he groaned, his voice vibrating against her skin, "better than I remembered." His hands were never still, soothing up and down her back, kneading the muscles of her shoulders, her back, her butt.

She was hardpressed to stay still, as every time his fingers moved they left a trail of fiery need behind. His lips lingered on her mouth, her neck, pushing her over onto her back where he had ready access.

"Mmm," he growled, lifting his head just enough for her to see his pupils blown wide with desire.

"Mmm," he repeated as he lowered his head to take full advantage of everything she was offering.

And take full advantage he did.

He lowered his head, his eyes locked with hers, while his lips and tongue painted picture after picture, no part of her body left untouched. The rasp of his mouth, traversing over her sensitive skin sent waves of exquisite pleasure rushing through her, shredding her control.

Heat suffused her entire body. It was burning through her thighs, pulsing in her core, her body on fire. Her hips moved against the hard wedge of his...sword...as it pressed against her, his lips and tongue drawing such wild responses from her it until her fingers tangled in his hair to hold him closer.

Each lick, each draw sensitized her further until the raking sensations that bathed her had her gasping with each surge. Only then did he move his hot mouth to another location and repeating the process all over again.

Arching to him, whimpering cries fell from her lips, need becoming a fiery demand, a sensual command she couldn't fight. His teeth raked against her as he moved back, his lips moving down her torso in a direction she wasn't sure she could handle, but, oh sheesh, was she going to try.
Killian moved down her body, licking, stroking, sucking every inch. God, he loved the smell of her and she tasted...just like heaven. He swiped his tongue along her abdomen, loving the way she responded. "I've dreamed of this...every single night," he moaned against her thighs, punctuating each word with a lick here, a kiss there.

"Killian," she begged.

Her breathing came fast and heavy. He smiled, staring up at her as he pleasured her again and again. Every muscle was taut. He had no words to describe the pleasure he felt at having her in his arms again. Whole...he was once again whole.

Unsure how much longer he would survive, he used her body movements as hints, telling him what and where she wanted his mouth, Killian alternated between licking, sucking and kissing, feeling her reaching until she screamed his name, her body pulsing over and over.

When she went limp and sighed, he pulled back, his lips moving up her body as he came over her. "I can't wait any longer," he muttered, burying in her neck as the crest of his hardness pressed its way inside of her.

She felt like heaven...hot...his, holding him tightly...she spread kisses across his face and neck.

Nuzzling her neck, he smiled against her skin, then eased back languidly. When she hummed with pleasure, he took that as a good sign, and then slowly...pressed back in. Her skin flushed rosy, her nails digging into his back just as he remembered.

"Faster, Killian," she pleaded grabbing handfuls of his ass, pushing his body closer to hers.

She arched up, taking him a fraction deeper. He brushed her hair from her face and fused their lips together, feeling her body tense, reaching out for that crest one more time.

Her nails sunk into his butt cheeks, his first indication that she was nearing the edge. With one more thrust, her body rippled around his, then exploded as sensation after sensation pounded through his system. His breathing was rough, agonized. Pleasure still coursed through his senses, rasping along his flesh.

Under him, she clung to him, her breathing slowing until with a tender kiss, he eased off her, tucking her close to his side. "I've missed you so...so...much, Swan."

Emma felt like she was in a dream, as just this morning she had woken up in a Boston hotel room...alone...and not knowing whom she was. And now...she had her life back. She pushed up, just enough to be able to look down into Killian's beautiful face, the overwhelming amount of love looking back at her was almost too much...but yet never too much.

"What?" A tiny frown formed between his brows, his concern for her, causing her heart to flutter.

"Is this real?" Her fingers drew circles in the hairs on his chest, causing his male nipples to harden, and tiny goosebumps to appear on his skin. "I want it to be real."

He cupped her face, his thumb gently brushing back and forth over her cheek, "I'm here, love. Feel me?" He turned toward her inserting a knee between her legs, while butterfly kisses landed randomly across her face. "I'm willing to show you how real," he thrust his pelvis against hers, "as often as you
"Round three already?" she asked as her hand traveled south taking hold of the...sword she had dreamed about rather vividly...was it just Sunday night?

Killian kissed her gently. "We were apart about a hundred days. That's a lot of missed opportunities." His hand joined his wandering lips making it rather difficult to stay focused.

"Well..." she pushed him over onto his back and straddled his torso, "seems I've some catching up to do."

Killian arched a brow, sending her a cheeky smile. "I like this position." Both hands came up to caress her breasts.

It felt so good to be able to touch and be touched at any time, that she allowed him free will for...just a bit before she pinned his arms down, "No touching. It's my turn."

"But Swan," he pouted.

She kissed his pout away. "You'll like this. I promise."

Killian flung his arms wide. "I'm yours. Do with me what you will."

"You won't regret it," she sent him a saucy wink. But where to start was the question. She began at the top of his head, reacquainting herself by touch...using her hands to gently trail her fingers through his hair, massaging his scalp as she went along.

She followed with smell...using her nose, she took deep breaths, breathing him in, reminding her of his unique scent.

And then came taste...her lips and her tongue feasted upon him, licking, nibbling, sucking and kissing.

Sight and hearing were not to be ignored...for as she reacquainted herself with each and...every part of his male body, she watched him. Cataloguing his facial expressions, his squirms, his looks of wonder, of ecstasy, of love. And with his groans and moans, ahhs, and bloody hells, she had him singing for quite some time.

### Liam's Apartment
### New York, NY
### Saturday Morning

Since his first meeting with Elsa, merely four weeks ago, Liam constantly found himself surprised by the man that he became when he was with her. He had been so used to living on the fringes of life that he had forgotten how enjoyable spending a quiet evening with friends could be, and having her by his side gave it a meaning that he had never known. And the past two days having Henry with them had added a dimension to his life that he had refused to think about since the debacle with Lily. In helping Killian, Emma and Henry find their happy ending, was it possible that there was one waiting out there for him?

He wanted to believe that and as he had walked away whistling, he couldn't remember the last time he had felt this...bloody amazing! Yesterday had been special, from the time with Henry to the dinner with friends and then after Henry was asleep, he and Elsa had just...talked. And after just a few hours of simple conversation, he felt that he knew her...and much better than he had ever known the woman he had married. How was it possible that he had been so stupid? Or so blind?
Blind? He certainly wasn't blind when it came to Elsa, as when she had walked into the kitchen this morning, he had read everything on her face. The interest, lust and excitement were evident in her eyes and, he was sure, mirrored in his own. But there was more between them...an awareness that he hadn't ever experienced before, and that kept him going back for more.  

*More...more...he couldn't imagine ever feeling like he had enough,* he thought, as he tossed aside the pitiful excuse for a towel and stepped into the shower. She stimulated his senses so completely that he was hard-pressed to define any one part that he wasn't irrevocably enamored with, and yet...they had never even gone out on a date.  

But they had kissed...and kissed. He groaned as he remembered how sweet she tasted and how she always responded to his touch. While she might not have shown up in the kitchen sans clothing as he, her clothing had been revealing. The thin t-shirt over her delectable and otherwise bare body did nothing to hide the arousal that was happening beneath, and being the git that he was, the picture of her twin peaks was burned in his brain. He grabbed the soap and, turning his face up to the water, created a lather, and the memory of the look on her face as he had slid past her fluttered through his mind.  

The hot water cascading across his shoulders and chest paled in comparison to the warmth he felt when her eyes did the very same thing. Trailing his soapy hands in the path of her eyes, he could easily imagine they were her hands. And now, just as then, his body came alive, and when he had dropped the towel...bloody hell, he had wanted more than just a kiss. Much more, he thought, but, blimey... what a kiss it had been. He flipped the water temperature cooler, attempting to refocus his carnal thoughts back to safer ones.  

Safer ones, such whether or not Killian had found Emma in Boston and how impressed he was that his younger brother was moving heaven and earth to get to her. Killian was one lucky SOB, having a woman who loved him and a child who was a little spitfire. He hoped that someday he was lucky enough to have someone in his life who made him a better man...*you do,* his subconscious reminded him.  

Yes, he did, he thought as the image of her in that thin t-shirt once again presented itself to the front of his mind. The hem barely skirting the top of her thighs. The v-neck low and wide enough to reveal the swell of her breasts. And then her body had hardened just like...his. Bloody hell...his heart spiked, as he closed his eyes and let his hands roam free.  

**The Cabin**  
**Portland, Maine**  
**Saturday, Afternoon**  

"Oh, my gawd, Killian, do that again," Emma moaned, as he stroked over the *spot* that was giving his lady such pleasure.  

"Like that, do you, Swan?" He pulled her thigh farther over his, opening her more to his exploring hand and doubled his efforts to bring her with him over the edge.  

"Every time you stroke me there, I see stars." She dug her fingers into his flank, holding on as his pace increased.  

With a few well-placed flicks, Emma's body detonated around his, gripping him like a second skin, wringing everything from him that he had to give. Wrapping his arm around her, he pulled her tighter against his chest, burying his face in her hair. He had missed this, he realized, not just loving her, but the tender moments when the loving was over. He felt his body drifting toward sleep, only to be startled by a loud rumble from the vicinity of her stomach. A laugh burst forth before he could stop it,
"Hungry?"

"Yes," she clasped her hand over his, holding them against her stomach, "starving. What time is it, anyway?"

Killian rolled over and reached for his phone. "3:00."

"P.M.?" she asked incredulously. "We've been here for the better part of four hours?"

"Mmm. It's been heavenly." He nuzzled the back of her neck.

"Killian, I'm hungry," she whined, rolling over in his arms, "and this bed smells like sex." Her smile was equal parts sweet and sexy, a siren pulling him closer with every breath.

"Shall I order pizza?" He kissed her nose. "And what did you expect?" he asked, reacquainting himself with the tiny freckles that faintly covered her skin.

"You know me so well." She gently pushed him. "Pizza now, more kisses later."

He gave a tender smile, before climbing out of bed and pulling on a pair of gym shorts. Grabbing an old t-shirt from a drawer, he tossed it to her and went to order the food. While on the phone, he heard the old pipes groan and would have loved to join her in the shower but opted instead for changing the sheets.

He was in the kitchen locating plates, napkins and something for them to drink when he felt her arms wrap around his midsection. "Want to shower and let me wait for the pizza?"

Since he could feel her unfettered breasts pressing into his back, he assumed she was still wearing only his shirt. "And allow the pizza man to see you like," he turned around, pulling her close, "this? Not just no, but oh hell no."

"What's wrong with the way I'm dressed?" she flirted, pressing her palms flat against his pecs.

Killian grinned wolfishly. "Oh baby, nothing." He lifted the hem of the shirt enough to palm her butt cheeks, pushing her pelvis closer to his...which seemed to have recovered from their earlier escapades. As he attempted to take the flirtation deeper, the knock on the door deflated him in more ways than one, and after retrieving the pizza, they sat at the kitchen table to eat.

~~~CS~~~

While they ate, by tacit agreement, their conversation was innocuous...never touching on anything too heavy. That the time was coming to talk was understood, but to get them both to the right frame of mind was where they were heading.

When the last bite was completed, Emma sent Killian off to shower while she cleaned up the kitchen; washing the plates, putting the items that could be recycled in the appropriate places and wiping down the counters. And once all was complete, she took her bottle of water and left the room.

Killian had told her while they ate that he bought the cabin in June, and while he and Henry had stayed in it for several weeks, it still held the taste of the past owners. Made of weathered wood with a steep roof and a large front porch, its back built into a cliff and its front looking out at the beach, it had survived many years and many seasons. The front room was essentially one large room with the living area on one side, the kitchen on the other and the master bedroom with its own bathroom off the back. A circular staircase led up to a second floor that was separated into two bedrooms, a common area and a small bath.
Wandering into one of the rooms upstairs, she knew immediately it was the one that Henry had claimed as his own. There was his old ball cap lying on the bed, a pair of flip flops next to it and the bucket and shovel she had bought him during one of their beach outings in a corner. Opening a few drawers in the chest, she found those empty and the top held only a few seashells. No books, balls or Legos wasn't typical Henry, making her wonder if perhaps he had left his things in the closet. She opened it, expecting to at least see a forgotten dirty shirt, or a few pieces of a puzzle or Lego but no, the closet was bare except for a few lone hangers and in the floor of it there was...a secret hiding space, just like the one in her closet growing up in the home.

"What mysteries have you hidden, little man?" she murmured, bending down to reach inside and pull out nothing but a...book. When she turned it over and read Grimm's Complete Fairy Tales, she had to swallow back the emotions that threatened to overtake her.

Flipping through the pages, her eyes were too watery to see anything, but she had read every story in it so many times that she knew them all by heart. Each story special to her in its own way, and lodged in between the pages where Snow White started was...a picture. A picture of her...and Killian and Henry, and on the back in his messy boyish scrawl, he had written, Our family.

~~~CS~~~

Killian found Emma sitting on the floor, in Henry's closet clutching a book and a picture to her chest, her shoulders shaking as great sobs shook her body. He tenderly took them from her, pulling her into his arms getting his first view of what had started the waterworks. "Would you like to talk to him?"

She turned her tear-stained face to him, a smile blooming on it like one he hadn't seen in a while. "Can we?"

"Of course, love." He stood, pulling her to her feet. "Go wash your face and I'll meet you downstairs.

After she skipped off into Henry's bathroom, he looked at the title of the book. It was Emma's, he knew, and the last time he had seen it had been at the apartment. How it had gotten here was a mystery, but one solved later. Leaving it on the shelf, he went to get his phone to contact Liam.

As the phone rang, he found he was curious about how Liam would sound. Would his voice be quiet, tortured like it had been Thursday? Would it be haughty, stiff like it had been most of the last five to six years? Or would it be the Liam he remembered, confident...cool...serious?

"'Lo," The laughter in Liam's voice surprising him speechless for a minute. "Killian? Everything alright?"

His second question broke through Killian's bewilderment, enough for him to form a coherent question, "You sound happy. What did I interrupt?"

"Oh, not much," Liam sobered. "I'm just watching Henry and Elsa play this game called Twister. But...never mind us. Did you find Emma in Boston?"

"No-"Killian started.

"-Oh, Killian, I'm sorry," Liam interrupted.

"Bugger all, Liam," Killian exclaimed, "stop being a wanker and listen." Liam's chuckle was another surprise, but his silence gave Killian the floor.

"My Emma's back, Liam," he said quietly.
"Oh Killian," Liam congratulated him, "you don't know how happy that makes me...wait a second. You said 'your Emma.' She remembers?"

"Aye."

"But how? Did it just come back all at once?"

They hadn't talked about it yet, but there had been magic on that cliff. "I kissed her," he stated matter-of-factly.

"Excuse me," Liam laughed, "did you just say you kissed her?"

"Aye. That's what happened."

"Sounds like your kissing has improved, little brother."

Killian laughed. "Wanker," he repeated, feeling light-hearted and so...happy, as did Liam. "You sound lighthearted, brother. I'm pleased to hear that."

"I'm getting..." was all he got out before his phone was snatched away.

"Did you find her? Where are you? When are you coming home?" all said breathlessly by a laughing Henry.

"Calm down, Henry." Killian shook his head at the exuberance in his voice. Emma walked in looking much better with the tears washed away…and walked right into his arms.

"Sorry, Killian. Can I talk to Emma?" he asked, this time with a bit more patience.

"How about we Facetime?"

"Alright! Bye."

"I guess Henry's excited," he told Emma as he pushed the button to call Liam's phone again. It was answered immediately and he handed it to Emma and let her and Henry catch up.

~~~CS~~~

It was so good to talk to Henry that Emma's face hurt from smiling. She did find it interesting that Elsa was with him and Liam and thought there might be more to that story, but Henry moved off to another topic, never sticking to one subject for long. When he ran out of things to say and started running all over the place, showing Uncle Liam's treasures, she was reminded of the sketches she had drawn with his many faces. It seemed that perhaps Henry had uncovered a few more.

"Bye, Emma. I've got to go to the bathroom. I'll see you tomorrow." And then the phone went blank.

"Well, I guess he was done," she handed the phone back to Killian, "thank you." Leaning in, she kissed him. "I saw a box of hot chocolate in the kitchen, want some?"

"No, love, go ahead. I'm just going to call Liam back."

She squinted, trying to read his mind, before kissing him one more time and heading to the kitchen.

~~~CS~~~

Killian watched her leave the room, and not wanting her to hear, went out onto the patio and pushed
the button to dial his brother. "Liam, I need a favor. Here's what I want you to do..."

~~~CS~~~

As Emma moved around the kitchen, her thoughts were on the impending talk with Killian. It was time. They needed to talk through their mistakes and move forward together, which was something she had learned from Doctor Blanchard. The question, it seemed, was if Killian felt it was time too.

"When I say always
I mean forever
I trust tomorrow as much as today
I'm not afraid to say, I love you,
And I promise you, I'll never say goodbye"

She sang as she filled her mug with hot water, settling for some tiny marshmallows in lieu of whipped cream. She had just picked up the mug to take a drink when she saw Killian standing just inside the kitchen, an odd expression on his face. "That's not usually the look you give me when I sing." The hot chocolate was still steaming, but she took a sip anyway to cover the awkward silence.

Killian shook his head. "Sorry, love...it's that song. How do you know that song?"

Emma tilted her head slightly, studying the perplexed look on his face, "You know," she finally answered and, taking his hand, led them to the overstuffed sofa she had seen upstairs. After a few more sips, the cup went on the table and she sat waiting for Killian to say something.

"You heard it?" She nodded her head.

"You were really there?" She nodded again.

"But how can that be?" he asked quietly. "How can two people share a dream?" He swiped his hand over his face, then looked back up at her. "Did you remember the dream or have any...marks?"

Emma felt her face heat up. "I remembered some of it...and well..." she pulled the neck of her shirt aside showing him the yellow remnants of her love bite, "that and...I was a bit sore..." she glanced down, "kind of like now." Her eyes grew wide as she teased him, leaning forward for another kiss when his ears turned red with embarrassment.

"Sorry?" He arched a brow.

"Oh Killian, don't be sorry. I thoroughly enjoy being ravished by you." She took another drink of her hot chocolate, feeling like she needed to keep her hands busy.

"What did Doctor Blanchard say?" Her head popped up at the question. "You did ask her about it, right?"

"I shared parts of the dream with her, but...she just said that some things can't be explained. And I," she shrugged her shoulder, "just decided it didn't matter. That you had been with me ever since I woke not knowing who I was, and that perhaps...I needed you more that night." Her voice trailed off hoping he didn't think her too loco.

"She told me I was with you," he admitted, "showed me some of your drawings even. I'm glad that at least a small part of me, at least, was with you." He dropped his gaze, reluctant to meet hers.

Emma tilted his chin up, forcing him to look at her. "Killian, you can't blame yourself for everything." When he opened his mouth to say something, she moved her finger over his lips, "And
not Liam, either," she reiterated. "We all need to take responsibility for our own actions."

He wrapped his fingers around her wrist, lowering her hand. "But if I hadn't made you go with me, you wouldn't have been hurt. And that you were hurt," his voice softened and tears filled his eyes, "tears me apart."

Emma wasn't sure what to say to take away some of Killian's pain, but she took a deep breath and tried to channel Doctor Blanchard. "Doctor Blanchard and I spoke a great deal about why I lost my memory and she seemed to think perhaps it was fear." The startled look on his face had her quickly assuring him, "No, not of you...or even of loving you." She took another deep breath before continuing, "I think in the hospital I was worried about having to depend on others too much and then...Liam gave me the opportunity and...even with the way it was offered, initially... I felt independent. Like I had made the right decision to take care of me. But," her gaze moved to stare out the window as she relived waking up in that hospital, "when I woke up, I was afraid of being without you, and inside my dreams you were waiting."

"And I," he picked up the topic, "heard something that I thought meant you had died...and ran inside myself where I knew you would be waiting," he finished.

"I think," Emma picked up his hand and scooted into the circle of his arms, "I like Doctor's Blanchard's advice. She says that we are each responsible for ourselves. That means you didn't make me go with you, and Liam didn't make me go to Seattle. That is on me. But, because we love each other, we talk..."

"...and listen to each other," he finished.

"Exactly." She sniffed, sending Killian a watery smile that became even bigger when he bestowed a rather hot kiss on her lips. Placing her finger over his, she sent him a playful grin. "Finish talking and then we can get back to the good stuff."

Killian stuck his bottom lip out in a cute pout but then finally started talking. He told her about his injuries and how helpless he felt when Liam left to go find her, but then when he admitted that he had essentially willed himself into a coma, she had to bite her lip to keep from becoming a blubbering mess. The thought that she held that much power over someone was both terrifying and exhilarating at the same time. His feelings for her humbled her in ways she had never experienced before, yet somehow, she felt that their ordeal had made them stronger.

When he returned to Boston and had gone back to the apartment on what should have been their graduation day, it sounded painful...but in all the pain there had been hope, too. Henry had given him hope that somehow the pain would one day become bearable. Gave him something to hold onto while he got stronger, just as she held on to his eyes...her dream lover...until she got stronger.

Liam's behavior leading up to her meeting with him in May and his responses since then were interesting. It was as if he had undergone a complete transformation, not just over the summer but now that he was spending time with Henry, he was still changing. "Killian," she interrupted, "what happened when Liam showed up?"

"I punched him," he shrugged. "Thought he deserved it."

She inclined her head in agreement that Liam hadn't acted in a chivalrous manner in the beginning, but in the end, he had proven to be someone that Killian...and Henry...and even she could count on. The fact that he had changed seemed to be the real story, and based on the snippet of conversation she heard when she had walked into the room, it sounded like he had changed quite a bit.
"Tell me about Elsa and Liam," she asked, curious about Killian's feelings.

He glanced at her, his brow arched, causing her to shrug. "Sorry, it's just some things that Henry said."

"I don't know much," he ran a hand through his hair, "but I think she's good for him. He told me she started his heart beating again."

"Really? Mmm." She was curious about the man who could interest her friend, Elsa. Many men had tried and failed. "Seems there are quite a few interesting stories I'm coming home to," she muttered, hoping it didn't take her too long to catch up with her friends.

Emma knew there were many pieces of information that she had missed, but so much had happened that she wasn't sure where to start. "What about Robin and Regina?" she asked suddenly, realizing she had no clue how Robin had fared during the accident.

He gave her a lop-sided grin. "They're married and I feel bloody awful that I missed the wedding."

"Killian..." she warned.

He held his hand up. "I know." He cupped her face. "You know, Emma, this summer was the lowest that I have ever felt, but now...that it's over, I feel...stronger."

Emma launched herself into his arms and kissed him. "So do I, Killian. So do I," she repeated, stopping in between her words to scatter kisses across his face.

~~~CS~~~

Killian found it very cathartic to finally share his story with Emma. It was interesting hearing her questions, especially those that centered around his relationship with Liam, as well as Liam's relationship with Elsa. "Emma, you're really not mad at Liam?" He was having a hard time believing that she had no ill will against his brother at all. He still found himself fighting...something...

"No, Killian," she interrupted his musing, "I want us all to be a family. Think that's possible?"

"Aye, Swan," he adjusted her across his lap and leaned his cheek against her head, "I believe it's not only possible, but probable...plus, Henry seems to like him."

"That's nice," she said around a huge yawn. "How did you find me? You never said."

Killian told her the story about meeting with Doctor Blanchard, finding her drawing and barely missing her at the airport.

"You know, when I realized where I lost the drawing, I...almost didn't get on that plane. But then I asked what I wanted and," she turned toward him, "I wanted home. And that's you...you are my home. I just wish..."

He didn't say anything, just let her work out what she was thinking, knowing she would share when she had organized it in her head. She worked over her bottom lip, which was quite distracting, as it was becoming red and plump and he was tempted to lean in and take a...bite.

"I wish," she bit her lip again, "I could let Doctor Blanchard know that I'm okay," she finally blurted out.

Well, bloody hell, he thought. "If I could make this happen," he scooted forward on the sofa and
moved her around so she was straddling his legs, "what would you do for me?"

A contemplative look crossed her face. "Well," she scooted closer to him, "what would you like?"

He didn't need anything, as he had everything he could need.

He didn't want anything, except...leaning in he whispered a suggestion in her ear that involved a little something he had impulsively purchased in the men's room at the airport. At his suggestion, her eyes flared wide, "Really?"

"Please."

Emma gave him a sexy smile and peeled her t-shirt over her head, tossing it over his shoulder. "I'll call her later. Take me to bed."

He wasn't stupid and didn't have to be asked twice. Standing up, he tossed her over his shoulder, and made haste to their bedroom, where it was several hours before Emma was ready to make the phone call.

Liam's Apartment
New York, New York
Saturday Afternoon

When Liam stepped out onto the balcony to speak with Killian, Elsa initially was worried. But a quick peek out the window told her there was nothing to be concerned about, as he was all smiles and happy hand gestures. It made her heart thrill to see him so carefree and it seemed like the rift between the brothers was on its way to truly being mended. And now that Emma was back...she felt like dancing!

It was obvious that there would be no more Twister, so after putting it away, and Henry was still bouncing around, she pulled out her phone, and using one of Liam's speakers turned on Meghan Trainor's Lips Are Movin. "Henry, let's dance." They bopped around the room, sometimes together, sometimes apart, but it felt good to be so carefree. She still tried to keep an eye on Liam and even danced by the patio doors several times. The look on his face just served to make her even happier and spur on the dancing session. And when she saw how excited Henry was with the activity, she decided that looking a little foolish in front of Liam was well worth it.

One song morphed into another and when Henry showed no signs of slowing, she kept dancing. After the fifth or sixth song finished, Beat It by Michael Jackson started, and while he wasn't an artist she listened to a lot, she liked this song. It had rhythm and just made her feet want to move...and Henry too, apparently, as he had dropped to the floor and was moving his body in a variety of contortions that she supposed could be construed as break dancing, but she wasn't really sure.

His movements quickly became so comical, she finally had to stop...and just watch. "I hope he doesn't hurt himself," she muttered as he stood up, and then dropped to the floor to repeat the process all over again.

When a warm hand settled at her waist, she had to clench her fists to keep from melting right there at his feet. "What does he think he is doing?" Liam's hot breath whispered in her ear.

"Dancing?" She grinned as a little shiver worked its way through her body. "I think...anyway.

Once the song ended and a slower song started, Henry spread out on the floor, his breath coming hard and fast. "That was hard work. Can you dance like that Uncle Liam?"
Elsa saw a tiny wince cross Liam's face before he sent Henry a grin and just shook his head. "Henry, my lad, I believe Killian and I have much to teach you about females. Dancing, for example," he handed her phone over and she watched his thumb glide along the screen as he looked for the right song, "is not something that should be done quickly. When a man dances with his lady, he wants to savor holding her in his arms."

*His lady?* Elsa thought, *oh be still my heart,* was the last thing her mind was able to settle on as he took her hand, pulling her flush against his body. As Michael Buble crooned the romantic words to *Close Your Eyes,* Elsa almost forgot to breathe as Liam held her close, making her wish there was a reason for his song choice.

"Relax, sweet Elsa, I've got you," he whispered.

"Sorry," she whispered, allowing him to pull her even closer. "I wouldn't have pegged you for a Buble man."

He didn't say anything as the words, *Think you're one of a kind. Thank God you're mine,* floated from speaker, moving back far enough for her to see his face. "I heard it on that station Colleen listens to all the time, and..." the heat from his blue eyes burned clear to her toes, "it reminded me of you," he finished quietly.

His lips were so close that all she had to do was move her head...just a little bit...and she would once again have the pleasure of tasting him. She licked her own lips slowly, watching his eyes flair, but just as she inched forward...so close that his breath mingled with hers, he turned their bodies, giving her a view of something just as effective as a glass of cold water being thrown at them. "Henry," she groaned, inclining her head in his direction.

When Liam didn't release her, just moved them around so she could see him, her heart flipped and she leaned her forehead against his chest. His chuckle was low, and gaw so sexy her mind almost went straight to the gutter, but the fact that he was talking to Henry gave her strength. "Henry," she heard him say, "I'm sure in a few years you will change your mind."

She could hear Henry making gagging sounds behind her back before stating he was going for a snack. "Maybe I should help," she started to step out of his arms.

"He'll let us know if he needs us." He twirled her around a couple of times. "Stay...please."

She would have stayed anyway, but when his voice broke on the please, she was lost. She didn't know what it was about him that called to her so strongly...but he did...and the more they were together, the harder she fell. "Liam..."

~~~CS~~~

He hadn't lied when he told her the song made him think of her, because it did. It was as if he had sat down and penned the lyrics himself, so perfectly did they fit how he felt. And while there were still moments when he wasn't sure that he deserved having her in his life, he already knew it was too late. She was his...and he was hers.

His name but a whisper on her lips sent his heart rate skyrocketing and hardened his body more than he was comfortable with when Henry was close by. Leaning his cheek against hers, he promised himself just a little longer and then...

*It's your beauty that betrays you*

*Your smile gives you away*
Cause you're made of strength and mercy
And my soul is yours to save
I know this much is true
When my world was dark and blue
I know the only one who rescued me was you.

"You did, you know?" Liam kept his jaw pressed against her cheek, not sure he was ready for her to see everything he was feeling.

"I did what?" she asked just as quietly.

"Rescued me."

Her head moved so she was looking up into his face. "I thought Emma rescued you?"

One side of his mouth lifted at her revealing comment, confirming that she definitely hadn't been sleeping when he was talking to Killian. "Emma and Killian helped mend my heart that had been shattered into a thousand pieces, but you, Sweet Elsa," he stopped moving and cupped her jaw, tilting her face to his, "started my heart beating again. And for that...I thank you." Her lips proved too tempting and he tried to just give her a little peck...but one taste wasn't enough and he sank back in figuring he had at least as long until the song was over to enjoy the feel of her mouth beneath his.

~~~CS~~~

After Henry's snack, Liam asked Elsa to entertain the lad while he took care of Killian's request, and once everything was arranged, he offered to buy pizza. A trip to *Numero 28 Pizzeria* served to fill their stomachs and keep his mind from imagining several different scenarios involving him, Elsa and quite a few of the rooms in his apartment. But once the meal was over and he didn't think Henry would take too kindly to bedtime so early, he had to come up with another way to tire the lad out.

As luck would have it there was a nice little park not far from his apartment and, after a quick stop where he grabbed a frisbee and an old blanket, he led them to the park. With Elsa on one side and Henry on the other, they walked through the gate and he couldn't help but feel wistful that everything wasn't real. Elsa as his...partner, and a child on the other, a lad...or a lass, he wouldn't care.

"I think I'll go sit under that tree...unless you need me?" She looked at him expectantly, waiting for his answer, which somehow or other he had ended up in that proverbial rock and hard place scenario with her and wasn't sure how to get out of it. Their eyes were locked in a dual of such great epic heat that he felt if he didn't look away he might burn and yet...he couldn't look away. Henry's shout broke the spell and as he ran over to a jungle gym, Elsa smiled and rolled her eyes, "I'll be okay. I'm just a little warm." Her face was flushed, he noted, but nothing else was said as she took the blanket and moved toward the large tree taking up one corner of the park.

Liam snagged her hand, stopping her before she got very far. "You sure?"

She gave him a gentle frown. "I'm sure. Even though the sun is almost down, you know how I burn." And he was drawn right back to Key West and her in that bikini and that kiss.

"Aye, I remember." And he did too...red hot and skimpy.

"Come on, Uncle Liam."

Liam watched Elsa walk away, that gentle sway to her hips making his mouth practically drool. "Okay, Henry, lead the way." Liam smiled and followed Henry as he led him from the jungle gym to swings, from the merry-go-round to the slide. They hadn't been at the park very long before Henry
made some friends who involved him in some game and Liam made his way over where Elsa was sitting. "Room for another?" He couldn't read her expression behind the sunglasses, but when her lips turned up and she scooted over, he didn't waste any time.

His knees popped as he lowered to the ground, earning him a snicker from his blanket partner. "You too, will be old someday." But still beautiful, he couldn't help but think.

He had barely made it down onto the hard ground when she placed her hand on his arm. "Liam, what did Killian say about Emma?" she asked softly.

He glanced at her, noting she had pulled off her sunglasses, and the way she was looking at him made him feel like he wanted to beat on his chest. Here sitting next to him was this beautiful, smart, kind and caring individual, and she cared what he...had to say. "How did I get so lucky?" he murmured softly, unable to look away from her.

Her lips tilted, showing off the tips of her pearly white teeth, "About?" Her eyes crinkled a little at the corners as the late day sun brought out the platinum highlights in her hair.

Maintaining her gaze as long as possible, he leaned toward her ear, nuzzling the hair aside to whisper, "I think you know."

"I could say the same thing." She turned his direction, her nose brushing against his scruff, and unable to resist, he kissed her. It was too brief…but might help tide him over for a while longer.

A shout across the way pulled his attention back to Henry, but once he ascertained that he was fine, he gave his attention back to Elsa. "What was the question?"

"Killian," she laughed, "what did he say about Emma?"

Her smile when he told her was brighter than the sun…and made him feel ten feet tall.

Group Home
Boston, MA
Saturday Early Evening

As soon as Blue hung up the phone after speaking with Liam Jones, she knew the day of reckoning was upon her and so…she did what every female does when they want to avoid...she cleaned. But no matter which room she ran to, it didn't change the fact that for months she kept her suspicions and findings to herself, allowing many to believe that Emma was dead. And now, while they were going to be ecstatic, they were going to be peeved. And for that, she didn't blame them one bit.

Several hours later she was finishing up in the powder room and, finally feeling calm enough, she let herself wonder about her caller. He was a mystery, as, last fall according to Emma, there had been some sort of discord between him and Killian, and yet...the man on the telephone was very congenial. And at Christmas when she asked Killian about him, he had been uncomfortable...but was it the question or the answer he gave, that made him that way? It had been unfortunate that Neal's call about Henry had come just then, as it would have been nice to find out more information, but perhaps…tomorrow. With everyone under her roof, it wouldn't hurt to ask...would it?

She decided that instead of telling her story one at a time, she would get it over all at once. A few phone calls later, while she was waiting, she made a cup of tea to calm her nerves, and then paced…and tried to come up with the best way to explain her decisions.

~~~CS~~~
Ashley hung up the phone and as if in a trance, sat Alex in her high-chair and gave her a handful of cheerios and a cup of juice. A split-second decision had her calling Sean's father to come watch the baby while she drove to the Home to see what was going on. Sister Blue's voice was worrisome, and after the loss this summer, she wasn't sure she could take any more bad news.

Walking into the House, Ashley was surprised when none of the children greeted, her but pushed the thought aside and quickly hurried to Blue's office. Blue was seated behind her desk, almost as if she was using it as a shield, and on the other side...Green...Astrid...Johanna, and...Marion. She frowned at the group. "What's going on, Blue? You're scaring me," she finally got out, but had to hold on to the door facing to keep her knees from giving out.

Blue gave her a strained smile. "Ashley, come in. I have some news."

Blue's heart problems had worsened immediately ran through her mind, but on trembling legs she made her way into the office, sitting next to Marion on the small sofa.

~~~CS~~~

Blue looked at each of women sitting before her and decided to just get it over with. Taking a deep breath, she blurted, "Emma's alive and Killian's bringing her here tomorrow, so we need to plan a party," all in one breath.

No one said anything for a few seconds and then everyone started talking at once. "Hold on, hold on." She held her hand up trying to calm everyone down, and for just split-second she was happy Ruby wasn't sitting in front of her. "And no, before you ask, I haven't known all along, just a few weeks-"

"-a few weeks?!" Ashley interrupted, "How?" was all Blue let her get out.

"Just listen," she pleaded with them, making a point to add a little emphasis for Ashley. "You might not agree with my choices, but...for the most part they were my choices."

Once Ashley gave a little nod and relaxed, Blue took a deep breath and began, "When Elsa gave me the news about Emma," that thought still caused her to shake, but knowing the outcome gave her strength to continue, "I needed information. You know that is just how I am. Not willing to take anything at face value, but once Killian and Henry were gone, it was just a matter of being a detective."

She continued on with her story of how she had searched for the accident, but what she didn't tell them was about all the times that she had found out information, only for it to be a dead end. Of all the sleep she lost while she was searching and how every time her leads didn't go anywhere, she cried. That by the time she finally found out where Emma had been hospitalized, it was in the middle of the night and she had cried then, but this time tears of relief. Of how she had lain awake each night wondering what she was doing wrong or how she could have worked faster.

Sister Green blew her nose loudly. "But why didn't you ask for our help, Blue? We would gladly have helped you."

"Why hadn't she?" I think...partly I didn't want to get your hopes up, because until I knew something for sure...I was afraid you would think I was just a crazy old woman."

Johanna shook her head, making a 'tsking' sound with her tongue, "You might have been shady, Sister Blue, but we would never have thought you were crazy. We love Emma, too."

"Well, I am sorry, but...I did what I thought was best at the time."
"Where has Emma been and why didn't she contact us?" Ashley asked with a frown. "That makes no sense to me."

"Emma had amnesia," she finally told them the whole truth as well as rest of the story. Again, though, she held back the many emotions that she had experienced this month. To know that one of her girls needed her, and didn't even remember who she was, and for it to be Emma had been gut-wrenching. She loved all the children of the Home, but Emma had been hours old when she found her, and being the one to feed her and care for her from infancy gave them a bond that was unique. And one that could never be broken.

"And today, I finally got the news I've been waiting for...Killian found her, and she remembers and tomorrow...at long last, she will be here with us."

"So...you wanted to tell us after you found Emma in Seattle?" Astrid asked curiously, and Blue nodded her head in agreement. "But Emma's doctor wanted you to wait?".

"Yes. Emma's doctor asked that I keep it quiet," she agreed.

But then they all started talking at once, asking the same questions over and over until she was getting a headache, and they still needed to plan for the party. When she couldn't handle it any longer, she put her fingers in her mouth and whistled. That got their attention.

"I'm sorry and I will let you talk to Emma's doctor, but I think we are forgetting the most important thing here. and that is that our Emma is alive and healthy and coming home, and we," she looked at each of the women individually, "have a party to plan. Who's with me?"

"Just one more question," Marion asked quietly. "How did she get back her memory?"

Sister Blue thought about her conversation with the brother, as she had asked the same thing. "Seems, Killian kissed her...and they returned," she shared happily.

"A true love's kiss," Ashley sighed, "just like in her fairytales. How wonderful."

"Well," Blue stated practically, "I'm not sure there's such a thing as a true love's kiss, but I do agree that love is the most powerful magic of all."

This time when everyone started talking at once, Blue was okay with it and, for Emma, they worked together.

**Fort Williams State Park**  
**Portland, ME**  
**Sunday Mid-Morning**

Emma's ring was still in his pocket almost twenty-four hours later, but the perfect opportunity to slide it back on her finger just hadn't happened. He wanted it to be special. Different. Something they could tell their children...and grandchildren someday. But even as he tossed their bags in the back and rounded the car to get in, he was still in a quandary.

He smiled at Emma as he hopped in, his heart much lighter than the last time he had driven away from the cabin. "Ready to go, love?"

"I am...but," she nibbled on her bottom lip, a sure sign that she was worrying over something.

Killian kissed the back of her hand, then rested it, entwined with his, on his thigh as he drove off the beach lane. "Talk to me," he said quietly.
"You don't think I've talked too much the past day?"

He gave her a surprised look, "Emma," he squeezed her hand, assuring both of them that they were indeed together, "after what we've just endured, I've learned there can never be too much communication between people who love each other."

Hitting the blinker, he intended to take the road to join I-95, which would take them to Boston, but other forces seemed to be at play because almost immediately he realized...Boston wasn't where he was heading. "What the..."

Emma grabbed his thigh. "What?!"

He waved his hand in front of them, "Look. Seems a force stronger than I had other ideas."

"Wha..." He saw her glance in the direction he pointed, and turn back, a curious look on her face. "Fort Williams State Park?"

Killian mentally knocked himself on the side of the head, bloody hell, you wanker. Why didn't you think of the spot? It's perfect! He sent her a questioning look, "You don't mind?"

~~~CS~~~

"Mind, why would I mind?" She sent him a questioning look as he followed the road. The strangeness that she had felt yesterday morning when driving into the park surrounded her yet again.
The magical atmosphere with singing trees and dancing winds...and their spot.

"I don't know," he finally answered, as if he was lost in deep thoughts. "I just know you want to get back. Speaking of...what has you worried?"

Right at that moment, Emma felt her concerns didn't matter, or perhaps it was just this place. "We can talk about it once we're on the road. This place is just so-"

"-magical," he finished her thought.

"You feel it too," she looked around her in awe, "the change in the air."

"Aye, and the guiding force."

"Exactly," she nodded. "I don't remember feeling this the first time we were here." She frowned at the thought that there might have been something else about that day that she had missed...or worse, forgotten.

Killian interrupted her musings by squeezing her hand. "It wasn't there then. Even this summer when I would come here with Henry, it wasn't. Odd, that."

"Maybe, its magic wasn't needed then," Emma shrugged. "It's called Sonata Cliff for a reason, you know?"

"Sonata Cliff? Like a song?" Killian asked as he followed the path between the trees and pulled the car to a stop.

Emma waited until he opened her door, pulling her into his arms before finishing, "Yes, Sonata Cliff. The brochure says it's well-known for its tale of reuniting lovers by luring them with music created by the wind through the trees."
He inclined his head, as if to listen to something. "Hmm, interesting," he hummed and wrapped his arm around her, turning her away from the car.

They started walking toward the water side of the cliff, still just as beautiful and still just as peaceful as always. This time, though, she could hear the music again. "Do you think it's true, Killian?"

He stopped not far from the rock, wrapped his arms around her waist and...perfectly in time with the music she could hear, they danced. She was pulled back to the first time they danced together and how nervous and excited she had been. And he had lived up to all her expectations.

"I think there has to be an inexplicable reason for our dreams-"

"-and your eyes," she added.

"And the memory. There's something magical about this place. And us."

He kissed her then, and as his lips explored hers, the music grew louder and words joined in, yet this time they weren't the words from their vows, but ones from a song. One that she really wanted to hear. When he released her mouth, he cupped the back of her head, holding her close to his chest...his heart.

~~~CS~~~

Killian knew the moment was near. That perfect moment when, with your heart in your hands, you offer it completely to the woman you love. The moment when you tell her that she is your whole world. That the feeling you have for her is one that is so special...so unique...that it's one you want to live with...forever. *Forever*, he thought, *such a powerful word.*

But he needed the ones to tell her exactly what he was feeling. The words to tell her exactly what he was thinking. Not the ones they had already said, here...the last time they had promised to love each other forever.

Not the words he had used when he had returned from New York, gotten down on one knee and put the ring on her finger for the first time. Not even the words that he had used to ask again the day in May before the accident. These words had to be special. More powerful than any other words between them.

He wasn't sure what he was going to say, but knew he had to try, when he heard her say, "Can you hear it?" her voice so soft, he had to lean into her to discern words.

"Aye love," he rubbed his chin against her head. "loud and clear"

"Do you know the song they're playing?"

*Did he?* The music was hauntingly familiar but when and where had he heard it? He cocked his head, turning his ear up to the trees, listening...letting the notes float toward his ear. As they spun around inside his head, he knew...and that gave him the chills, for he had no recollection of how that song came to be a part of his music library. Pulling out his phone, he scrolled through the many love songs he had stockpiled. Some new, some old, each one with a message meant for them. *It's this song, but,"* he gave her a lopsided grin as he cued the song, *"I don't know when...or where it came from."

She gazed up at him with wide green eyes. *"That's odd. It just appeared one day?"

"Aye. As if by magic...one minute it wasn't there...and then the next...it was," he shrugged a
shoulder, "but listen." As the intro music started, he pulled her back close...

_Please, don't let this feeling end_  
It's everything I am  
Everything I want to be

And his heart stopped, for right there were the words. The ones he had been searching for, and hadn't found...yet, the wind knew. The trees knew. This place knew. _Listen, Emma. This is me._

_I can see what's mine now_  
Finding out what's true  
Since I found you  
Looking through the eyes of love

_I feel as if I have loved you forever._

_Now, I can take the time_  
I can see my life  
As it comes up shining now

_You, Emma Swan, make my life infinitely better. Without you, there was just gray._

_Reaching out to touch you_  
I can feel so much

_You give my life color._

_Since I found you_  
Looking through the eyes of love

_I was always with you...and you were always with me._

_And now, I do believe_  
That even in a storm we'll find some light  
Knowing you're beside me, I'm all right

_And we made it through the storm, Swan._

_Please, don't let this feeling end_  
It might not come again

_It's going to grow and grow._

_And I want to remember_  
How it feels to touch you  
How I feel so much  
Since I found you  
_Looking through the eyes of love_

_Did you hear my words, Emma?_  

_Every...single...one..._

She tilted her head up and as the tears cascaded down both of their faces, he kissed her gently on the lips.
Killian then took a step back, reached into his pocket and withdrew the ring and slowly lowered to one knee.

Emma's knees almost buckled threatening to let her to fall flat on her face. But somehow, she was able to lock them, so she could keep standing as she wanted nothing getting in the way now.

Except her ability to see, apparently, as another wave of tears overflowed. The song...the magic...and then hearing his words spoken so...eloquently...so spiritually...so full of love. Her heart was so full that it threatened to burst and spill onto the ground.

His eyes, she thought, he really was looking at her through the eyes of love, for she could see it there and hoped he could see it in hers too.

Killian held the ring up to her. "I don't believe I can say it any better," his voice trembled with emotion. "Our love...you and me...they are everything I am...and everything I want to be. Marry me, Emma."

As soon as the last syllable passed his lips, Emma threw herself at him, catching him unawares, knocking them both to the ground. Killian recovered barely in time to ensure he was on the bottom of the pile, and as she loomed over him, she peppered his face with kisses, each kiss punctuated with multiple yeses.

Not wasting any time, he fisted her hair long enough to direct her lips to his and proceeded to very thoroughly ravish her mouth. A long while later they sat up, and with leaves in their hair and dirt on their clothes, he slid the ring back onto her finger. A perfect fit, just like them.

"Sorry, love. You've a bit of debris on you." He plucked a twig from her hair.

Emma looked at her pants and shrugged, "It was worth it. I love you, Killian."

"And I love you, soon to be Mrs. Jones." He stood and pulled her up with him then directed them towards the rock where he sat down and tugged her onto his lap.

Emma leaned back against his firm chest, his arms wrapped around her, keeping her warm. Making her feel safe...and loved...and through it all the music still played, serenading them with its melody. Giving her the chills, bringing forth answers to questions that she didn't even realize she needed to ask just yet. "Killian, when does Henry start school?"

"A week from Tuesday, as next weekend is Labor Day. Why?"

She turned slightly in his arms to see his face. "I want to get married, here."

"Here?"

"Yes, here." She nodded, pushing up and ran back to the car, grabbing her sketchpad and pencils. I can see it all." She turned in a full circle, taking in everything about the place that made it magical. The way the leaves hung over the path. The rocks hugging the shore and then over the edge of the cliff, how the water stretched on and on...just like their love. "Do you think that's possible?" she asked him breathlessly.

"Your heart's desire, Swan. That's all I want."

She rolled her eyes at her romantic man but wouldn't trade him for the world. With a giggle, she swooped in for a short but sweet kiss. "Then what am I waiting for? I have some work to do before we leave," and skipped off with her sketchpad.
Killian watched her work, using her fingers to create a magical scene that would be worthy of sharing the extraordinary day that would be their wedding. He didn't care what she had in mind though…for as long as she was by his side, anything was possible.

~fin

Toss me your thoughts on the chapter and let me know what you think of the songs. I really liked them. Two more chapters and The Promise will be completed. Also, check out my tumblr blog for gifs to each chapter. Let me know if you need the links.
Chapter 26

Chapter Summary

The reunions continue......

And the reunions continue as Emma reunites with her friends and family.

A couple of songs show up in this chapter.

A new one Can You Read My Mind can be found here.
And one we’ve seen before in Chapter 11 = Can't Help Falling in Love can be found here.

My Tumblr blog also has visuals for each chapter in the form of gifs. You can find the chapter here.

Chapter 26

Portland to Boston
Sunday, Noonish

As soon as Killian drove across the Massachusetts state line, Emma felt the butterflies take flight in her stomach, which really...was ridiculous. These were people that she had known her entire life, why was she scared?

"What's got you so vexed, love?" Killian's soothing voice broke into her thoughts.

She sent him a small smile, but then something pulled her gaze back outside...at the scenery as it flew by the car window. Was it just yesterday morning that she had taken this road...in the opposite direction? In fact, she could even remember that moment...that as she drove past the sign that said Leaving Massachusetts, she had felt anticipation for what was ahead...more so than sadness for the fact that she was leaving her home state. That even though her driver's license listed Boston as her home...that wasn't what she missed and at the time, she wondered why.

But now, she thought, as she looked down at her ring, she knew why. Boston wasn't her home...her home was Killian.

"I'm scared," she finally answered him. "I know it sounds odd, but...they thought that I was...dead." She saw him wince and mentally kicked herself. "Sorry."

He laid his arm on the console, palm up. "I'm here, Swan."

Emma didn't have to think twice about laying her hand in his. When he laced their fingers together and closed his hand around hers, the butterflies in her stomach caused by fear dissolved into the butterflies of love that were always around when he was near.

"I'm being foolish, aren't I?"

He squeezed her fingers and braked as the flow of traffic slowed. "I'm a little scared too," he admitted quietly. "After all, the man that Blue saw this summer might not be someone she wants her
girl to marry."

Emma squinted at him, wondering if he was serious or just teasing, but then he looked her way...and his eyes...those showed fear. "Well, Mr. Jones, too bad. This time next week, we will be-

"-married," he finished. I can't wait to make you my wife. Speaking of, it is customary for one to take a honeymoon after nuptials are exchanged, is it not?"

"I...I guess so," she answered hesitantly wondering what in the world he was thinking.

Killian sent her a cheeky smile, his usual confidence restored. "I'd like to take you to England. I'd like to show you where I was born."

Her heart sped as she had dreamed of seeing some of the places he'd described. "But to travel across the pond," she tried to mimic his accent...horribly, "don't you need a passport?"

"Aye." His one-word response made it sound like it was a natural occurrence for someone to carry their passport.

"Oh, then," she told him forlornly, "I don't have one." He looked at her like she had suddenly grown two heads. "Never needed one." She shrugged her shoulders as if that answered the question.

"Then," he kissed the back of their joined hands, "we will get you one and it will say Emma Swan-Jones, my wife."

She giggled, "Now you're just being corny."

"Frankly, my dear, I don't give a damn." he joked, using Rhett Butler's famous line. "I got several giggles that I love so much, meaning you relaxed and..." the car slid to a stop, "we're here, Swan. You ready?"

Was she ready? She glanced at him again and then looked down at her ring. "I'm ready."

"Stay right there." She watched him run around the car and open her door. "Here we go."

When she put her hand in his, he pulled her into his arms, kissing her soundly and ensuring that she knew he was there by her side...and would be, should she need him.

As they walked toward the door, her hand in Killian's, Emma suddenly felt a rush of love and peace settle over her and knew that everything was going to be fine. She had her memories back, her love and, through the doors...part of her family.

Killian reached around her for the door, and before it had even fully opened, she was pulled into the maternal arms of Blue. As soon as Blue's arms settled around her and Emma got a whiff of her perfume, the tears flowed and she could barely hear Blue saying, "You're home. My girl's really home," over and over again.

It took several moments before Blue let her go enough to see that they were surrounded by Green and Astrid. She cried more tears of joy than she could ever remember crying in her life, but it was worth it to know how much she was loved. Astrid passed her to Johanna who passed her to Marion and then she heard, "Emma!" and she barely had enough time to lock her knees before Henry launched himself into her arms.

"Whoa there, kid, don't kill me," she joked around the lump in her throat.
"Emma," he pulled her across the room and pointed to a chair, "sit, please." Emma sat down as he had asked, very curious as to what he had in mind. Henry cupped her jaw with his hand, turning her face from one side to the other, frowning a little the entire time. "It looks good," he proclaimed. "Welcome home," and this time when he hugged her, he whispered, "I missed you." and the tears flowed again.

The fact that Henry was here opened her mind to her other friends, and he had hardly scampered off before she was pulled tightly into Ashley's arms. "Ruby said to give you an extra hug for her and to tell you we are going to kick your doctor's ass if she doesn't watch out."

What did Ashley and Ruby know of Doctor Blanchard and why would they want to kick her ass? A question she really wanted to ask, but before she could, Robin was there. He looked happy, she thought, as he sent her a huge smile that made those dimples pop and pulled her back into his arms. "Heard you forgot a few things there for a while." She nodded her head, but was afraid if she said something the tears would start again. "Well, what do you expect? Killian is quite forgettable."

"Watch it, Locksley," she heard Killian quip, "that's my girl you've got there."

Robin stepped back, letting her go, his eyes locked on Killian. "Welcome back bro," Emma heard him say quietly, "I missed you" before he too hugged Killian.

Regina, with Roland in her arms greeted her next and after small talk, Emma heard her name and, with a squeal, her reunion with Elsa happened. "I missed you like crazy, Emma." Elsa squeezed her hand, noticing the ring on her finger. "Does this mean we have a wedding to look forward to?"

"Yes," Emma nodded, "next Saturday. We've plans to make."

"Anything you need, Emma. Just ask." Elsa relinquished her hold when Killian stepped into the fray.

"Thanks, Elsa. We'll talk later."

Killian took her hand, leading her a little away from the crowd. "Emma, there's someone I want you to meet." They stopped in front of his brother. "Liam, meet Emma."

Emma's eyes met Liam's, and there she saw care and concern and so much more that her heart turned over in her chest, and as the tears clogged her throat, she wrapped her arms around his neck...and hugged him.

When he didn't immediately hug her back, she wondered if she had misread what she saw in his eyes, but then, with a soft cry, his arms closed around her, and burying his face against her shoulder, he chanted, "I'm sorry, lass. I'm so sorry."

His words, so unexpected, released the tears, and as they flowed down her face to land in the cotton of his shirt, healing was complete by all.

~~~CS~~~

Killian had watched Emma study Liam after the introduction, but what she was thinking he didn't know. He also wasn't sure what he had expected, but for Emma to step forward and wrap her arms around Liam's neck hadn't been it. Liam's look of shock had to have been mirrored on his own face, but when his always larger than life brother fell apart in the love of his life's arms, he was humbled.

Humbled by Emma's grace and willingness to see the best in people even after adversity. Her love made him a better man, and just like that she brought Liam into their family circle.
He looked away briefly, his gaze connecting with Elsa's who was wiping the tears from her face, telling him that she knew the whole story. It seemed he had several things he needed to discuss with his brother.

As Emma stepped away from Liam, Killian noticed that Elsa stepped closer to him, sliding her hand into his. The look they exchanged was private, and that his brother was allowing her to see his vulnerable side was new.

"Did you have something to do with this?" his fiancée asked as she tucked herself closer to his side and gazed up at him with eyes that were still a little watery.

Killian swiped one of her tears away with his thumb, and sent a smile Liam's direction. "I had a little help."

"Thank you," she told him quietly before standing on her tip toes to kiss him gently on the cheek.

"And thank you," she repeated the process on Liam's cheek before looping her arm through Elsa's. "And now if you boys will excuse us, we have wedding details to discuss." And without waiting for an answer, they waded into the circle of women and all disappeared.

Liam looked at him like he had been punched in the gut and was unsure what had just happened, but Killian noticed that his eyes never strayed far from Elsa, much like when he was in the same room as Emma. "Thank you for pulling this together so quickly, brother. It's nice to see Emma surrounded by all her closest friends."

He took his eyes off Elsa long enough to say, "I was happy to help, after all it's the least-" but as soon as Killian interrupted, his gaze was gone.

"-I believe my lovely bride-to-be's hug was an indication that it's time for our family to move forward."

Liam's smile was self-deprecating. "That's what the lovely Elsa keeps saying to me."

"Then perhaps it's time you listened," Killian finished just as Robin walked over, bringing with him bottles of beer for all.

"What's this," Robin tapped his bottle against Liam's and then Killian's, "I hear about a wedding? Emma just drew my wife into a discussion and I heard the word."

The smile on Killian's face grew, as he hadn't been sure the time would ever come when he would find himself standing next to both his brother and best mate. "Aye, Emma's agreed to be my wife and we're getting married next Saturday...in Maine. You will both be there, right?"

"I wouldn't miss it for the world." Robin's promise assured Killian that their friendship had indeed survived the darkest of times.

"And you, Liam. Will you too be there?" Killian thought he knew the answer but hearing Liam say it was something he felt he needed.

Liam put his arm around Killian's shoulder. "I'd be honored to be at your wedding to Emma, but," his grin turned devilish, "there's one condition."

Killian's thoughts were pinging all over the place, trying to figure out what the condition was and finally he decided to practice what he had learned this summer and tackle it head on. "And what might that be?" His voice sounded a bit sharp even to his own ears.
"Why, that you allow Robin and I to throw you a bachelor party, of course." Liam laughed at what Killian assumed was the fight flowing from his body.

"A bachelor party?" He hadn't even thought of one of those. "Alright. But no strippers." He glanced off toward the direction Emma had disappeared, thinking that was not particularly something he wished to explain to her.

"Well," Robin drawled, "even if Emma has them at her party?"

Killian's eyes snapped right back to Robin. "Wait...what?" And then he saw the devilment dancing in his mate's eyes and just shook his head.

"Serious though, Killian," Liam asked, "what do you want us to do?"

"Actually," he looked around to make sure he couldn't be overheard, "there is one thing."

"Anything," Robin and Liam answered in unison.

"Alright. I want you to..."

~~~CS~~~

The wedding plans complete and Alex awake from her nap, the conversation turned toward other things, giving Blue a chance to spirit Emma away for a little alone time. "I haven't told you congratulations yet." She linked their arms leading Emma to her office where they could talk in peace. Emma's face lit up with the mention of her engagement sending a thrill to her heart that her girl was back and so happy.

"And I didn't tell you thank you for fighting for me." The look on Emma's face was contemplative, as if she were trying to piece together snippets of information.

_How much do I tell her_, skipped through her head before Blue decided that she would give her the information she wanted...or was ready to hear. "You know...I've always fought for you...all my kids really. But...how did you know?"

A little smile crossed Emma's face, like there was more to her thoughts than she was willing to spill. "Killian has Doctor Blanchard's number, so I let her know I was," she shrugged, "whole again and she told me that she spoke to you. She wanted me to know that _she_ was the one who told you to give me time." Her smile grew broader. "She didn't want me to hold it against you."

"I didn't like waiting...or keeping the secret. But I am happy that everything returned, and with a kiss, just like in all those stories you love." Blue rubbed Emma's shoulder, a comfort to both in some ways before continuing, "The doctor never told me but...Emma, what caused you to lose your memory? Did you hit your head?"

Emma shook her head. "No, I didn't have a head injury but...the doctor suggested fear...and somehow after talking to Killian and his talk with Liam, fear seemed to be the prevalent factor with all three of us...that and lack of communication." She wrinkled her nose at the thought that if they had talked through things perhaps it all could have been prevented.

Blue found the fact that Emma was bringing the brother into the conversation interesting, but from what she could gather when everyone arrived, everything had worked out as it should have. "It sounds as if there has been quite a bit of growth and maturing by all. And Henry appears to be quite enamored with his 'Uncle Liam'."
"That's what I hear," Emma chuckled. "I bet Liam will be happy to have his house back."

"Speaking of Henry," Blue smiled, anxious to share the secret she had been keeping for over a month, "let's get Killian and Henry in here, as I have some news."

~~~CS~~~

Liam had spent a surprisingly enjoyable hour with Killian, Robin, Henry, Roland and another boy, Wyatt, building with Legos. He’d forgotten how much time he had spent as a lad designing building after building, with his father always around to help him with construction. And while he could remember a few times doing the same thing with Killian, really…there had been too many years between them, that by the time Killian was interested in Legos, he had been older and off doing other things. Times that he looked back on and wished he had done things differently. And now…a second chance. What more could he ask for?

"Killian, Henry," Emma's voice interrupted his musings, "Blue would like to see us about some news." She looked happy and when his brother reached her, pulling her in for a kiss, her giggle was infectious and made him smile.

"They're good together, aren't they?" Robin put the finishing touches on a building and handed it to Roland. "Watching him chase his tail for a year after their first meeting was rather...entertaining," he smiled at the memory.

And if I hadn't been behaving like such a prat, I could have...no, not looking back. "Elsa has been filling me in on some of the happenings during their courtship. I'm particularly fond of the one where you are all waiting in the hospital in costume." he laughed thinking about the pictures Elsa had shared from her phone.

"Hey, don't laugh," Robin deadpanned, "I looked rather dashing dressed as Batman."

"Oh, I'm sure you did," Liam agreed, "but you had her dress as Robin?"

Robin's reply was cut-off when Emma's friend, Ashley, came to get the boys for snacks, and as they ran out of the room with Robin following, the answer to his earlier question was there: What more could he ask for? A woman who loved him...and a family.

Elsa...he wanted Elsa. That thought that had him quickly cleaning up the loose bricks and leaving the room to go in search of the blonde who took up quite a bit of space inside his head these days.

The Home was a maze, and after ending up down a couple of wrong passages, Liam found one that looked familiar and rounded a corner only to be hit with the full weight of an exuberant Henry.

"Whoa, there," Liam held Henry's shoulders and yet he could still feel his body practically vibrating under his hands, "where's the fire?"

"Uncle Liam," Henry was all smiles, "it's 'fficial. I'm 'dopted!"

"Well, my lad, that is big news." So that made his baby brother a father...which meant, he was an uncle.

"My name's same as yours!" Henry exclaimed.

"Is it, now?" Liam found himself containing the need to chuckle, which felt very strange.

"Yes," Henry nodded vigorously, "I'm Henry Swan Jones. Just like you."
"That you are. Congratulations."

"Thanks! Come with me while I tell my friends." He grabbed Liam's hand, pulling him along behind, and as Liam followed he realized he was no longer living on the fringes of life, but right in the very center of it. That felt amazing.

~~~CS~~~

Emma and Killian left Blue's office just as Henry pulled Liam around the corner, their laughter echoing in the small hallway. The chance to talk to her fiancé's brother was something she had been waiting for, but as of yet there just hadn't been the perfect opportunity. She kept hearing the tortured tone of his voice repeating I'm sorry over and over, and with Henry dragging him toward the backyard, perhaps the perfect occasion had just been gifted.

She laid her hand on Killian's arm. "I think...I'm going to go talk to Liam...if you don't mind."

He tilted his head, taking a long, hard look at her. "Why would I mind love? I want you and my brother to be friends." He pulled her close, her body flush to his. "Shall I come with you?"

Emma chewed on her lip thinking that a part of her had a few things to say to Liam that she didn't care if Killian heard, but, "I think...this is something I want to do on my own." And before he could say anything else, added, "I'll be fine and...so will he," she dimpled, gave him a lingering kiss, which somehow reminded her of their morning's activities before they left the cabin, and went to move past him.

He snagged her wrist before she could get very far. "That," he popped his t, "gives me loads of ideas," he whispered as he circled her waist. and invading her space, pushed her against the wall, holding her there with his hips. "I seem to recall a powder room around here...where," he placed barely there kisses along her jaw, causing her heart to race and her knees to buckle, "we never quite finished what we started." His hands moved up to rest just under her ribcage...right below her breasts, and his thumbs...lawdy...they were hypnotically moving up...then down...every up movement bringing them closer to...

The unmistakable sound of repeated throat clearing halted any further movement.

"Bloody hell," Killian whispered, "what is it going to take?" was all he got out before Emma clamped her hand over his mouth as she had peeked around his shoulder.

"Sorry, Blue," she mumbled, feeling like she was sixteen instead of close to thirty.

Emma gasped in surprise as, in a single motion, Killian turned toward Blue, pulling her in front of him. His ears were red and two spots dotted his cheekbones as he looked up at Blue from beneath hooded eyes. "Pardon me, Blue. Won't happen again."

Emma couldn't be sure but she thought she saw a twinkle lurking in Blue's eyes as she stood there looking over the top of her glasses at them. "I would hope not. You are parents now, after all."

As Blue walked away, Emma's eyes followed her...and just as she rounded the corner, Blue looked back and winked. Darn that woman, Emma thought, she's always surprising me.

Killian gave her a dejected look. "Think she'll forgive me?"

Unable to help herself, Emma laughed at his pout, "Oh, I would bet on it." Gently steering them away from temptation, she pushed him in the direction of the main part of the party and, after grabbing a couple drinks, went in search of Liam.
She found him in the backyard, sitting on the glider under the big trees, watching Henry, Roland and Wyatt playing on the jungle gym. From her vantage point on the porch, she marveled over how different the man before her was than the one she met in May...or the one she briefly met in Doctor Blanchard's office. It seemed the summer brought changes to all of them...Liam most of all.

He saw her coming, and the flair of his eyes when he noticed her walking his way made her think he was surprised but pleased she had sought him out. He stood, smiling, waiting for her to approach, and in his eyes...

Gone was the anger.

Gone were the secrets.

In their place she saw joy, happiness and...was that...love?

"Thirsty?" She held out the water in deference to the warm late summer day.

He wasn't quick enough to hide his reaction but shock...and then pleasure crossed his features. "Thank you, Emma." He inclined his head giving her a shy smile.

Emma returned his smile with one of her own. "Shall we?" They sat down on the glider, and as she always did, Emma angled her body toward the person she was sitting next to and tucked one leg under the other. It was peaceful sitting beside him, watching Henry, the rhythmic motion of the seat reminding her of quiet talks with Ashley, Ruby and others. For several long minutes nothing was said while they each took several drinks from their bottles. She was sure they were both thinking the same thing, and that was wondering what the other would say.

She glanced at Liam, watching him swallow before opening his mouth. "I'm-

"You're not solely to blame, Liam," she interrupted gently. "Killian and I talked about this...and I know you spoke to Doctor Blanchard...but we all made mistakes." Emma took another drink, swallowed and tried again, "I left. That was on me." He closed his eyes slowly, as if in pain, but as she continued speaking, he reopened them...watching her. "As far as Killian and I are concerned, the story stops with us. For everyone else, you helped me get where I needed to be in order to heal. Some might even say you're a hero," she finished with a gentle smile.

Liam shook his head. "Oh, Emma, I'm no hero."

Her smile was understanding. "I've been told that I'm a savior...and until the accident I would have denied the title. But since then...Doctor Blanchard helped me see that if I helped...just one person...and that's how they saw me then..." she let him complete the statement.

He laughed. "I see what you're doing there, but-

"...oh I can think of several, besides myself, who think there might be a hero inside of you." She saw Elsa watching them from the back porch.

"Killian put you up to this?" he asked curiously.

"No," she shook her head as Elsa stepped off the porch and headed their way, "all me. But, perhaps I should tell you that you better not hurt my friend, or..." Emma giggled at the look on Elsa's face when she realized what had been said.

"Emma, must you?" She shook her head. "I'm sorry, Liam. I didn't put her up to this."
He stood and tugged her closer. "It's quite alright, Sweet Elsa."

Emma watched them make eyes at each other, and quickly decided that yes...she approved. Promising them a few minutes alone, she called the boys in with her, leaving Elsa alone with Liam.

~~~CS~~~

"Are you alright?" she asked him as she took the seat vacated by Emma. She had been keeping an eye on him since they had arrived, and had to admit he had never looked better. When they met, which she couldn't believe it was only a month ago, he rarely smiled and in groups always held himself stiff...formal...almost as if he were an observer and not a participant. But Friday night and again today, he was engaged. Another side of the man who drew her unlike any other.

"I'm fine." His arm was stretched out behind her, and periodically his fingers would caress her shoulder or run through her hair, almost as if he were seeing if she would allow it. "More than fine, actually." His smile grew, showing teeth, his eyes sparkled and the lilt in his voice became more pronounced, "I feel bloody amazing and much of that is thanks to you." He hesitated briefly and then slowly...oh so slowly, he leaned toward her.

When his lips touched hers, Elsa forgot to breathe, forgot to think. His lips were soft, and with gentle summer breeze blowing the leaves and the glider moving back and forth in a rhythmic fashion, he seduced her. She cupped his face and he pulled her closer into the circle of his arms, all the while his lips moved on hers.

Teasing.

Testing.

Tantalizing.

Opening her mouth, Elsa invited him in, and when Liam accepted her heart jumped to her throat and the desire to crawl closer clawed at her, but their whereabouts played chaperone, just as Henry had done the past two days.

His lips moved to her cheek, "Your taste, your perfume, separately pull me in but that's only a small part of what I'm feeling." He cupped her jaw and kissed her again...oh so tenderly...and slowly slid his thumb over her bottom lip, his eyes burned into hers. "I want you to know," he swallowed before continuing, "that I'm..."

"Liam, Elsa," Blue called from the back porch, "it's time to eat now."

Liam closed his mouth, his forehead falling forward to land against hers. "I guess we're being paged."

Elsa wanted to scream in frustration. I'm what? And why did Blue have to come outside at precisely that moment. Divine interruption? "I guess so."

He stood and offered his hand. Elsa placed her hand in his, and all the way across the yard she kept hoping he would say something...anything to tell her what he wanted her to know, but by the time they climbed the back stairs, the opportunity was lost.

"Are you alright, Elsa?" Blue asked as they reached the porch. "You look a little flushed."

She thought she heard Liam snicker, but when she chanced a glance in his direction, his expression was sober. "I'm okay, Blue. It's just...blonde hair...sun, they don't always mix." It was the best she
could come up with, after all, she couldn't tell her that the man next to her had just been kissing her senseless. Nor could she tell Blue her timing was horrible.

"Well, it's a good thing I called for you then," Blue told her happily. "I'd hate for you to burn."

Arriving in the dining room with all their friends surrounding Emma and Killian, Elsa pushed her disappointment away. The time would come again...the question was just when.

~~~CS~~~

Once the meal was over, Henry appreciated being a kid because he didn't have to do the dishes, and with Roland, Wyatt and J.J. following him, led the way to the treehouse. From their vantage point in the big tree there was no telling what they might overhear or see...you just never knew.

"Henry," Wyatt called as he followed him up the ladder, "why are we going up here?"

"No reason," Henry shrugged, "guess I kinda just want to say goodbye."

"You're so lucky," J.J. mumbled as he scooted across the floor, "I wish I had a family."

"Me too," sighed Wyatt, "you and Roland have all the luck."

"I'm sorry, guys," Henry patted his friends on their shoulders, "something will come along. I just know it will."

"You think so?" Wyatt brightened a little as Henry put his finger to his mouth, hushing him.

"Shh, listen." They all moved closer to the opening that was their 'window' and looked down through the leaves just in time to see Blue and Liam sit down on the glider.

~~~CS~~~

"Thank you for talking with me Liam," Blue smiled at him as she sat down, adjusting her dress more comfortably on the glider.

He gave her what she would describe as a cautious smile, before answering, "It's nice to finally meet you. Henry has told me so much about you...and the work that you do here."

Blue went on to talk about the Home and how many children had been through its doors since its inception. Some for a few days...others for most of their lives like Emma, Ashley and Ruby. "That's what I'm going to miss most about Emma, Killian, Regina and Robin living in New York...is their generosity in helping the children here."

"Killian helped with the children?" At her nod, he continued, "A part of me is still having a difficult time seeing my brother as a man...and now, with...a family of his own." His voice lowered and his smile was almost as if he had gone someplace far away, "I still see that four-year-old that used to follow me everywhere."

"It's good you'll be close," she told him softly, "to learn to be brothers as men."

"Aye, I'm looking forward to that." His eyes cut away for a brief second and when they returned there was a sadness there that she hadn't expected. "I...went through some really dark times a few years back and feel...I've much to make up for."

Blue found herself wanting to say something profound to this younger man, but she wasn't sure
what, nor sure if he would even care, but she would try, "It's not what we've done in the past that are
going to define you as a man, Liam. It's what you do in the present...and...what you choose to do in
the future. Those choices are yours to make...and from where I'm standing...that makes you a good
man."

She watched his jaw tic as he gritted his teeth before he turned glassy eyes her direction. "Thank
you, Sister Blue. That means so much to me. And," he looked away as if uncomfortable with what
he was going to say, "if there's anything I can do for you, don't hesitate to ask."

That surprised...but pleased her too. "Oh, I think you've done quite a bit for me already."

There go those cautious eyes again, she noticed, but then they were quickly masked, replaced by a
smile. "I have?"

"Oh yes," she sent him a huge smile, "you paid all that money so that my Emma could have the very
best care. That was very generous of you."

This time his eyes clouded as if he didn't enjoy the topic of conversation, and he shrugged, "It's only
money."

"True," she agreed, "but when you've grown up without much money, it is a very big deal."

One side of his mouth lifted. "I'm just glad it all turned out alright," a full smile bloomed on his face,
"and that she's back with Killian and Henry. He's quite the spitfire...Henry is. Elsa and I enjoyed his
company the past few days."

_Oh, now that's interesting to know_, she thought. Elsa was with him, which could explain the tête-à-
tête she had witnessed earlier. "Elsa is a lovely girl," she stated, watching his cheeks tint pink.

"She is," he answered, a secretive smile adorning his face.

A few questions later, Blue was assured that Elsa would be in good hands. Surreptitiously, she
glanced at her watch, and when she saw the time, rushed into action. "Liam, I'm so sorry, but I need
to run. We have a secret planned for Emma and it's happening in ten minutes."

~~~CS~~~

Once she was gone, Liam understood what Killian said about Blue being a force to be reckoned
with. He felt as if he had been interrogated, and rather thoroughly too. But, he was pretty sure he had
passed whatever test she had given him, as he was here to stay.

He still wanted to talk to Elsa and tell her how he felt and, he hoped, hear she was feeling the same
things. Just as he stood to go find her, Killian stuck his head out the back door. "Robin and I thought
we'd take the kids to the park to play football. Care to come?"

"That sounds interesting." Liam pushed up, walking toward the porch. "Have you seen the boys?"

"Robin went looking for them." Killian answered as the door slammed shut behind them.

~~~CS~~~

As soon as the door shut, Henry started scrambling. "Come on, guys. We need to go somewhere so
they can 'find' us."

"Wait," Wyatt stopped him before he disappeared out the door, "Liam likes Elsa?"
"Oh, yeah," Henry nodded his head, "I've caught them making gooey eyes at each other several times. Like this," and he showed the boys his imitation of gooey and then climbed down.

Once all the boys were down, Wyatt grabbed his shirt. "Hey, Henry, if Liam and Elsa get together like Killian and Emma...think they'd want a little boy?"

"Hmm," Henry's brows went up, "maybe. We should ask...later. Let's go." They ran to find the men, hoping there wouldn't be too many questions asked.

~~~CS~~~

Emma was enjoying catching up with Ashley, Elsa and Regina when Blue hurried past them and down the hall, barely sparing a glance in their direction. "Where's she going?" she asked, perplexed.

"Not sure," Elsa answered her. "Where's she been might be the real question."

"I think I saw her outside talking to Liam earlier." Ashley answered innocently.

Elsa's eyes met hers, question after question flashing through them, until just as quickly as her confusion appeared, it vanished when the laughter of the Brothers Jones preceded them into the room.

Killian winked on his way through and mouthed, "Looking for the Henry," before they disappeared in the direction of the boys' rooms.

Then wha... was as much as she had time to think before Blue came running around the corner. "It's time, Ashley."

Ashley jumped up and squealed, pulled Emma out of her chair and down the hall behind Blue. Once in her office, she flipped her monitor around and there, looking back at her, was Ruby's smiling face. "Red!" she exclaimed, running up to touch the monitor. "You look wonderful."

"Oh, I miss you guys." Ruby cried, the tears already starting to fall.

"We miss you too," Ashley and Emma gushed, each sniffing back their own tears.

Ruby asked Emma questions about the accident and surgeries and while Emma answered, she found that she preferred not talking about the actual event and everything she went through immediately afterward. Yes, she had come through stronger, but there were some memories that were just too painful to think about.

When Emma got to the story about the proposal and when and where the wedding was going to be, they all cried, sad that Ruby was going to miss it. The conversation continued, moving from topic to topic until suddenly Emma noticed something different about the placement of Ruby's hands. "Oh my, Ashley! Do you see what I see?" She pointed at the screen.

"What? What?" Ashley asked several times before one of Emma's fingers landed directly on the image of Ruby's. "You're engaged?! And you didn't tell us?! Ruby!"

Ruby screeched excitedly. "Yes, we're engaged! He asked me tonight because he knew I was going to be talking with you and he wanted me to be able to share." Ruby sighed, holding her diamond out in front of her with such a blissful look on her face that Emma couldn't help but reach over and squeeze Ashley's hand in happiness for their friend.

"You got engaged tonight? Yet...you're here talking...to us? You...don't have better things to do?"
Ashley asked slyly.

"Well..." Ruby giggled and winked, "later...but enough about me. Ashley, how's Alexandra?"

The women spent another enjoyable fifteen minutes talking, until the connection kept cutting out and they had to say goodbye. "Oh, Ashley," Emma hugged her friend. "I'm so glad we got to talk to her."

Ashley shut down the computer and linking arms, they left the office. "I know. Me too. And can you believe they'll be back before Christmas!"

The closer they got to the main living area, the clearer they could hear a screaming baby and the voices of several adults all trying to calm her down. "Oh my!" Emma sent a look her friend's way, "Someone is not happy at all!"

"Do I want to go in there?" Ashley whispered out of the side of her mouth.

Emma shrugged her shoulder as they turned a corner and could see what was happening in the room, "Maybe..."

"Look at those men," Ashley sighed and just shook her head at the scene.

"Being brought to their knees by a ten-month-old." Emma tilted her head watching the antics before her. Sean, Killian, Robin and Liam were all sitting on the floor with Alex in the middle...in only her diaper...screaming her head off. Every time someone picked her up to try to dress her, her body bowed backward and her scream grew louder.

"She gets like this when she's pushed beyond exhaustion. Guess we need to take her home." Ashley waded into the melee and picked up the baby and her clothes. Alex's cry immediately calmed down to a whimper, and as soon as her momma had sat down, slipped on her pajamas and handed her a favorite stuffed mouse, she closed her eyes.

Emma laughed at the looks that every man sported, not only 'what the hell', looks but also looks of fatigue. While Ashley was dressing Alex, she sat on the sofa behind Killian and whispered, "Problems?"

He turned to her, laying his arm across her thighs. "We could have handled it." He gave her a cheeky smile, "We just needed a little more time."

"Oh, I'm sure you could have," Emma quickly agreed tongue-in-cheek. "Looks like the magic touch was momma, though." Emma glanced across the room to where Ashley was rocking Alex, and such an overwhelming influx of emotions rushed through her system that she wasn't quite sure what to do. Killian must have sensed something was off, as he moved up onto the sofa next to her and gently pulled her into his arms. With her head on his shoulder, her heartbeat slowly decreased and she was able to focus on the quiet conversation going on around her.

"Alright now, love?" Killian whispered.

Emma nodded, "Better, now." She lifted her head from his shoulder, "It's just been an emotional day, that's all. I'm okay." Kissing his cheek, she had just laid her head back down when...

Henry yelled into the room, "Dessert's on," unfortunately sending Alex back into tears again.

"I think we should get her home," Ashley apologized as Sean took the screaming baby while she gathered the diaper bag and hugged everyone, saying goodbye.
Once they were gone, Killian held her back while the others headed to the dining room for dessert. "Are you sure you're alright?" Killian's arms were safe and warm, and just as they had a few minutes ago, served to bring her feet back to the ground.

Emma cupped his jaw, bringing her lips into contact with his. "I'm fine, Killian. Just after seeing so many people that I love and then talking to Ruby and then...watching Ashley with her baby, I just realized how blessed I am." She shrugged her shoulder. "That's it. Thank you for my day."

"My pleasure, Swan." His lips hovered above hers as his eyes sent message after message of love, "Ready for a little sugar?" When she smiled and started to move out of his arms, he tightened his hold and closed the gap between them, allowing her to feast on the sweetness of his kiss for quite some time.

**Swan-Jones Cabin**  
**Portland, Maine**  
**Thursday Evening**

Henry couldn't remember ever being as happy as he had been since they had arrived at the cabin. Spending time together as a family had been better than he had imagined, and before he had actually lived with them, he had imagined it a lot! He had dreamed of doing the same things together they had always done: going to the beach or the park, out to eat and playing lots of video games together. And while they did do those things, he was quickly learning that being a family was so much more.

This summer when he had been staying here with Killian, they had spent lots of time together but both of them had been...sad...missing Emma and so their time together always felt incomplete. Now though...it felt as if the story was almost complete...just like in Emma's fairytale books, when the ending started...'And they lived'...that was his life.

Oh, sure, there were some things that he didn't like so much, such as cleaning up after himself or having to remember to put the seat back down after he peed. Killian hadn't made him do that at all, as they had eaten on paper plates that they could just toss in the trash, and in the bathroom...well...they were men and when you had to go, who wanted to take the time to put the lid back up? He just didn't get it at all, but he was trying. Emma had only yelled at him once in the last day or so. Well, maybe twice; after all it wasn't his fault she had fallen in. She should have looked. Duh.

He was quickly coming to think that his favorite times as a family were when they just talked. They would watch a movie and then talk. Or go for a walk on the beach and talk. It was like Emma and Killian really cared what they had to say...to each other...and to him. It was cool.

"What's running around inside that head?" Emma broke into his thoughts as she scooped him out his nightly bowl of ice cream.

He took a slow bite of the ice cream while trying to decide how to bring up something he had been thinking about since Sunday when they had been at the Home. "I was thinking about my friends," he told her as he slid the metal spoon back into the cold treat in front of him.

She frowned around her spoonful of ice cream. "Which friends? Friends in New York or the ones in Boston?"

A bony shoulder went up. "Boston. I haven't met anyone in New York yet."

"And?" She waited for him to give her more information, but he wanted her to keep asking questions, that way maybe she wouldn't guess what he had in mind.
"Well," another spoonful of ice cream slid down his throat leaving behind cold tingles in its wake, "I'm going to miss them...especially...Wyatt and J.J. I wish they were getting families like Roland and me."

"Oh, Henry," Emma sighed, "I wish that too. Maybe something positive will happen for them soon."

Henry laid down his spoon and leaned forward on his crossed arms as if he was going to tell a secret. "You know what I was thinking?"

"That look on your face scares me almost enough not to ask," she laughed at the puppy dog face he sent her way, "but I'll bite. What were you thinking?"

"Wouldn't it be SO cool if Uncle Liam and Elsa got married and 'dopted them?" he told her excitedly.

Emma laughed. "Whoa, kid, where did that idea come from?" A contemplative look crossed her face. "As far as I'm aware, they're not even dating. Do you know something I don't?"

He nodded his head and resumed eating the quickly melting ice cream. "Oh, yes. I caught them making goo goo eyes at each other just like you and Killian do all the time."

"Oooh, did you now?" Emma stretched out the first syllable. "Do you think I need to have a talk with Uncle Liam?"

He thought about that for a few seconds. "Mmm, maybe. But I think he likes her," his voice dropped to a whisper, "a lot. Except," his grin grew as the memory crossed his mind, "he did get all red that one time she walked in and saw his willy." When Emma started coughing, Henry jumped off his chair and ran around to pat her on the back, wondering what it was that caused her to choke so much.

When she was finally able to get herself under control enough to talk, he heaved a sigh of relief because he wasn't finished giving her his ideas.

"I'm sure there's more to that story Henry," Emma told him slowly, "but...how did you get them from making goo goo eyes to getting married and adopting one of your friends?"

"I don't know," he admitted, "but it would be so cool. We could live close to each other again."

~~~CS~~~

Emma had been wondering where Henry was going with the pieces of information that he was doling out, but his last statement clarified it all in her mind. "Are you not happy to be living in New York?"

He dropped the spoon into his bowl and pushed it toward her. "I'm happy to be with you and Killian, but...I..." He dropped his head as if unsure how to explain what he was actually thinking.

Emma took their bowls, set them in the sink and filled them with water. She held out her hand, and when he put his into hers, walked him to the living room. "Henry," she said slowly, "it's perfectly normal to feel a little...unsure about moving," she licked her lips before continuing, "even I'm a little scared. But you understand why we're moving, right?"

Henry nodded his head. "I think so," he told her. "He's going to work with Uncle Liam and Robin, right?"
Emma knew from talking to Killian that he hadn't started, but that he was scheduled to start as soon as Henry started school. "That's right, he is. And Elsa and Regina, too." She changed directions with her questioning, "I know you haven't started school yet, but you like your new room, right?"

"I like it a lot," Henry assured her, "it's just going to be weird not having a backyard, you know?"

That wasn't something she had expected, and because she hadn't lived there she wasn't really sure what to say, finally deciding on the truth. "How about we take it one day at a time, but if you're feeling sad, you know you can talk to me or Killian, right?"

"I know. Do we have time for a walk on the beach before I go to bed?"

"We do. Should we go see if Killian is done talking to Uncle Liam and wants to go too?"

"Yep. I'll do it," Henry yelled as he ran from the room before she had time to say anything else.

While she waited for his return, Emma placed their bowls in the dishwasher and wiped down the counter. She also made a mental note to speak to Killian about Henry's concerns, thinking that communication would be the key to making their transition from three individuals to a family unit as smooth as possible.

Swan-Jones Cabin
Portland, Maine
Friday Morning

That was a lonely shower, Killian thought as he wrapped the towel around his waist and dried his hair with another. He understood that with a child in the house there was a need to be a bit more circumspect with their behavior, which meant Emma wouldn't be able to spend the day in his shirt and nothing else. "Such a shame," he sighed tossing the second towel over a rack and stepping into their bedroom to her eyes.

A little shiver ran through his body as her appraising gaze traced something that only she could see, but she started at the top of his head and worked her way down to his feet. And then she returned to his chest and repeated the process all over again. When he dropped the towel to pull on his boxer briefs, she studied his stomach, his arse...not as if she were seducing her lover but as an artist, memorizing her subject. It unnerved him, because she didn't say anything...just watched. What did she see? What was she looking for?

"You've lost weight," her soft voice answered his question.

"Aye," he agreed, "a little. That's what happens when you believe you've lost the woman you love. But," he pulled on his jeans and shirt, turning toward her as he buttoned it, "so have you."

She smiled and inclined her head as if to say, 'touché,' before answering, "That's what happens when you are put on a liquid diet for two months."

Killian sauntered toward her, watching as her eyes grew larger and she licked her lips...in nervousness...or excitement...or perhaps anticipation. "I love you." he whispered, stopping a foot away, the surprise at his statement showing on her face.

"That wasn't what I expected you to say," she murmured.

"I know," he reached out a hand and pulled her up and into his arms, "but I do. I love you this size...I loved you before...and I'll love you when you are pregnant with our child. I love you." Gently, he kissed her lips, almost feeling like she was porcelain that he needed to treat delicately and
reverently...but he knew that not to be true. She was strong. She was tough. And she was his. Releasing her lips, he tightened his hold on her saying without words everything he was feeling. She was precious and he wanted her to know.

"You don't have to stay away tonight, you know?" Her question quiet against his chest where her head rested...just over his heart.

"Swan, after the summer we've had I'm not willing to take any chances. I'll be at the B&B with Liam, Robin and Sean and you can have girl time with Elsa, Regina and Ashley."

"I know," she sighed. "I wish Ruby was here."

"Do you want to wait to get married until she's back?" He thought he knew the answer and realized if she said yes, it would hurt...but...he wanted her to be happy.

"No," she stepped out of his arms and pointed her finger at him, but the laughter dancing in her eyes belied her warrior stance, "if you think you're backing out of marrying me, Killian Jones, you can just forget it. We will be getting married tomorrow. Got that, Captain?" Her hands cupped his jaw, forcibly bringing his lips down to meet hers in a hot, sloppy...sexy kiss that left both of them breathing a little harder when it was over.

Unable to tear his gaze away from her kiss swollen lips, he asked softly, "No second thoughts, Emma?"

"None," she answered quickly, this time going up on her tip toes to kiss him gently. "I'll let you finish getting dressed and go make sure Henry has everything." She trailed her fingers down his chest. "It's okay if you've lost a few pounds. You're still...hard," her fingers reached his stomach, "in more places than one." She winked and with a lingering caress to his hard...parts, she left the room.

A smile bloomed as he studied his bemused reflection. "Bloody hell, I'm a lucky git," he mumbled as he tossed everything he needed into a small suitcase, grabbed his garment bag and left the room.

**Airport**
**Portland, Maine**
**Friday, Mid-Morning**

Killian had been standing with Henry as Liam exited NID's corporate jet, following Ashley, Elsa and Regina, and after a quick whispered conversation with Henry, the two had vanished back into the plane. The next time Liam had appeared, he had been helping Johanna down the stairs and she was carrying a rather large garment bag. As soon as they reached him, she handed him a piece of paper saying, "Be there in one hour to be fitted in your wedding finery," and then pointed at the waiting limo asking, "For us?" Killian nodded, hoping for more of an explanation, but without giving one she quickly headed for the car.

He frowned at Ashley. "What did I miss?"

When she sent a panicked look Elsa's way, Killian knew they were up to something, he just wasn't sure what that something was yet. Finally, Liam came to her rescue. "Don't question it, Killian. Johanna is going with the girls and then will be taking the plane back to Boston shortly."

"But..." he started to say before stopping when he realized that Liam wasn't standing next to him any longer, as he had walked the women...or more specifically, Elsa...to the limo.

"Alright, Brother, what do we need to do?" Liam asked as he walked back to the car Killian hadn't
ventured far from.

"Wait, Liam," Killian looked back toward the jet, "where are Robin and Sean, and why is Henry on there alone?" He ran his hand through his hair sending it flying in several directions.

"It's nothing nefarious, Killian," Liam tried to assure him, "Henry will be going back to Boston to stay with Blue and she will bring him back tomorrow, and Robin and Sean are driving up this afternoon."

Killian kept looking back up at the plane, trying to decide if leaving Henry behind was a good idea when Liam read his mind, assuring him that Henry was in the middle of some X-Box fight with the pilot and would be fine. "You're sure?" he asked one more time.

"I'm sure," Liam confirmed. "Now, let's go see what they chose for you to wear tomorrow."

"But I already have my suit," Killian remarked, as they climbed into the car. "Are you sure you don't know anything?"

Liam held both hands aloft, "Would I keep secrets from you?" and then as if realizing what he said, he winced, and tried again, "I mean..."

Killian reached over and squeezed Liam's shoulder, "I'm glad you're here, Liam," he told him quietly.

"Me too, Killian. Me too," Liam agreed softly.

The Cabin
Portland, Maine
Friday, Mid-Morning

Emma wasn't sure what to expect after Killian and Henry left as he had given her free rein with the decorations, but had been very secretive about the guest plans and the music. Assuming she had several hours at least, she had taken a long bubble bath and was making a cup of hot chocolate when there was a knock on the door. A huge bouquet of pink roses greeted her and hiding behind them were the smiling faces of Ashley, Elsa and Regina.

"What are you doing here?" she exclaimed as they filed past her, uncovering another surprise visitor, "Johanna!" who smiled and lifted her arms, revealing a rather large garment bag that she was holding as if it were the Crown Jewels.

Ashley laughed, "What are we doing here? Did you forget that you're getting married?"

"No, but..." Regina and Elsa held up bags of food and Emma pointed to the kitchen before looking at Ashley in confusion. "I didn't expect you all to get here so early. And Johanna..." Emma opened and closed her mouth several times as the woman's presence was a huge surprise.

"Let's get to the bedroom, Missy. My ride's awaitin'." She gave Emma her patented glare that used to always scare her, Ashley and Ruby when they were young.

Emma pointed to the hall leading to the bedroom and Ashley took pity on her, linked their arms and led her the way she pointed.

"Simple version, Em," Ashley began, "Johanna made you a dress, and as soon as you've tried it on, she will get in the car and be taken back to the jet and go back to Boston to make any alterations."
While she was talking, Johanna had unzipped the bag and revealed the most beautiful dress Emma had ever seen. "Recognize it, Emma?" she was asked quietly.

Emma nodded yes as her eyes filled with tears, "You kept it? All this time?" she asked reverently as she fingered the ivory lace of the wedding dress that she had drawn for herself when she was...fourteen or fifteen.

"I did," Johanna picked up the dress, spreading the laces wide. "You had watched some old movie and the next thing I knew you handed me this sketch and said-"

"...When I get married will you make me this dress?" Emma finished.

"Exactly," Johanna beamed, "now get the proper undergarments and get this on. I've not got all day."

**Fox' Diner**  
**Friday, Noonish**

After being fitted for his suit, Killian took Liam to a place that not only had good food, but also had a shop in the front that sold arts and crafts from local vendors. He had been in there several times during the week with Emma, and when Cleo saw him, he was pleased that she remembered who he was. "Killian, no Emma today?" she joked as she led them to a booth beside a window.

He explained where she was, introduced Liam, and after congratulations, she left to seat other patrons and they were left alone. "She wants Emma to sell her paintings here," he proudly told Liam.

"Is Emma interested?" Liam asked as the waitress left with their order.

"She's not really said much, but it is one of the items on our list of things to discuss." They had put a lot of items on that list, he thought, as before the accident, moving to New York and getting jobs hadn't been something that seemed real. Now, in just a handful of days, the time to truly embrace adulthood would be upon him. What would that be like?

"What's on your mind, little brother?" Liam's quiet question broke into his thoughts.

Killian shrugged his shoulder. "I was just thinking about being an adult," he confessed.

"Must have been deep thoughts if you let me get away with calling you little brother," Liam teased him.

Killian was saved from answering when their fish tacos were set in from of them and both dug in as if they hadn't eaten in days instead of mere hours. Liam finished and, pushing his plate back, leaned on the table. "Killian, I want you to know that I'm proud of the man you've become. Since Mum and Dad's passing I've not been there for you, but that's going to change."

Killian had to swallow the lump that was wedged in his throat, as all he had ever wanted was to make his big brother proud. Hearing the words made it a good day indeed. "I appreciate that, Liam. Much of it can be attributed to Emma." His voice sounded wistful, wishing she was with them.

"I'm sure," Liam responded quietly. "She is a special woman."

"That she is," Killian agreed, "but I believe," he gave Liam a devilish smile, "you have your own special woman." He still got a chill every time he thought of his dream and how in it...Elsa had been what had stood between Liam and him. Was she his brother's fate...just as he had been Emma's?
Liam kept pinching his thigh, reminding himself that this was real! That somehow, he and Killian had come through the storm and were stronger than he could remember being...ever, and much of the thanks was due to Emma...and he had to admit...Elsa. On and off during the day, thoughts of her had floated through his mind. Hell, who was he kidding? On and off...mostly on...through the week, she had been on his mind. And without Henry around, that excuse to keep her close had evaporated and she had slept in her bed...and he in his.

He owed her a date...but between catching up at work and coordinating the guest situation for the wedding they hadn't seen much of each other and...he found he missed her. When he had stopped by her apartment this morning to pick her up, he hadn't been able to help himself, because the second she had opened her door, he'd had to kiss her. "She's a special woman," he heard Killian say.

"Wait...what did you say?" He pulled his head out of the clouds where he had been reliving his morning taste of honey.

"I said," Killian sent him a cheeky grin, "that you seem to have a special woman of your own." Liam watched him arch that one eyebrow while waiting for an answer. "Is there something you wish to share...or ask perhaps?" he teased.

A snort escaped before he could catch it. "Ask? You mean like the birds and the bees?" Killian just shrugged as if to say whatever, and Liam rolled his eyes. "I seem to remember answering a few questions for you one time when you were too embarrassed to ask Mum and Dad."

Killian shook his head, a pink tint covering his cheeks. "I'd forgotten about that. Mum would have been so embarrassed if I would have asked her."

"Maybe," Liam smiled fondly, "Mum was usually willing to answer most of my questions. It was only periodically that she sent me to Dad."

"Good memories," Killian murmured, "but...I'm still waiting. You and Elsa? Now talk."

Liam wasn't planning to say much but when he opened his mouth and the words spilled out, he let them flow.

**The Cabin**  
**Friday, Noonish**

Emma finished the last bite of her bagel and wrapped her hands around her mug of hot chocolate and leaned back in her chair. "Those were delicious." She took a sip of her drink.

"Weren't they," Elsa agreed, "Liam and I stopped and got them on the way to the airport this morning."

"Oh?" Emma felt her eyebrows go sky high, "Do tell."

"I'd like to hear too," Regina seconded the statement.

Ashley smiled at Emma. "This kind of feels like when we were asking you about all those pictures you drew when you first met Killian."

"It does," Emma teased Elsa, "and I bet your face is just as red as mine was at the time." Elsa's smile was soft...smitten for sure, and the way she kept rubbing her hands together said the story had to be good.
Elsa could feel her face flaming the more they teased her, but yes, she deserved it as she could totally remember asking Regina and Emma the same things when they first started having feelings for Robin and Killian. "Don't we have to run some errands before our appointment at the The Glass Slipper?" she tossed out, thinking that might save her for a few hours.

Emma glanced at the clock and sighed, "Yes we do, but..." she wagged her finger playfully at Elsa, "don't think this saves you for the entire weekend. A few hours of reprieve at best."

Elsa felt her whole body relax when Emma put her dishes away and left to go get ready. She relaxed even more when Ashley and Regina both left to call their spouses, leaving her alone to do what she had become quite good at...taking a walk down memory lane. And boy, she licked her lips, this morning’s memory was hot.

She hadn't seen him much during the week but that didn't mean that he hadn't spent an exceptional amount of time in her mind. And her dreams, well...those were getting rather steamy...and now that she'd gotten an eyeful of the goods, well...she was interested in seeing them in action. Just the thought made certain parts of her dance...and dance.

Finding herself nervous and anxious about his arrival this morning, she had tried to keep busy but when his knock had sounded, she didn't know if she should run or walk sedately. In the end she did neither...most likely a bit of both...but when she opened the door, she was toast. Burned to a crisp by the laser stare of his blue eyes as they seared into hers. Singed...every single hair...singed.

Goosebumps collected on all the exposed skin and the only thing that went through her mind was that she was going to tell Emma she finally understood. Emma had spoken about there being something about Killian that made her lady parts scream ME, ME, and now...she knew what that meant...as that was exactly what hers were doing.

"Hi," she greeted him rather breathlessly, as just seeing him made her forget to breathe.

"Elsa," he stalked her, there was no other word, following her into the apartment and shutting the door with his foot. "Before we go, I need..."

"What?" She watched, waiting for him to make the next move.

He reached his hand out, urging her to come to him and with no hesitation she took the last step and practically leaped into his arms. He lifted, holding her tightly against his strong chest, his lips nearly consuming hers with their heat.

Their lips communicated in a language meant for lovers.

A kiss full of primal need.

A kiss full of heat.

A kiss that, by the time it was over, left neither one of them untouched. A time when two became one, so tightly were they intertwined.

Liam groaned as he created distance enough between them, while his body, still shaking with need, calmed...the edge slowly receding...but if it was like hers, never as far as the time before. "You undo me, Elsa," he sighed against her lips. "I don't know how much longer I can resist."

But then he had realized the time and they had hurried to get bagels and then to the airport where
they were meeting Robin, Regina and Roland. Question was, how did she let him know she didn't want his resistance?

~~~CS~~~

"Earth to Elsa. Earth to Elsa," Regina repeated several times in a row, but Elsa had a dreamy smile and appeared to be lost inside a special memory and wasn't responding. "What do you think?" she asked Ashley, who had just walked into the room.

Ashley snapped her fingers in front of Elsa's face a few times, and while there were eye blinks, for the most part Elsa's smile remained beatific. "Maybe she's asleep and having such a good dream, she doesn't want to wake up."

Regina's brow went up in thought, but then she looked back at her friend, "With her eyes open?"

Ashley shrugged, "Stranger things have happened."

"Boy, I can vouch for that," Emma joined the conversation when she came back into the room. "When I had amnesia, one of my dreams was so real I woke with a hickey...and some very graphic memories. In fact, I need to get those drawings back," she murmured absently.

Regina looked at Ashley, who mouthed 'no clue' and wondered what it was about those Jones men that seemed to have a bit of mystical powers surrounding them. But, she was quick to think, she appreciated Robin's mystical powers just fine, as often as possible, in fact as he was quite good with his-

"Regina," her name being called by Elsa interrupted a good memory and she turned to notice that Elsa had once again returned to the room with them.

"I'm right here." She noticed Elsa's fair complexion had a bit of color to it. "Welcome back," she smirked.

Elsa just shook her head and busied herself cleaning around the kitchen until Emma called them to leave.

~~~CS~~~

After leaving the cabin, they stopped by the Castle Lodge where the reception would be held, and Emma showed them the horse drawn carriage that would bring her, Elsa and Ashley to the park.

"Just like in your fairytales," Ashley hugged her friend and sighed, "I'm so happy for you."

Emma sniffed, "I'm happy for me too." Then she giggled and linked her arm with Ashley's as they walked toward the dining room. "Except my Prince Charming is Captain Hook. Go figure."

"Fate," Elsa intoned.

"True," Emma agreed. "Okay," she signaled to Regina, "I need your help with the food, as you've been to more fancy parties. If it were up to me we'd have-"

"-Grilled cheese and onion rings," her three friends finished her sentence.

"Exactly."

"Nothing wrong with grilled cheese and onion rings," Regina told her.
"I know but with a fairytale dress..."

"You want fairytale food." Regina finished.

"Please?" Emma asked.

"I'm game." Regina smiled.

As they walked into the dining area to meet Katheryn, the wedding planner for the Lodge, the many delicious smells emanating from the kitchen were so heavenly they were almost overwhelming. "Mmm, do we get to taste?" Elsa whined. "I'm hungry."

~~~CS~~~

When Emma drove away from Castle Lodge, she was happy with the final choices they had made and ready to be pampered at The Glass Slipper, but...then Elsa asked about the wedding location and well...the car had a mind of its own. As she drove the few miles to the cliff, she reminded them that it was the place Killian had first proposed back in May and told them of its reputation for playing music to reunite lovers who had separated.

"It's the strangest feeling to hear music when you know in your head there are no musicians anywhere around," she reflected absently as she turned into the park.

Ashley met her eyes in the rearview mirror. "You mean...like actual music? Not just the whistling sound the wind makes sometimes?"

"Like actual music," she answered, but then quickly amended, "but before my memory returned, I couldn't hear words to the song, just the promise that Killian and I had made to each other the first time we were here."

Parking, they stepped out of the car and the first thing Emma noticed was how quiet it was...peaceful. The music had been hushed as the cliff had completed its legendary task. It had reunited her with Killian...and with herself.

The feelings that had surrounded her last Saturday when she had first arrived, she kept to herself. She didn't know why, but for some reason those were hers, not meant to be shared with others...except with Killian...her True Love.

Her friends asked questions...about the rock...the beads...the reunion...but, as if sensing her reluctance to share much, they mainly stood on the edge of the cliff and gazed out at the sea, absorbing the sheer awesomeness of being so far above the water and observing the power of the waves, realizing that many years ago the water would have covered their feet when the tide rolled in. But as time went on, the power behind those waves had subtly chipped away at the soil, until they were separated by distance, yet...still...very much connected.

The thought that there was a parallel there between the cliff and her and Killian this past summer was interesting, especially in light of how they had been reunited. That even though there had been a distance between them that seemed insurmountable...their connection continued. And the longer they had been separated the stronger their bond had grown.

Powerful.

That's love.

"Emma," Elsa cut into her thoughts, "where will you be standing and what kind of decorations have
"You planned?"

Shaking her head a bit to clear the deep thoughts, Emma took them back to where they had parked the car. Spread out in front of them was an inverted V, with the point being where the rock stood and then the sea stretched as far as the eye could see.

"Okay," Emma pointed, "imagine a field of pink roses covering the ground," she emphasized, "not in baskets as was typical at weddings."

She pointed to where the chairs would be placed, simple...white, just a handful, really, as they hadn't wanted a large crowd. Just their closest friends and family...and them. "And then," she smiled, remembering that her sketchbook was in the car, and getting it showed them, "a raised dais...Elsa and Ashley here...over here...Liam and Robin.

"And in the center, surrounded by the pink flowers, will be Killian and me." Her eyes grew misty thinking that this time tomorrow she would be Emma Swan-Jones. Batting the tears away quickly, she looked into the smiling faces of Ashley, Elsa and Regina. Three strong women, who had come into her life at different times, yet who were now connected to her for life. Not just through their friendship, but with Regina and it seemed Elsa too...the connection between the men they loved. "I wish Ruby were here," she said quietly, thinking that even Victor had come into her life via a connection...as Blue's physician and...as Killian's friend.

Ashley put her arm around her shoulders as they walked back to the car. "It was supposed to be a surprise, but we have instructions to Skype again tonight."

"Thanks, Ash," Emma gave her a grateful smile. "Let the pampering begin."

They climbed into the car, ready for an afternoon of massages, facials and fun conversation. On top of the list...Elsa's growing feelings for Liam, a topic of interest to all.

**B&B**

**Friday Afternoon**

When Killian had pulled him and Robin aside at the reunion and told them that he wanted to sing his vows, and that he wanted them, and not just Robin to sing harmony, Liam had almost called him a blooming lunatic. But the excitement on his face had been infectious and the way that Killian and Robin had included him in the planning had made him feel honored and humbled, even if he hadn't known what the hell they were talking about some of the time.

Once home the reality of the situation had set in and he had decided that it was not Killian who was the blooming lunatic, but that title belonged to him, one Liam Jones, for even agreeing to such an idea, especially when he pulled out his old Gibson and ran his fingers along the strings. Out of tune, and since he hadn't played the thing in forever, his memory was faulty for some of the chords. Thankfully he could find just about anything on YouTube, and after a few 'lessons' he felt comfortable enough to attempt to learn the chords to the song. Of course, that had been in the privacy of his own apartment, not here in front of his brother...or more terrifying, the possibility of making a mistake and messing up his brother's wedding day.

"Are you going to admire it or play the thing?" Killian laughed at the way that he was running his fingers over the battered old case.

"Sorry, Brother, I was just thinking about when our father used to play this thing." He improvised, not wishing to give Killian anything to worry about. "Do you remember?" Opening the case, he pulled out the guitar and settled on a chair close to where Killian was already tuning his instrument.
"Aye," Killian smiled, "I remember he used to bring it out for Mum's birthday, right?"

"He did," Liam agreed, "and we'd all take turns singing her favorite songs. And then inevitably—"

"—she and father would end up getting lost in old stories," Killian finished.

"Aye."

"I miss them," Killian said quietly, "especially at times like this. Do you think they would have liked Emma?"

That they would have liked Killian's choice in wives much more so than Liam's own, there was no doubt. "I think they would have loved your Emma," Liam reassured him. "And even though they aren't here in body, they are here in a way, as they are in your heart."

Killian sent him a grateful smile. "Thank you, Liam." Then his smile turned cheeky, "Now are we going to play or what?"

_Baby steps_, he thought, his heart lighter than he could remember it being in quite some time.

~~~CS~~~

Killian had known that Liam had changed, but just how much, he hadn't been aware of until today, and spending so much time together, just them...talking...laughing...sharing, the memory of singing with their parents something he hadn't thought about in...forever. _It felt good_, he thought as he absently tuned his guitar, thinking how unfamiliar it felt in his arms, as he hadn't played much all summer. With Emma gone, it had been as if the music was lost...he had been lost in more ways than one.

But now...Emma was back, and his life was better than he could imagine, and his music...well, the song he was planning to sing kept speaking to him. He thought that meant his music had returned, or was he just hoping?

Emma brought music into his world.

Emma brought love into his life.

And one look was all it took, the words in the song aligning with what had occurred in his life. He strummed the opening notes, watching Liam's fingers as they fumbled on the strings. "I thought you said you remembered how to play," he teased as Liam hit yet another wrong note.

Liam gave him a disgusted look, "I do, it's just..." This time he was able to get through the opening bars without a mistake, but then it was Killian who played the wrong chord.

"Bloody hell," Killian exclaimed, starting the process all over again. "Perhaps this was an awful idea," he admitted as he tried again.

"Afraid you'll botch up your vows?"

Killian studied Liam, his face serious...concerned...empathetic, not something he had much experience with when it came to his big brother, but something he thought he could get used to...and pretty quickly, it would seem. "Aye. I don't want Emma to be disappointed on our wedding day."

Liam laid his guitar down on a nearby chair and moved closer. "Killian, do you love Emma?" Killian gave him an 'are you daft?' look, and he then continued with, "And she loves you?"
"Bugger all, Liam. You know the answer to that question. Of course, Emma loves me." In his agitation, he could feel his jaw clenching tighter and tighter.

"Then don't you think the only way Emma is going to be disappointed is if you don't try?" Liam patted him on the shoulder, picked up his guitar and resumed strumming as if he'd never gotten up.

Was that true? Would Emma be upset only if he didn't do it? The more he thought about it, the more he decided that he would be upset if he didn't try it. The song spoke to him, and through it he was sending a message to Emma that she was the only one for him and he loved her unconditionally, and with those thoughts he felt his confidence return once again. And this time when he played, he sounded better. "Thank you, Liam."

"Anytime, little bother," Liam quipped.

"That's younger brother," Killian corrected, starting a chord all over again, just as the door opened.

"And you gents call that music?" Robin entered the room, all cocky attitude and sparkling eyes as if he had been up to something. "It's a good thing a professional is here to show you how it's done."

Killian arched a brow and watched his best mate pull up a chair and lovingly stroke his guitar before slinging the strap over his shoulder and strumming a few chords. When his finger slipped and the notes squawked, Killian let out a snort. "You were saying?"

"Just warming up," Robin retorted sheepishly. "Don't get your knickers in a twist. Let's go again."

Several hours later, Liam had finally convinced Killian that they needed to be on their way to Blackbeard's Tavern to meet with the boys. Killian hadn't stopped fretting over the song, even though they had played it no less than a hundred times and it sounded fine. He couldn't quite understand getting that worked up over a woman...but he did have to admit that being near Elsa worked him up quite a bit. Singing for her...well, that was a worry for another time.

"Are you sure we shouldn't have gone through the song one more time?" Killian asked anxiously.

"Killian..." Liam groaned, thinking that his brother was beginning to sound like a broken record.

"It's fine Killian," Robin reiterated. "Any more right now and my fingers are likely to bleed."

"Don't be cheeky, Robin. It's not becoming," Killian retorted.

"Boys, behave. We're here and only grown-ups are allowed." Liam opened the door and he and Robin manipulated Killian to a table back in the corner where a few friends were waiting.

"Congratulations, Killian." Graham handed him a beer.

"About time you showed up," Arthur called from across the table.

One after another of Killian's friends from his time in Boston shook his hand and congratulated him, and once again Liam felt like a fool for being such an arse. When a beer was shoved into his hand, he looked up in surprise into Robin's serious face. "I'm supposed to tell you to stop."

Liam frowned, "What?" He shook his head, wondering if he heard him correctly, "What did you say?"

"Your watchdog gave me instructions." Robin assumed what Liam thought might be a more
feminine posture, by cocking his hip and flipping invisible hair over a shoulder. "She said...'Now Robin, if after Killian sees all of his friends, Liam gets all pensive, give him a drink and tell him I said stop." He shrugged, "So I did, although I have no clue what she meant."

"Elsa said that?" Liam asked quietly, amazed at how well that woman knew him.

"She did," Robin told him softly. "She's a good person."

Liam agreed nodding his head. "Elsa's the best."

"She cares about you, but," Robin's smile disappeared, "just remember...if you hurt her, well..."

"I don't plan to hurt her," and then he surprised himself by admitting, "I care about her, too." He sent Robin a grateful smile and nodded toward the table of rowdy men. "Go have fun, as these are your friends too. I'll be fine."

And as the night wore on, Liam found that he was fine and even enjoyed himself immensely. Hearing about Killian's years at Boston showed him a lot about Killian—the man—someone he was coming to admire quite a bit.

As the evening wound down and the guests disappeared one by one, Killian leaned over and whispered, "Where's Nemo? I thought he was flying down with you today."

"Last minute change of plans," Liam explained. "Nemo and Cora will be stopping in Boston and bringing the rest of the guests with them tomorrow. He said I'm to keep you calm."

"Calm?" Killian questioned, "Why the bloody hell would you need to keep me calm?"

Liam shrugged. "He said all grooms are nervous."

"Not this groom," Killian scoffed repeating again, "Not this groom."

_Famous last words_, Liam thought as he excused himself to check-in with Nemo.

**The Cabin**

**Friday, Late Night**

Emma's day with some of her closest friends had been perfect, from the dress fitting, to the spa, and ending with dinner and a Skype session with Ruby, but she couldn't sleep. While her friends were sleeping soundly, she was wide awake. Her mind wouldn't slow down and her arms...those were empty. Was Killian missing her too?

She crawled out of the bed and padded out onto the patio. The sky was black this close to the sea and between the gentle breeze and the soothing sound from the waves, she began to relax. Leaning against a column, she stared up at the stars and just like on Sonata Cliff, she could hear a song.

Lois Lane sang it to Superman, but many of the words could be used to describe how she felt about a super man, her very own Captain Hook...one Killian Jones. And tomorrow she was going to marry him. "How did that infant who was left on the steps of a group home just hours after birth get so lucky?" she murmured to the dark summer sky.

As the breeze blew through the sea grass, the notes grew louder. "Can you hear me, Killian?"

Across town, the men had turned in early, and just as he was slipping into sleep, Killian heard Emma's voice. It was so clear that he picked up his phone making sure that she hadn't called, but
no...she wasn't there. Silence, until notes were ringing inside his head and he heard her beautiful voice. Pulling on a pair of sleep pants, he took his phone and stepped outside. She was there...in the wind...in his mind.

"Can you read my mind?
Do you know what you do to me?

The same things you do to me, Swan.

I don't know who you are
Just a friend from another star

You know me, Emma. Sometimes better than I know myself.

Here I am like a kid out of school
 Holding hands with a god
 I'm a fool
 Will you look at me
 Quivering
 Shivering
 You can see right through me

I'm a fan of every part of you, you should know that by now

Can you read my mind?
Can you picture the things I'm thinking of?

Our future; you, me, Henry...and perhaps...

Wondering why you are
All the wonderful things you are

The words touched a space inside of him that made him question whether he was worthy of having someone as wonderful as his Emma, but she brought out a side of him that he had never known. She made him a better person.

You and I
Could belong to each other
If you need a friend
I'm the one to fly to
If you need to be loved
Here I am
Read my mind

You belong to me, just as I belong to you. I'm here, love. Answer my call.

She needed him, Killian thought as he hit the Emma button and waited for her to answer. She needed him and he...needed her.

"Killian?" her soft voice came over the line.

"I'm here, love. I heard your call."

Fort Williams Park
Saturday Afternoon

Killian was nervous...and he didn't know why. He didn't think it had anything to do with pledging his life to Emma's, because...if the truth were known, he would have married her two years ago when he had first heard her laugh. She had captured his heart then and loving her had become better than he could have thought possible.

Did it have to do with singing, he couldn't help but wonder. But...he had sung to her many...many times. Was it singing with Liam and Robin for the first time? That didn't seem right either.

Was it that he was singing his vows? That he didn't write them like he said he would?

Or was it the song itself? Maybe...but not because the song wasn't the right song...but because it was the perfect song. He was nervous because this time, the meaning behind the words mattered. This time it meant forever.

"Ready, Killian?" Liam and Robin asked, both carrying their guitars, with Henry following behind carrying his.

"I've got your guitar," Henry told him, pounding hard enough on the body that Killian winced and bit his tongue to keep from saying something he shouldn't.

"Watch it there, Henry," Liam said gently, "guitars are like women and must be treated delicately."

Henry side-eyed Liam for a few seconds and then as if a lightbulb went off, he smiled and nodded his head, "Oh, I get it." He rearranged it in his arms so his hands clasped tightly to the waist of the guitar and its headstock rose up along his head and he started swaying, "Like this? Isn't this the way you were treating Elsa the other day, all delicately and all?"

A laugh burst from Killian and Robin simultaneously, and when Liam's speech was rendered incoherent, they laughed even harder, only stopping when The Minors started playing I Can't Help Falling in Love. He met Robin's and Liam's eyes.

"Think she'll show?" Robin quipped taking Killian's guitar from Henry, as he was going to be sitting with Regina and Roland.

"Wanker," Killian shot back, just he had thousands of times in the tenure of their friendship.

"Boys, boys," Liam grinned. Show's on."

As they turned to walk to their places, Henry asked, "What's a wanker?" but thankfully, Regina called for him to go sit before they had to think of a good answer.

Killian jabbed his elbow into Robin's arm and realized he was no longer nervous. "See what you started."

"Me?" Robin frowned at him, "How did...?" was all he managed before they reached where Pastor Lancelot was waiting for them.

"Shall we, gentlemen?" Pastor Lancelot led them close to the edge of the cliff, and after setting their guitars on the stands, they took their places next to him and turned to wait for Emma.

~~~CS~~~

Emma had been pampered, coiffed, and with Johanna, Blue and Green flitting around her in their
jewel-toned outfits, she felt like a fairytale character being dressed for her fairytale wedding. Which was completely fitting, considering her dreams growing up.

Once she was dressed and everyone had left except Ashley and Elsa, the butterflies kicked in and started a swarm. Her day was here.

Her prince was waiting.

But...for some reason, she couldn't get out of her head that something...no, someone was missing. Not Ruby, even though she was missed greatly, but...the woman who had been there for her this past summer...during her darkest times...Doctor Blanchard had been there. Realistically, she knew it made no sense for her doctor, who was very pregnant, to fly across the country...but emotionally, she would have loved to share the day. Even a phone call would have been nice, but...there had been no answer.

"Emma, they're ready for us," Elsa told her, picking up her spray of flowers, ready to go. "Shall we go?"

Was she ready? Unequivocally, yes, she was. "We should." Her vow was that she was going to live in the moment and enjoy each and every second to its fullest.

The horse-drawn carriage added to the fairytale ambiance and the closer they came to Sonata Cliff, the clearer the music. "You two can hear that music too, right?" Their expressions to her question made her laugh. "Just kidding. Killian brought The Minors, from Boston, to play today. Pretty isn't it?"

"I love this song," Elsa hummed.

Emma had to agree that I Can't Help Falling in Love, was both beautiful and romantic and reminded her of her first proposal. Was that on purpose? Would other songs from their courtship make an appearance today and make her cry? Knowing Killian...probably.

The carriage stopped, and as the music continued to play Elsa and Ashley started their walk down the path, the roses parting for their every step.

With a nod from Katheryn, Emma took the first step toward her Happy Beginning.

~fin

I hope the reunions were everything that you wanted. Drop me a line or two and let me know. Next week is Chapter 27 as well as a Promise compilation. See you then.
Chapter 27

Chapter Summary

And they live happily......

*And here is the final chapter.*

*A few new songs.*

*Here and Now* can be heard [here](#).
*Can't Fight This Feeling* can be heard [here](#).
*Truly* can be heard [here](#).
*Time of My Life* can be heard [here](#).

Chapter 27

**Sonata Cliff**

**Fort Williams Park**

**Saturday Afternoon, September 3, 2016**

Stepping out of the carriage, the train of her dress trailing behind and the smell of roses surrounding her, Emma felt like a princess. A princess who was getting the fairy tale ending just like she always imagined. And waiting for her at the end was her very own Captain Hook, disguised as Prince Charming. Or was that wrong? Was he...Prince Charming disguised as Captain Hook?

Perhaps...he was both, but what mattered the most was that he...was hers...and...she was his.

With the path laid out before her, she hadn't realized how long and winding it really was...much like life. Much like her life and her path to happiness with Killian. Their journey hadn't been straight, but full of curves and obstacles, and through it all their love had grown...and strengthened. And now with every step she took along the path of roses, she drew closer to where he waited.

As Elsa rounded the curve ahead, she looked back and sent Emma a smile, and for some reason things got real and she could feel the tears gathering...just behind her eyes. She blinked furiously to clear her vision, focusing on the music...for without words, each individual note could be heard clearly. Rising and falling, they resonated in her head, seeping under her skin and making it feel alive, bringing with it the ever-present butterfly swarm that created goosebumps and heat. Bringing with it love...the love her man felt for her...and that she felt...for him.

When Ashley disappeared around the bend, Emma felt that perhaps that bend represented the last hurdle that had been overcome this summer. And around it would be her future...waiting for her to grab onto it with both hands and never...never let it go.

The white chairs ahead signaled she was getting closer, and as she followed the arch around...he was there. The tears she had kept under control broke free...and as her eyes collided with his, she could feel his love and it took every ounce of strength she possessed not to hike up her dress and run into his arms.
Killian hadn't been prepared for his first sight of Emma, dressed in her beautiful fairytale gown. She truly looked like a princess and he felt Liam steady him as his knees nearly gave out. The sun peeking through the leaves above them caused her blonde hair to shimmer, casting a halo, creating the illusion of an angel. She was so many things to him and that she loved him...loved him was the most extraordinary feeling.

She was his friend.

She was his lover.

And today...she would finally...finally be his wife.

Her steps through the flowers were slow and measured...controlled even...as if she was focusing to stay in time with the music. Her gaze steady, never straying far, just like her love, her faith and her trust had never wavered...never changed.

And then...he saw her hesitate...nearly stumble, and as her wide eyes met his, he knew that she had just then seen the surprise guests. She questioned with her gaze...but with a subtle nod toward Liam, he told her that it was his brother's surprise. Somehow, he had known that the day wouldn't be complete without the Doctors Blanchard and Nolan.

Her smile turned sunny and with a silent 'thank you' sent Liam's way, her sure steps were once again established, and she moved closer to where he waited. He watched as there was one more surprise in store. One more person important to her that, while they had tried, had been unable to appear in the flesh. Yet with the amazing invention of technology, she could be present for their wedding. When Emma reached the aisle where Sister Blue was sitting, he saw her eyes immediately fill, as waving back from an iPad screen was her friend, Ruby. From all the way in Africa, she was still...a part of their day.

Emma had known seeing Blue here, on her special day, would be emotional, and a quick glance was all she had allowed but then...there was Ruby...waving...crying...smiling at her and her feet stopped. Sending a panicked look Killian's way, he came and rescued her...just as he had in so many ways.

"I've got you, Swan." His steady hand took hers, and as his strength flowed into her, she took the last few steps...ready to pledge her life to his.

As Pastor Lancelot started speaking, Killian knew he should listen, but now that she was standing next to him, he found that his heart was racing...his throat was tight and his breath...was gone. The moment they had been working toward for two years was here...and with everything inside...the time had come to share his heart.

Emma watched Killian's hands tremble as he took his guitar from Liam, but then before he even played a note, he had set it back on the stand. When he took her hands in his and looked back to her, the vulnerability she saw in his eyes nearly stopped her heart. What had he chosen to sing that was causing that look? Was it one of their songs or had he found another whose lyrics seemed to have been written just for them? As soon as the opening bars of the song began, she had her answer...it was a song he had chosen to save and sing just to her...on their wedding day. And that he was singing with Robin...and with Liam, once again emphasized just how far they had come...as a family.

Killian had planned to play and sing...but when he turned and took his guitar, it didn't feel right and changing his mind he set it back on the stand. He wanted to be close to her...he wanted to touch her
as he sang. Sending Liam and Robin a quick look, he was relieved when they read his mind and, as if it was planned, started the song without him.

Taking a step closer to the woman who held his heart, he took her hands and with a gentle squeeze, whispered, "This is for you." With a calming breath, he sang *Here and Now*, sharing with her what was in his heart.

"One look in your eyes and there I see
Just what you mean to me
Here in my heart I believe
Your love is all I'll ever need
Holdin' you close through the night
I need you"

As Killian sang, Emma found herself drowning in the love she saw in his blue eyes. So powerful, it stole her very breath. So strong, it kept her from falling. So potent, it intoxicated her.

"I look in your eyes and there I see
What happiness really means
The love that we share makes life so sweet
Together we'll always be
This pledge of love feels so right
And, ooh, I need you"

As he sang the second verse, the magic of the cliff came alive and the wind rustled the leaves, bringing forth full orchestral sounds to join with the guitars. Killian's eyes flared, his hands squeezed hers and goosebumps climbed along her skin. When the emotions grew so big and one lone tear spilled over and rolled down her cheek, his hands cupped her face, his thumbs softly whisking them away. She felt so treasured...so loved...so happy.

*Here and now*
*I promise to love you faithfully
You're all I need
*Here and now*
*I vow to be one with thee
Your love is all I need*

As Killian sang the last few lines of the chorus, his voice grew huskier, sending the butterflies in Emma's stomach swarming and her heart fluttering. She sent him a watery smile, "Thank you," kissed his hands, and added, "it was beautiful."

Emma had spent all week trying to come up with exactly what to say to Killian to tell him how she felt. But the more she tried to concentrate, the more she realized that mere words would ever express what was fully in her heart. That Killian, the man that she loved with everything that she was, had expressed them already...that he knew her...and he knew them. Kissing him tenderly, she began her vow, "I love you, Killian. And you have proven time and again that you know me...better even than I know myself."

His smile warmed her, giving her strength to share what was in her heart. "The first time our eyes met, you were singing...and you sang the lines, 'Hello, is it me you're looking for?' The simple answer was yes. I had dreamed of you...almost, my entire life, I just called you by your moniker...Captain Hook." She winked when he rolled his eyes and continued, "Ruby said it was fate...and here we are."
Blinking rapidly to stem the tears threatening to take her voice, she pushed on, "Our first dance was to the song *Unforgettable*, and this summer, I learned just how true that really was, as through that dark time there was a light...and that was you. That even though I didn't know your name...didn't know my name...I knew that you were my safe harbor...and here, in this magical place...your kiss made me whole."

She could hear sniffing behind her and knew that if she turned and looked over her shoulder at Elsa and Ashley, their eyes would be filled too. Pulling her hand free, she wiped the tears away with the back of her hand and resumed, "The night after our first dance, you sang the words, 'When I fall in love, it will be forever,' and then the song continued with, 'And the moment that I can feel that you feel the same way too, Is when I fall in love with you.' Those words are so powerful, as they convey so much about our relationship. We have always been in sync...on equal ground, and loving you is not something I have to think about. It is as natural as breathing, and it feels like I've loved you forever.

"Our love grew, and then at Christmas you shared a song that your parents had danced to and sang, 'I've always believed in dreams and that fantasies somehow come true,' and here you are. Every dream and fantasy I've ever had come true."

Taking another moment, Emma swallowed and gestured around them, and finished, "In this place...in front of our friends and family, I promise you I'll never say goodbye. That by looking through the eyes of love, I can see my life...our life...shining, and know that no matter the mountains, love will always lift us up where we belong."

The entire time she was talking, Killian's heart was in his throat and his hands and legs trembled, overcome with the amount of love flowing from her. He wanted to take her in his arms and kiss those soft, pink lips so badly that he almost didn't hear Pastor Lancelot give him permission.

"You may kiss the bride was barely out of his mouth before he gave Emma a wolfish smile, and she was in his arms and his lips were on hers. He couldn't get close enough...she was seeping into skin...surrounding him...consuming him with her love.

Only the fact that they were in front of others kept him sane, and as they walked back up the aisle, this time as man and wife, the magic returned and the music from their courtship, serenaded their every step.

**Castle Lodge**  
**Portland, Maine**  
**Saturday, Late Afternoon**

When Emma walked into the room where their reception was being held and they were announced as Mr. and Mrs. Killian Jones, she had a moment where it all seemed like a dream. Like one of those fleeting images that ran through her brain this summer, and when she would draw them, she never knew if they were real or if they were her life. The feeling was...almost surreal.

As if sensing something was off, Killian nuzzled her ear. "Alright, Swan?"

His hot breath stirred her senses just like always, and that, she knew, was real. "I'm just happy." She gazed up at him, letting him see everything she was feeling.

Killian's eyes widened and, surprising her, he twirled her into his arms, dipping her for a swoon-worthy kiss. When he let her up, she was breathless. "Wow," she sighed.

He lifted a brow, sending her a devilish grin. "I'll take that as a compliment."
She opened her mouth to make a smart comeback, but caught sight of Doctor Blanchard. "Oh, we have to say hello," and pulled Killian over to where the doctors were sitting.

"Emma," Mary Margaret stood up to hug her, "the ceremony was beautiful."

"I...I can't believe you're here. I mean..." she waved her hand in front of the pregnant belly.

Mary Margaret laughed. "Your new brother-in-law can be very persuasive. Even sent a private plane for us."

"He did that?" Emma murmured looking over to where Liam was standing next to Elsa. "It was a great surprise to see you, Doc-"

"-you're no longer my patient, Emma. Please call me Mary Margaret."

Emma spent a few minutes answering questions regarding her continued progress before Mary Margaret's smile turned secretive and she moved them away from the men. "I brought you the rest of your things from you room at Anita's Place, including," her voice became even softer, "your drawings."

"Oh..." As in quite vivid detail, Emma remembered what she had drawn and could attest to the fact that, while her drawings were good, they didn't quite live up to the real thing.

Mary Margaret grinned at her embarrassment. "I didn't look...much," she winked, "but they are all in a large envelope."

Emma felt her cheeks heat up even more, but couldn't keep the grin off her face. "I thank you for bringing them...and not looking much. I was thinking about them the other day."

"Well," Mary Margaret began, "you know Ariel would display..."

"Haha," Emma laughed, "I think not."

They spoke a few moments longer, and then it was time for the meal to be served. After making sure Mary Margaret and David were seated, Emma followed Killian to the head table. Once they were seated, she finally got a chance to look out on the audience and couldn't believe how many people had come. "Killian, how did these people know we were getting married?"

He sent her a side-eye glance. "Blue, Ashley and Elsa, I believe."

"And all your friends?"

"Hmm, I was told Robin had his hand in that." He took a drink of his champagne. "It was quite the surprise to see them last night at the bar."

"Nice," she murmured, her eyes on his lips.

"Perfect," he responded before leaning in steal a kiss. When she couldn't take her eyes off of him, he squeezed her hand and sent her a smirk. "Stop looking at me like that, Mrs. Jones," he quipped before turning to say something to Liam, who was sitting on his other side.

Emma thought about denying that she was looking at him a certain way, but smirked instead and went back to eating.

~~~CS~~~
Liam watched Emma and Killian as they danced to the song *Up Where We Belong*, and thought his brother had never looked happier. And the smile on Emma's face matched the one on Killian's.

Blue put her hand on his arm. "Thank you for helping make their day special."

Liam watched them a little longer, before answering softly, "It was..." His initial reaction was to say it was the least he could do...but then he caught sight of Elsa and how she kept telling him to give himself a break. "I was happy to help. They deserve happiness after the tough summer."

"That they do," Blue agreed, just as an announcement was made that the wedding party should join in the dancing. "Go dance with your girl. I'll be fine."

Her dark eyes were filled with merriment when she told him to go dance with his girl, making him rethink her timing when she interrupted them last weekend. Not having to be told twice, his eyes found Elsa and, wasting no time, she was in his arms...again. "You look beautiful, Sweet Elsa."

"I... Thank you," she smiled demurely, her fingers playing with the hairs at the base of his neck, creating an awareness in his hair follicles he didn't even know existed.

As one song ended, and as the next song began, he kept her in his arms, gently swaying to the music. "Killian told me that the music is all meaningful to him and Emma. Do you know when this one was played?"

The song was the romantic ballad, *When I Fall in Love*, and he saw a dreamy smile cross Elsa's face. "Killian sang it to her one night when he was playing with The Minors. Pretty, isn't it?"

Liam listened to the song, and as the words, *And the moment I can feel that you feel the same way too. Is when I'll fall in love with you*, and something inside sparked and slowly he manipulated them until they danced out onto a balcony. "Pretty song," he agreed. "Elsa, I," he swallowed, trying to calm his racing pulse, hoping that he wasn't overstepping what he was feeling...what she was feeling. "I want you to know...I'm falling for you. Hard...and fast."

"Oh, Liam," she murmured, "I'm falling for you too."

And because they were on a balcony with relative privacy, he did what he had been wanting to do again since the previous morning: he kissed her. She tasted like champagne, felt like heaven, and for the first time in forever, his future looked bright.

~~~CS~~~

Mary Margaret watched Emma and Killian make the rounds, stopping to speak with their friends, and even though she was eight-months pregnant, she was really happy to be sharing their day. It was very interesting trying to match people that Emma had remembered and drawn pictures of with the real people from her life. She and David had been seated with the Sisters and a couple other women for dinner and something told her that was where the name Blue came from...but Kate, she didn't know. "David, did Emma ever tell you where the name Kate came from?"

"Emma didn't, but Sister Green told me that Emma had a doll growing up and her name was Kate. She also told me a little about Emma and her two friends, Ashley and Ruby. It sounds like they are still really close friends, even now.

"Ruby," Mary Margaret mused, "that could be another word for red, don't you think?"

He just shrugged. "Perhaps. Do you want to dance?"
The band was playing one of her favorite songs, *When I Fall In Love*, and the thought of dancing sounded nice. "I would love to, David. Thank you for asking."

~~~CS~~~

Ashley pointed out to the dance floor. "See the pregnant woman dancing with the fair-headed man? That's the doctor that was treating Emma while she had amnesia, and her husband is the one who performed her jaw surgery." Ashley had to admit the pair had been friendly enough when she had been briefly introduced to them but she was still feeling a bit peeved with all the secrets.

"And they flew out for the wedding? That's interesting," Regina murmured. "Did you ask her why she asked Blue not to tell you all about Emma's memory issues?"

"Oh, I wanted to," Ashley teased, "but didn't think Emma would appreciate me wrestling with her pregnant doctor."

"Hmm," Regina's dark eyes glittered with humor, "perhaps you're right. They were sitting next to the Sisters during the meal, weren't they?"

"Yes, and when they came to take Alex to give me a break, I didn't get anything from them so..." she shrugged her shoulders, "if Ruby were here, she would push the issue...but look at Emma...look at Killian...they finally have it all."

"I know Robin is really happy for his friend," Regina smiled, "he really missed Killian this summer."

Both fell silent for several moments, lost in their own thoughts about what Emma, Killian and Robin had gone through and how they had all come through stronger.

"Be happy for them-" Ashley started.

"-let go of any negative feelings," Regina finished just as Roland came running up to them.

"Dance, 'gina?" Roland dimpled.

"Excuse me, Ashley," Regina winked, "it seems my services are required."

"Have fun," Ashley called as they disappeared onto the dance floor.

~~~CS~~~

Killian had been waiting for an opportunity to say a few words to Mary Margaret, and with Emma dancing with Henry, he took the opportunity to ask her to dance. "I'm not holding you too tightly, am I?" he asked in deference to her pregnant girth where he had left quite a bit of space between their bodies, making dancing feel bit awkward.

She smiled and her eyes twinkled as if she had expected the question. "You're fine, Killian. In fact," she took a small step forward, causing her pregnant belly to periodically brush against him as they danced, "this is fine and my arms don't feel like they're being stretched too far.

He laughed a little self-consciously and sighed, "Sorry about that. It's all new to me."

She laughed. "You'll learn when Emma's pregnant that we're pretty strong."

He glanced over her shoulder as Emma and Henry danced by, and whispered, "She's the strongest person, I know. I...We're all very grateful that you were there for her this summer. She must have felt
so alone." His voice trailed off as that ever-present lump reappeared whenever he thought about what she must have gone through.

"Killian," Mary Margaret interrupted his thoughts, "I think that the fact that you, Emma and all your family and friends have come together to celebrate your wedding says something about the strength and resiliency of you two...and people in general." Her voice was empathetic but what she was saying held a lot of truth and then she continued, "Today is a time for a new beginning...grab hold of that with both hands and enjoy everything life has to offer." Then as if the conversation was getting too deep for certain people, he felt a very decided kick from her unborn child.

"Oh, was that...?" He was in awe at how...real it had felt...how strong.

She laughed lightly. "That was," she confirmed. "Strong, isn't she?"

He shook his head. "Bloody amazing," then realized how that might have sounded, added, "I'm sorry if that sounded rude."

"Don't worry about it," she assured him hurriedly. "Why don't you tell me why your clothes look as if you stepped from the pages of a fairytale?"

---CS---

As the afternoon turned to evening and all of the usual wedding traditions had passed, Emma felt a need for a little air and slipped out onto the balcony. Since the Castle Lodge was built on a cliff high above the Atlantic Ocean, surrounded by large trees, the balcony offered an amazing view and finding a semi-secluded seating area, she sank into a large wicker chair. From this vantage point, the wind blew just enough to stir the still air and bring the rhythmic sound of the waves far below to her ear. With the world at her feet, it didn't take long before her mind had relaxed, bringing with it inner peace and a sense of how right her world really was.

She hadn't been sitting there very long before she heard the steady tap tap of heels headed her way. Emma let out a sigh, before peeking around to see who had searched her out, and was pleasantly surprised when it was Mary Margaret. "Were you looking for me?" she asked, almost hesitantly, as if there was another wedding requirement that they were going to rush her into, even if she needed a little break.

Mary Margaret gave her a look as if she knew exactly what had been running through her mind. "Looking for you, yes...but just so we could talk...not for any other reason." Her direct gaze landed on Emma's face as if she were reading her mind. "Care if I sit down?"

Emma felt a huge smile cross her face. "Please."

She watched the doctor settle on a chair, put her feet up on an ottoman, cross her hands over her stomach and sigh, "This is heaven."

"I know what you mean," Emma agreed. "It's so peaceful here."

Conversation turned to the beauty of the scenery of both Sonata Cliff and Castle Lodge and how different the weather was in Seattle. The longer they spoke the more Emma found herself taking a deep breath...and relaxing.

"Were you feeling a bit overwhelmed in there?" Mary Margaret asked quietly. The surprise she felt by the question must have been evident on her face as her friend's smile grew. "No. I can't read your mind...experience, remember?" She didn't say anything for a few minutes, and then gave Emma the opening that she hadn't realized she needed. "I've seen it all, Emma. I'm here if you want to talk."
Emma sent her a gentle smile, "I've missed our talks," she admitted quietly.

As if sensing something that even Emma couldn't put her finger on, Mary Margaret reached and squeezed Emma's fingers. "It's perfectly normal to feel overwhelmed, Emma. After all, it's only been a week since your memory was returned."

Emma shook her head. "I know...but it makes no sense that I should feel this way."

"Let me see if I can help this make sense," Mary Margaret began in that soothing psychologist's voice. "Let's say you were kept in a dark space for three months...and then were suddenly exposed to bright lights. What would happen?"

Emma grinned, "Oh, that's easy. I wouldn't be able to keep my eyes opened for very long."

"Exactly," Mary Margaret praised her. "How about if you were kept in a sound proof room for three months and then suddenly exposed to noise. But not just any noise...loud noise...like a locomotive or a jack hammer. What would happen?"

"My ears wouldn't be able to handle it for very long," Emma answered.

"That's kind of what's going on with your brain," the doctor tried to explain. "Your brain isn't used to so much stimulation all at once and it reaches a point where it needs a break to regroup."

"How long until I no longer need that?"

Mary Margaret shook her head. "Everyone is different...but give yourself a break. Take naps...but above all talk to Killian...he will understand."

Would he? Emma wondered, but then immediately answered her own question as yes, he would. He would worry but he would understand. "Thank you. I'll try."

"And Emma," she was told, "if you need me...I'm just a phone call away."

Emma's smile was genuine. "But I'm no longer your patient."

"True," Mary Margaret inclined her head, "but I'm your friend and that's infinitely better...so, if you need me, promise you'll call."

"I like knowing that," Emma confessed. "Thank you."

"You're very welcome, Emma. Now," she dimpled, are you ready to go in before your husband comes looking for you?"

Emma rolled her eyes and smiled, "I'm ready."

As they walked back toward the double doors, Mary Margaret linked her arms through Emma's. "So, I was wondering about some of those pictures you drew..."

Emma cut her eyes to sideways, wondering which pictures exactly she was talking about. "Which...?"

Mary Margaret's face turned red. "Oh no, not those," she laughed, "I'm talking about your other drawings. Who's Ella...Red?"

Emma laughed, "Oh, those." And then she went on to talk about her friends Ashley and Ruby and that conversation led to talk about the other picture she had drawn with the three fairies. "See," she
pointed to Sisters' Blue, Green and Astrid, "that would be the-

"Blue, Green and Pink fairies," Mary Margaret finished her sentence. And then she sent Emma a puzzled look. "How does one get from being a...well, a Sister...to dressing like a fairy?"

Emma laughed, "Oh, that's a good story. When Ruby, Ashley and I were around ten or eleven..." By the time they found David and Killian deep in conversation, they both had tears running down their faces, they were laughing so hard.

~~~CS~~~

Killian left Emma talking to Ashley and went looking for Robin, finding him on the periphery of the dance floor watching Regina and Roland dancing. "Looks like you lost your girl," he teased.

Robin grinned, "Good thing it's only to a pint size male or I might have to beat him up."

"Agree. Emma wouldn't like a fight breaking out at our wedding." The laughter died in his voice, "Seriously, though, Robin. Thank you for inviting the guys...singing with me...hell, for saving me from myself when we were traveling around England. I would never be where I am now, without..." He choked up, unable to continue.

Robin put his arm around him as they continued to watch Regina and Roland. "You would have done the same for me...and besides...you helped me find my own happy ending." He sent Killian a grin reminding him of everything they had been through since meeting when they were eighteen-years-old. Some good times...some bad...but all important as they became the men they were today.

A waiter walked by with champagne glasses on a tray and Killian snagged a couple. "To friendship." He tapped Robin's glass.

"To happy ever afters," Robin responded.

~~~CS~~~

Emma and Killian were talking to Liam and Elsa, when *I'll Never Say Goodbye* came on, and thinking Killian would ask her to dance, was surprised when Liam asked first. Killian pulled her back snug against him and playfully teased his brother, "This is my woman, Liam. Dance with your own woman." He looked pointedly at Elsa.

Liam had turned bright red but he had still managed to toss back, "I'll just borrow her for a bit, then," and led her onto the dance floor.

~~~CS~~~

Killian watched his wife...*his wife*, he thought again, and his brother walk onto the dance floor, and couldn't help the little thrill of exhilaration that ran through his system. This was exactly what he had always wanted, and it was perfect.

"Care to dance?" He and Elsa moved to the dance floor and as they danced, just listening to the words of the song, he realized they still had a powerful impact on him.

Being around Liam, yesterday...and today...Killian couldn't believe it was the same man that had shown up at his apartment a mere ten days ago...much less the man he was last May. So much change and much of it due to Elsa. "You and my brother...are good together," he said quietly. "It's nice to see him so happy." They danced by Emma and his brother and the way Elsa's eyes lingered on Liam made him smile. Did Liam know how she felt?
"Liam makes me happy," Elsa murmured, almost as if she hadn't realized she said it out loud.

Killian knew if Elsa would have said that to Emma, she would have come up with twenty questions...but he would save that for his wife. His job would be to tease his brother and help him along...if necessary.

~~~CS~~~

Liam smiled and took Emma in his arms. "You don't mind dancing with me...do you?" he asked, almost hesitantly once they were moving.

"No," she smiled at him, "I wanted to thank you for getting Mary Margaret and David here."

He looked across the room to where Mary Margaret and David were in conversation with Ashley and Sean, and said quietly, "Your Doctor Blanchard is a special person. I felt she deserved to be here...almost more than anyone else."

"She is," Emma agreed, "and thank you, again."

They danced in silence for a few moments, the music just as beautiful as she remembered. Liam tilted his head as if he were listening to the words. "Speaking of the good doctor, I understand this was a song you remembered. Killian told you that it was a favorite of our parents, right?"

"He did," Emma nodded her head. "He told me you two would catch them dancing all the time."

"Aye." Liam sighed, "when mum and dad were dancing it was as if they were the only two people around. They had a special relationship." He was quiet for so long, Emma almost filled in the silence but then he whispered, "Much like you and Killian."

Emma blinked rapidly, trying to stem the flow of tears, and while she wasn't entirely successful, only a couple trickled down her cheeks. "Thank you, Liam," she said quietly. "That means a lot."

He gave her a lopsided smile as the song was finishing and she couldn't help but tease, "Perhaps your relationship with Elsa will someday..."

She grinned at his quick intake of air, but then his eyes searched the dance floor for one of her very best friends, and in them she saw hope...and his heart. "Perhaps," he agreed softly.

He walked her back to where Killian was standing with Elsa and kissed the back of her hand. "Mum would have loved you. Thank you for the dance."

His eyes glittered when he lifted his head and to her surprise, as soon as he let go of her hand and looked over at Killian, her new husband hugged him. She was so overcome with emotion she had to look away. Catching a glimpse of Mary Margaret's smile, she couldn't help but think that Liam was right and that the doctor had been a huge part of ensuring that Killian and she got their happy ending.

~~~CS~~~

Mary Margaret had watched Emma, Killian, Henry, Liam and the blonde woman surreptitiously all evening and she had a really good feeling deep inside. It was obvious to anyone who cared to notice that Emma and Killian shared a love that knew no bounds, and that what they had would continue to grow.

And Liam...the eldest Jones brother who had come to her a broken man had healed...and his healing was helping the family become whole. She remembered telling Liam in Seattle that he deserved love.
It had been a pleasant surprise discovering he had listened and found a woman who seemed to be just as enamored with him as he was with her.

Then there was Henry...a precocious little boy who had come into all of their lives by chance, but who somehow had been able to weave his way into the family...almost seamlessly. He brought out a different side in each of the adults and their interactions with him were unique...and varied.

"It appears my work here is truly done," she whispered, watching everyone line up to see the newlyweds off.

"You did good, honey." David put his arm around her, holding her close. "Want to go blow some bubbles?"

She hadn't wanted to say anything, but her back had been hurting all day. "I think I'll sit here and watch the happy couple leave." She smiled up at him before catching Emma's eye, sending her a little wave. "What a special day."

~~~CS~~~

As Killian grabbed her hand, pulling her through the bubble shower, Emma saw Elsa standing next to Liam and couldn't resist tossing her bouquet directly into her arms. When a contemplative look crossed Liam's face, it gave her hope that the relationship was further along than she had originally thought, as it was Liam's turn to get his happy ending. Mary Margaret's smile and little wave were the last things she saw before Killian lifted her onto the carriage, and then her new husband's lips kept her busy for quite some time.

The Cabin
Portland, Maine
Saturday Evening

The day had been long, but it had been perfect. All their family and friends had been there to celebrate with them and while he had enjoyed every moment, he was ready to have Emma to himself. "Tired, love?" He stretched his arm along the back of the seat as they rode to the cabin in the horse-drawn carriage.

"Yes, a little." She angled her body slightly into him. "But it was a good day."

"The best," he agreed, trailing his finger down her petal-soft cheek, to cup her neck, bringing her closer for another kiss. "But the best is yet to come," he nuzzled her nose, then couldn't help but kiss her again.

"Oh?" Her grin was all temptress, drawing him in, again and again. "You have plans for us?"

His chuckle came out sounding dark, even to his own ears, "I do."

"And these plans," her voice was teasing, "you think I'll like them?"

"Well, my love," he whispered as they stopped in front of their cabin, "if you don't I must be doing something wrong."

The wind carried away her laughter as he jumped down and held his hand out to her. With a nod to the driver, they started toward the door, but once they reached the steps, he lifted her into his arms. "Happy honeymoon, wife."

~~~CS~~~
Emma had felt like a princess all day but when Killian lifted her and carried her over the threshold...she felt like a wife. He let go of her legs and as she slowly slid down his body, she got a good look at her surroundings. "Killian," she exclaimed in awe, stepping out of his arms, to walk around. Everywhere she looked, there were candles. Dozens and dozens of candles...their flickering flames casting shadows on the walls...on her...and on Killian. "Who...?" Turning in a circle, Emma couldn't imagine how much time this had taken.

Killian took her hand, drawing her closer to him, taking her around the room, letting her see...for not only were there candles everywhere...but rose petals. "Katherine helped by asking a few of the hotel employees that she trusted. Do you like it?"

"What's not to like?" Emma turned in a circle. "Wait, are these the petals to the roses that decorated the cliff?"

He shook his head, almost shyly, which was interesting as she hadn't seen that side of him in a while. "Aye. They are." His answer was soft...hesitant...but there was such hope there that if her heart hadn't already been a puddle over him, it certainly would be now.

"One thing, though," she looked around, noticing an odd pattern to the placement of the rose petals, "why are there," she shrugged, "clumps of rose petals in front of the fireplace, on the sofa, on the table, and I'm assuming in our bedroom?"

"Well," the way he was looking at her made her heart race, her knees so weak that she had to hold on to him to keep from just falling at his feet, "those piles," he pulled her close, his desire evident, "are all the places we're going to make love."

"All these piles?" She looked around incredulously. "You must have a lot of faith in your ability to recover."

A laugh burst forth before he could stop it. "You let me worry about that."

Emma didn't care if they made love one time or a dozen, her husband made each time special, and as their lips met and her heart raced, the magic that surrounded them every time they touched came alive.

**Mass General**  
**Boston, MA**  
**Sunday, September 4, 2016**

Mary Margaret Blanchard had never expected to take a trip during the last month of her pregnancy...but when Liam Jones had called, she couldn't find it in herself to say no. And she certainly hadn't expected to give birth in a hospital clear across the country from everything and everyone that was familiar...that wasn't how it was done.

But now that it had happened, she wouldn't trade the experience for anything in the world, because she had learned something that in the long run would most likely make her a better therapist, and she had been a part of a magical weekend for a special couple.

"How're you feeling, honey?" David asked as he walked back into the hospital room after following the baby to the nursery to be cleaned and have a thorough check-up.

"Tired. Happy." She smiled as he bent to kiss her. "When will we get to see her again?"

"If I tell you I don't know..."
"David," she practically growled at him.

He laughed. "Sorry, I should know better than to come between a momma bear and her cub...after all I couldn't convince you to not come east for the wedding, could I?"

Mary Margaret winced a little, as he had been against her flying all this way, but when Liam had offered a private jet and told her there would be an obstetrician at the wedding, she had convinced him that it would be perfectly safe for her to go. And she had been perfectly safe...and had enjoyed herself...and now she had a brand-new baby. "You've been married to me a long time, David Nolan. You should know that by now."

He shook his head at her, sending her a tender smile. "I do know that and wouldn't change a thing about you. Now," he kissed her on the forehead, "are you ready to meet our daughter?"

She rolled her eyes. "Do you even need to ask?"

His smile melted her heart, he looked so happy. "No. I'll be right back."

While he was gone, Mary Margaret thought about the name choices for their little girl and wondered which one would fit...which one would feel right...and if when she got older, she would like it. When David pushed the bassinet into the hospital room, and all she could see was a little pink hat, she couldn't help it, and the tears overflowed.

"Are you okay? Do I need to get the nurse?"

She dashed the offending things away. "I'm fine. Hormones. Hurry," she reached out and ran her finger along a downy soft cheek, "let me see her."

David picked up the infant and gently put the babe in her arms. "Meet your momma, baby girl."

Mary Margaret couldn't believe the all-consuming love she felt holding her daughter close, something she had never experienced before...and something she hadn't known would be quite so overwhelming. The infant was small, since she was born at thirty-six weeks, but her eyes were wide open, and she was looking up at her momma as if she were trying to figure out a puzzle.

Laying her on the bed between her legs, Mary Margaret unwrapped the blanket, admiring the baby's long fingers and watching those fingers curl around one of her own. Folding the blanket back even more, she revealed dainty feet and, unable to resist, Mary Margaret stretched out a little leg and ran her finger firmly up the center of the baby's foot. "Look, David," she whispered in awe, "a perfect Babinski reflex."

"She's perfect," David said, stroking the infant's cheek, watching her sucking response as she looked for food.

Suddenly, Mary Margaret knew what the baby was to be called, "Emma," she stated decisively.

But David misunderstood. "Emma's here?" He looked over his shoulder as if he expected her to be standing in the doorway.

"No, David. The baby...her name is Emma."

David studied her for several moments before he said anything. "You're sure?" was his simple question.
"Positive," she answered him with conviction, "it's perfect for so many reasons."

~~~CS~~~

Emma and Killian had been on their way to Boston when Liam sent the text that Mary Margaret had been admitted to Mass General and was in labor. They made relatively good time, and by the time they arrived at the hospital Emma was anxious for some news. They took the elevator to the Labor & Delivery floor, and when they stepped off, the sense of deja vu was so strong that Emma grabbed Killian's arm to steady herself. "Whoa, I didn't realize the memories would be so overwhelming." She looked up at him curious if he was affected just as she was.

Killian's grin was pure sex "Very overwhelming," Killian pulled her close and whispered in her ear, "Think the broom closet is available?"

Her answer was swallowed when Liam and Elsa walked out of the waiting room. "Oh, good, you're here." Elsa hugged her. "How was the drive?"

"Good, thanks. How's Mary Margaret?" she asked, anxious for an update.

Liam grinned, "Mum and baby are doing fine. David stopped by a few minutes ago and was on his way to get the infant from the nursery.

"That's so good to hear. I wonder if she would mind visitors? But," Emma realized that since Mary Margaret was so far away from home, she would have nothing for her...nor for the baby, "we need to go shopping for them."

Elsa quickly agreed, but then told her that Ashley was pulling a few of Alex's newborn things to pass on, but that she was going to run and buy an infant seat.

"That sounds good and I'll let you know if Mary Margaret needs anything." After telling Killian she would be back shortly, she kissed him quickly and went searching.

It didn't take her long to find the room, and standing in the door watching the new family, she was almost hesitant to interrupt. But when David glanced her way, she knocked lightly on the door.

"Care for some company?"

"Emma," Mart Margaret beamed from the bed, "come meet our little girl."

"How are you feeling? I was worried when I heard the news."

David stood up, and after squeezing Mary Margaret's shoulder, he kissed her on the cheek and said he was going to take care of a few things.

Mary Margaret watched him leave before answering, "I'm wonderful. Would you like to hold her?"

Emma studied Mary Margaret's face and, unable to discern any reasons to be concerned, allowed herself to relax and admire the infant. "She's beautiful, but wasn't she born a little early? Are you sure she's okay?"

Mary Margaret smiled. "She was born early, but everything is fine. She's breathing on her own and she wasn't even jaundiced, which is often a worry with early babies."

The baby was held out to her, and as Emma took her in her arms she was amazed at how something so tiny could be so perfect. From her tiny pink lips, little button nose and delicate eyelids outlined with dark blonde lashes. "I remember you told me you weren't naming her until you met her. What
did you decide?"

Mary Margaret met her gaze. "Emma," she said softly.

"Emma?"

"She's strong, yet delicate. She's curious one minute, but content the next. She came into the world in a place where I knew no one...my planned support system is out West. I saw what you went through this summer and I saw what you had become yesterday. I would be proud if my daughter grew up to be just like you." When she finished speaking both women had tears running down their faces and were reaching for tissues.

"I'm honored," was all Emma could think of to say.

They talked for a while longer until the nurse arrived to check on both baby and mom. Emma hugged Mary Margaret goodbye and promised they would stop by tomorrow before they flew home.

On her way back to the waiting room, she passed by the broom closet and wondered...

**NID Offices**
**New York, NY**
**Thursday, October 2016**

With her mother and Nemo picking Roland up from preschool, Regina had nothing to do but go home early and make a romantic dinner for her handsome husband. But as luck would have it, when she stopped by the store to pick up a few items she ran into Meg, one of the women she had worked with at her previous job. In the course of catching up, Meg had announced she'd recently had a baby and wanted to know when she and Robin would have one, and the question had so stunned her that she hadn't even mentioned they did have a child, Roland.

But after they parted ways, Regina hadn't been able to get the question out of her mind, as it wasn't something that she and Robin had discussed. Both in their thirties, they were still young, but there was Roland and she never wanted him to worry that they were replacing him...or didn't think he was enough. And how did she know if she was ready to throw her pills out and start trying, as she had no friends who she was close enough with to ask...except Ashley. Would she have any insight, she wondered as her phone rang with the tone indicating her husband was back in New York.

**Robin:** Just landed but need to run by the office for a few hours to complete a report. Should be home by 8:00.

A quick check of the time showed her she had several hours before she would see him again, but she found she couldn't wait. Making a mental note to speak with Ashley when she saw her at Thanksgiving, Regina quickly changed into more comfortable clothing and made plans to take a romantic meal to the office. Maybe she could persuade him to hurry a little faster.

~~~CS~~~

Robin was tired. In the last thirty plus hours he had been in three states and four cities and he missed his family. He hadn't seen Regina since he kissed her goodbye in the still-dark hours yesterday morning. And the moppet, he hadn't seen Roland since they tucked him Tuesday evening. He was quickly learning the meaning behind the saying *Time and tide wait for no man*, as it seemed just yesterday that he had gotten out of the hospital, and here it was October and the holidays were upon them. "Crazy," he mumbled stepping off the elevator onto his office floor.
Stopping by his assistant Quinn's desk, he picked up his mail before entering his office, dropping his suitcase on the floor and tossing his tie in the corner. A quick perusal of the mail showed nothing important and wanting to get home as quickly as possible, he unpacked his laptop, buzzed Quinn for a cup of coffee and started in on his reports. Several hours later, he was adding his electronic signature and sending the report off to Liam, almost ready to leave.

Robin quickly repacked his laptop and when he reached across his desk for his cell phone, his arm caught the handle of his cup, causing it to tip over into his lap. "Good thing you weren't hot," he muttered, looking around for something to wipe up the desk. A wad of tissues helped...a little...but with no other choice, he took off his dress shirt and finished cleaning up the spill before heading into his tiny washroom to change.

~~~CS~~~

When Regina arrived at the NID offices, most of the windows were dark save for a few, and worried that she missed him, she hurried up the stairs, her basket with their dinner safe in her arms. Robin's floor was quiet, the only light coming from his open doorway, but when she arrived, expecting him to be sitting at his desk, she found it empty.

Her shoulders dropped with disappointment that she had come all this way, only for him to be gone, until she heard him whistling and realized where he was. She quickly cleaned off the table in front of his sofa, tossed a simple white cloth over it and laid out all their favorite Chinese dishes, finishing just as he opened the door.

"Regina," his smile grew, "this is a happy surprise. I was just getting ready to leave."

"Maybe we can eat before we go?" she suggested, handing him a glass of wine before lowering herself to the floor.

"That sounds lovely. And Roland?" he asked as he set his glass on the table and sat down next to her.

"Mother and Nemo have him," she told him as his arm came around her and his lips sent her heart racing by leaving lighter than air kisses along her jaw and across her cheek before finally settling on her lips.

As her brain power diminished, Regina's thoughts were that she couldn't imagine ever growing tired of his kisses. They made her feel cherished, desired and loved, and winding her arms around his neck, she let him take and take, until he sat back, his breath coming hard and quick.

"If we were home, you wouldn't have any clothes on," his gruff voice sent chills along her skin, making her wish they were there.

"Well," she ran a finger down his chest, "Roland is spending the night with Grandma Cora so..." Her fingers fisted in his shirt, dragging him back for another open-mouth, sloppy, but very hot kiss.

"Well then," his dimples popped, "let's hurry and eat. Seems I have some ravishing to take care of when we get home."

~~~CS~~~

Robin had been pleasantly surprised to find his wife waiting for him after he changed, and her kisses were just as sweet as he had remembered. Several times while they were eating, she licked her lips or tilted her head just so, and they had gotten side-tracked so much so that when he checked the clock,
it was long after 8:00.

He had found a spot on her neck that, when he rubbed his scruff against it, caused her whole body to shiver, and he was anxious to uncover more spots like that. Making quick work of the clean-up, they repacked the basket and, with his arm around her, made their way down the dark hall to the elevator.

Once inside, he stole a few kisses as the elevator glided swiftly down to the bottom floor without stopping in between. "I think that must be a first." His comment sounded loud even though it had been said softly.

They stepped off the elevator, encountering Liam as he reached the bottom of the grand staircase that led to the administrative offices, his shock at running into them evident on his face. "What are you two still doing here?" his asked with concern. "Everything alright?"

"Everything's fine, Liam," Robin was quick to assure him, "I just haven't seen my lovely wife much this week and she brought me dinner."

A frown flitted across Liam's face, gone so quickly that Robin wondered if he had imagined it. "You both traveled this week?"

Robin glanced at Regina. "Yes, Regina was gone Monday and Tuesday and then I-"

"-You left yesterday and just got back today. Does this happen often, both of you gone like that?"

"In the last month, probably three of the weeks, why?"

Liam was good at keeping his thoughts to himself most of the time, but something about Robin and Regina traveling so much was disturbing to him, which was an interesting development. "Why don't you both come to my office tomorrow around 3:00. Will that work?" Liam's question interrupted Robin's thoughts.

He was just getting ready to answer in the affirmative when Regina put her hand on his arm. "Can we make it a little earlier, by any chance? We usually pick Roland up from school around that time."

Liam nodded his head. "I'll make it work," he promised. "Have a good night. See you around 2:00?"

They agreed and watched as Liam left the building. "What do you think that's all about?" Regina asked as they walked toward the door.

"Mmm, not sure," he answered, "but let's think about it tomorrow. I have some important things to take care of when I get home." He winked as she passed through the door.

"Things?" she asked in that prissy voice that turned him on.

His hand caressed the curve of her hip. "Yes, my wife, things."

Her lighthearted giggle made him smile and when she took his hand, encouraging him to her, because she had 'things' to take care of too, his smile turned into a full-fledged laugh. Blimey, he loved this woman.

NID Offices
New York, NY
Friday, October 2016

Liam pushed up from his desk and wandered absently over to stare out the window, the long
shadows showing him it was later than he thought. But in the hour since Robin and Regina had left his office, he kept getting distracted...not by work...not by self-flagellation...but happiness...sheer unadulterated happiness.

Him! He was happy...very, very happy. His brother was back in his life and he had been welcomed with open arms into his family with Emma and Henry. And the woman that had quickly become the most important person in his life, Elsa, was his girlfriend. *Such a juvenile title,* he thought, but no other name fit.

Elsa was his friend, but that word seemed so small compared to everything she meant to him...everything she had done for him...did for him. And since Killian's wedding, when he had finally admitted to her that he was falling hard and fast, they had been dating...exclusively. Just dating.

They weren't lovers.

They weren't friends...with benefits. However, even though there had been a few times when their kissing sessions had gone beyond *just* kissing and the heat that surrounded them almost blew the top of his head off...they had stopped. Hell, who was he kidding...he had stopped. The question was why?

Amends had been made for his behavior.

She was amenable to taking their relationship to the next level.

He had given her his heart...most of it anyway. There was a small piece he still held...keeping it safe, but the more he was with her, the more of that piece belonged to her...no longer to him. So why had he stopped? Because he knew that the first time their bodies were connected, there would no longer be a choice...his heart would be hers...completely.

Did he trust her enough?

Or the better question was, did he trust *them* enough?

"Liam?" Her soft voice calling his name had the same effect as it had the first time she used it. His mouth dried, his heart raced and his breath stuttered, almost rendering him lightheaded.

"Elsa." He turned from the window and there she was, all golden hair, shining blue eyes and soft pink lips and he needed a taste...he needed her.

Without conscious thought his feet took him across the room and she was in his arms, their lips connected in a kiss...so deep...so heart-poundingly thrilling that he didn't want to stop. He wanted to lock the door, dim the lights and see where it went, but was that because he was ready to take that last step? Or was it because he knew it wouldn't happen, here...in his office?

He released her lips, taking a few minutes to breathe her in...settle, before smiling and taking a step back, realizing for the first time that she was holding a letter, now all crumpled. "Sorry about that," he murmured shyly, pointing to the messy paper.

As if only then remembering that she was holding it in her hand, she looked down blankly before a smile quickly bloomed on her face. "Oh! I forgot! Look, I passed the bar! I'm a real lawyer!" Then she threw herself into his arms.

Liam caught her, spinning her around several times. "Congratulations! But I never doubted that you would pass."
"Really?" She licked her lips, and then laughed, "Me either." Then, as if she realized what she'd said, covered her mouth. "Or does that sound too braggy?"

Pulling her torso flush with his, Liam kissed her again, but this time made a point of keeping control of the kiss. "We should celebrate."

"Tonight?" she asked hesitantly...but hopeful, he thought.

"Well," his eyes zeroed in again on her lips, "it is Friday."

"It is."

"And I've nothing this weekend. Do you?"

Her arms slid over his shoulders to wind around his neck, "Nothing. What do you have in mind?"

What did he have in mind? Lots and lots of thoughts...carnal thoughts about how they could spend the weekend flew through his brain. His body had hardened the minute he had taken her in his arms and kissed her, but his head was creating images that spiked his need, rendering him full-fledged ready...for her. Her breath hitched and taking a deep breath, he tried to sound normal, "Dinner," he kissed her gently, "and a little dancing," he kissed her again, "would that be alright?"

"Perfect. Pick me up at seven?"

Her breath blew across his lips, and with his control almost shattered, he stepped back, squeezing her hand. "I'll see you then."

Liam watched her leave, thinking that if he ended up going to bed alone tonight he was a bigger fool than he thought.

~~~CS~~~

Elsa kept telling herself she wasn't nervous, but then she had changed her clothes at least six times before opting for a simple black dress. Once she had finally decided on a dress, she couldn't settle on which pair of shoes worked best, and only the fact that she was running out of time prevented her from starting the process over again. Hair up or down, a lot of make-up or a little, new perfume or usual; tasks she performed every day, most of the time without bothering to ask questions...today though...they wouldn't let up.

Of course, once she was dressed and early, strangely enough, her thoughts drifted back to when she had first arrived at the office. Liam had been staring out the window, deep in thought, but this time his thoughts had been happy, as he had been smiling. Something had been different, though, when he touched her. His hold...the look in his eyes...and the response of his body, it was tighter...hotter...harder. Could it mean he was ready to take the leap? She hoped so. She was ready...but Liam...he was scared. Of what, she wasn't sure, but if he took the leap...she would be there to catch him.

When the knock at the door came she wanted to run to answer it, but decided walking made more sense when one was wearing heels. When she opened the door, the look in his blue eyes took her breath away and his aftershave caused her mouth to water, and unable to stop herself, she stepped close, taking a deep whiff. "You smell really good." She grinned at the surprised look on his face. "New cologne?"

His cheeks pinked, and he ducked his head shyly, "Too much?"
"Unh uh," she shook her head, "just right. Come in while I grab my coat."

"Henry helped me pick it out the other day," he told her, following her into her apartment.

"Oh he did, did he?" She handed him her coat while he held it, and turned, slipping it on.

The musky scent surrounded her and she really wanted to turn around and bury her nose in the soft skin just below his earlobe, but as if sensing her intentions, he held her shoulders still, whispering into her ear, "He told me you would like it."

His hot breath sent a shiver down her spine and her lady parts were shouting at her to forgo dinner and feast on the man, but before she had time to say much, he had hustled her out the door. "Liam?"

But what to say after that she wasn't sure, as asking why he didn't ravish her right there sounded off.

He didn't say anything until they were alone in the elevator and he backed her against the wall, his lips hovering above hers. "Patience, Sweet Elsa," he murmured, "I'm getting there." Then the elevator doors opened or she would have been tempted to grab his jacket lapels and close the gap between their mouths.

~~~CS~~~

From the time she opened her door, Liam knew that he had been sending her mixed signals, and bloody hell, he wanted to toss her over his shoulder and shut the world out for the weekend, but...

And that was the crux of his situation...could he jump? And if he did...was she ready to catch him?

Their conversation in the cab was easy, as it wound its way through the tangled traffic that was Manhattan. They pulled up in front of Rockefeller Square and her eyes grew large as they stepped out onto the curb.

"Are we going to...?" She pointed to the top of the building in front of them, the muted lights from the windows barely distinguishable in the night sky.

"Aye." He tucked her arm through his, leading her onto the elevator. "I thought since we were celebrating your passing of the bar, you deserved someplace special...someplace we've not been to before.

"But Liam," Elsa sent him a quick glance as she watched the floor lights counting up before stopping on the 65th floor, "I've heard the Crown Jewel is quite...well...expensive."

The doors slid open as they stepped out, the city of Manhattan bowed at their feet. The lighting inside the room was muted, candles on the tables providing an atmosphere of romance, and the large windows allowed a view of the city lights below. Else's wide-eyed gaze drew him in, as she had grown up surrounded by wealth and the finer things life could offer, yet she was like a child, seeing a castle for the first time or being granted a wish they thought they might never receive.

"It's beautiful," she whispered as they followed the hostess to a table.

Liam pulled out her chair and whispered, "So are you," into her ear, feeling her body tremble as a shiver worked through her.

Once seated, they listened to the specials, and within minutes their meals were ordered and a bottle of champagne was placed close to the table. Liam lifted his champagne flute in her direction.

"Congratulations, sweet Elsa. That's quite the accomplishment."

She ducked her head, seemingly embarrassed by his lavish praise, and he fell a little more under her
spell. Captivated...completely gobsmacked...that's how he felt when he was with her.

"So tell me," she took another sip and set the crystal down, "what did you do for Regina and Robin?"

His brows went up in surprise, "How did you know about that?"

"I have my ways." She leaned forward, causing the neckline of her dress to gap, giving him a view of her décolletage that had his mouth watering, his hands itching to touch and his pants fitting tighter than when they had arrived.

Tearing his eyes from her lovely body, he looked up into her eyes, twinkling with devilment, knowing exactly what she was doing. "Careful, sweetheart, you're playing with fire there," his voice was low and dark.

"Promise?" she asked breathlessly.

Liam looked down, noticing his hand had gripped the cloth napkin so tightly his knuckles were turning white. Was he going to make it through this dinner without doing or saying something he might regret? Maybe, but only if he kept his mind and the conversation someplace safe. "You want to know about Robin and Regina?"

"I do."

~~~CS~~~

Elsa watched his face as he told her how he had learned that Robin and Regina were traveling so much that they barely got to spend time with Roland. Deciding that wasn't the reputation he wanted NID to have, he had asked them to be in charge of the project in Westchester County, where the new NID headquarters would someday be located. "It keeps them both home with their family, which the older I get the more important that seems."

"That's sweet of you, Liam. Is that something you want...a family?"

His face turned red at her compliment, but when he didn't say anything about wanting a family right away, and she wondered...had she misread the signals? Were they not moving in the same direction?

Finally, he reached for her hand, gently playing with her fingers as he spoke about what had happened with his first wife. Had he reached for her hand because he just wanted to touch her...or did she touch him on a different level, just...as he did her?

"After that debacle, I put the dream of falling in love...getting married...having a family, behind me."

His blue eyes staring deeply into hers mesmerized her...weaving her so tightly in their web, that she forgot to breathe, and when he continued speaking, the husky timbre of his voice melted her panties right there. "Until you. Somehow, you touched a space deep within that was cold...and barren. You brought me back to life and my dreams of the future include you. Elsa, I-"

"-Alright folks, who had the shrimp?"

Elsa wanted to scream, and when she looked at Liam, he looked shell-shocked, but she wasn't sure why that would be. Was it he was annoyed that he didn't get to finish or was it that he was terrified of what he was feeling?

After the heaviness of the last two conversational exchanges, by mutual agreement they kept the rest of dinner discussions lighter and fairly neutral. Nothing too serious...nothing too heavy, allowing
both to eat and enjoy the company without the added pressure of elephant in the room...their feelings for the other.

Once dinner was complete and the champagne bottle empty, Liam once again took her hand. "There's dancing upstairs," he said softly, his fingers hypnotically soothing back and forth on hers. "Can I hold you?"

The look on his face sucked the air from her body, rendering her tongue useless, her only means of communication at that moment a nod of her head. His smile and husky "good" revved up the heat down below so high she was squirming, tempted to look down to make sure smoke wasn't rising from under her skirt.

_Holy moly_, she thought, _what he does to me._ She took his hand and followed him up the spiral staircase thinking that she would follow him wherever he wanted her to go.

~~~CS~~~

Liam cursed his timing. Why was it that every time he felt ready to tell her what was in heart, there was an obstacle? First Sister Blue and tonight...the waiter. Was it a sign he should continue to fight to keep that tiny sliver of his heart to himself?

He led them to a small table, set far back from the speakers so they could hear each other without competing with the music. But sitting across from her, his attention to the conversation waned as her eyes sparkled and her lips begged for his attention. He didn't know what was different about tonight, but the web she sent out pulled at him...reeling him closer and closer. The need to touch her grew until, unable to deny himself any longer, he took her out onto the dance floor and her body melted into his.

She fit perfectly in his arms, all soft skin and warm woman, but having her there pushed at his willpower. As one song ended and he recognized the next, he wondered if fate had stepped in...placing that song squarely in front of him...forcing him to ask the question that haunted him.

The words to REO Speedwagon's _Can't Fight This Feeling_ flowed over his skin, sneaking into his brain...forcing him to ask himself that all important question. Do you love her?

He looked down into her beautiful face, her eyes dreamy, her skin glowing and they moved slowly to...

_I said there is no reason for my fear_
_Cause I feel so secure when we're together_
_You give my life direction_
_You make everything so clear_

She gave him hope...she gave him love, and even though the words had never been said, they were there, every time they were together. In her eyes...in her touch...in the little things she did. His heart rate spiked as he urged her hips closer to his hardness, ready to take that leap as the reasons he was afraid, didn't matter any longer.

_Cause I can't fight this feeling anymore_
_I've forgotten what I started fighting for_
_And if I have to crawl upon the floor_
_Come crashing through your door_
_Baby, I can't fight this feeling anymore._
"I can't do it any longer," he whispered, his voice desperate.

"Do what, Liam?" He was scaring her, as all evening there had been a push and pull thing going on between them. Yes, she knew he was scared...but if he told her he couldn't take a chance...and walked away, she would be devastated.

"I can't keep this up. It's not fair...to me...mostly...to you." He still hadn't let her go, but she tensed, worried that he was going to say something she didn't want to hear.

"Just tell me, Liam. I will understand...I might not like it, but you know that I will understand." She wanted to let him know that she would still be his friend...if he needed her.

"I will understand" was an odd statement to make in preparation to someone professing their feelings...but then he realized that he had said...nothing.

The music slowed and Lionel Richie's *Truly* blared through the speakers, bringing forth words that he wanted to hear...but from her.

*Girl, tell me only this*
*That I'll, have your heart for always*
*And you want me by your side*
*Whispering the words I'll always love you*

"Downstairs I said to you that you were the person who made me think about the future, and then..."

He twirled her around moving them away from the crush of all the people.

*Don't stop*, Elsa was chanting silently, as she listened to one of the most romantic songs she had ever heard in her life. "You were interrupted, which," she squinted her eyes, as if concentrating, "seems to happen a lot."

"It does," he agreed. "And before...I let it feed my insecurities, but no longer, Elsa."

One hand moved to cup her face and in his eyes she saw everything she wanted to see...and so much more. "What changed?" she asked so softly that it could barely be heard.

He shrugged a broad shoulder, "I can't fight the feeling any longer, and jumped?"

Then, just like from the epic romance novels, Elsa got to experience that lady parts dancing, panty-scorching situation of having words of love sung directly to her. His hot breath added to the goosebumps, and if she survived, it would be a miracle.

Liam kissed her gently and then tucked her against his chest and crooned in her ear,

"*Because I'm truly*
*Truly in love with you girl*
*I'm head over heels with you love*
*I need you, and with your love I'm free*
*And truly, you know you're alright with me"*

Elsa's breath hitched and tears sprang to her eyes. "You love me?" she asked, a little awe in her voice.

"I do," he whispered, his lips barely touching hers. "I love you, Elsa. I'm just sorry it took me so long to say it."
"Oh, Liam," her hands cupped his jaw, before sliding over his shoulders, back around his neck, "I love you too."

And then he kissed her and every hair follicle on her body stood up and cheered. He was sexy...and tender...and so special...and he was hers.

Once the words had run free, Liam wanted to slap himself several times for waiting so long, but now...he wanted the celebration to continue somewhere quiet...more private. "Shall we go?"

Elsa's knees buckled, and only the fact that he was holding on to her kept her from sliding to the floor in a boneless mass. Maybe, maybe...her parts were yelling, "Please."

The trip home was quick, and all the way up the elevator, Liam fought to keep his hands to himself...to not presume, but hell...who was he kidding? He wanted her...now.

As they neared his apartment door, Liam wrapped her in his arms and kissed her with all the pent up need and love that he had been holding back. Fumbling for the door, he unlocked it, manipulated them inside, and then his lips were back on hers. "I don't know if I can wait much longer," he confessed. "I've wanted you so long."

"Then don't wait," Elsa jumped into his arms, wrapping her legs around his waist, bring forth idea after idea.

She felt the earth move as he carried her down the stairs to his bedroom, wrenching his lips away only long enough to ask, "You said you have no plans this weekend, right?"

She loosened her legs, sliding down his body till her feet touched the floor. "None, why?"

"You do now," he moaned against her mouth, the last words that were spoken for quite some time.

**NID Office**
**New York, NY**
**Wednesday, November 2016**

Killian was leaning back in his chair with his feet propped up on his desk, staring out the window instead of looking over the set of drawings Liam had given him. Half of his brain was thinking about the Thanksgiving holiday in Boston with all of their family and friends while the other half was trying to come up with a way to help Liam and Elsa. They had been almost inseparable since his wedding, and while Liam had brought about asking Elsa to marry him several times, for some reason, he still hadn't asked her yet.

While Killian understood his hesitation after everything he had gone through with Lily, not only was that a long time ago, but Elsa was no Lily and Liam was not the same man. With everything that had happened to him and Emma this past summer, they had learned that life and love were precious and that it was important to grab onto what you wanted with both hands and hold it tight. And with married life being everything he had expected, and more, he wanted that for Liam.

Pulling out his phone, he sent a quick text to someone who might have a few ideas.

**Killian**: Busy? If not I have a problem you might be able to help me with.

It wasn't long before the ping sounded signaling an answer.

**Robin**: Marriage problems already? What did you do to piss her off?
Killian: Wanker! The problem is Liam.

Robin: Liam's pissed you off?

Killian: Bloody hell, Robin. No. Liam is scared to propose to Elsa. He needs a push. Any ideas?

Robin: Well, hell, Killian. Why didn't you say so? I'll be right down.

Killian shook his head and tossed the phone onto the desk, hoping that Robin had an idea that was good. Getting this situation taken care of before they left on their trip would be a plus and it might earn him bonus points with his wife, which was never a bad thing.

"Okay, I'm here," Robin breezed in and sat down in an empty chair next to his desk. "What's Liam's problem?"

Killian explained that Liam had expressed a desire to ask Elsa to marry him but that something, namely fear, was preventing from taking the next step. "I want my brother to have what Emma and I have," he told Robin. "I keep telling him he's not getting any younger."

"Oh, I'm sure that goes over well," Robin laughed. "Maybe he's afraid Elsa will say no."

"I thought of that," Killian agreed, "but then I heard her tell Emma, she'd marry him tomorrow if he asked."

"Perhaps," Robin sent Killian a sneaky smile, "he just needs to be in a place where he is surrounded by glitter, gold and diamonds."

"Broadway?" Killian quipped.

Robin rolled his eyes. "No, you idiot, Hidden Gems."

Killian thought about it and maybe Robin had a point, but the problem was getting Liam to the shop. "So how do we get him there?"

Robin gave him a disgusted look. "Must I come up with all the ideas? We kidnap him, of course."

"Lead the way, old wise one," Killian mocked as he followed Robin down the hall toward Liam's office.

~~~CS~~~

Liam couldn't keep his mind on the task at hand, as his thoughts kept replaying his morning with Elsa and how every time they were together, he wanted to kick himself for making them both wait. However, in the past six weeks since they had become lovers, they had certainly made up for lost time, and he couldn't be happier. He loved her...and by some miracle...she loved him.

That he wanted to marry her was a given, but something had been holding him back, and just like the blooming lunatic he was, he had spilled his fear to Killian. "What was I thinking?" he muttered, as he gave up trying to work and rolled up the plans to look at again next week.

You were thinking your brother would support you in your fear, his subconscious answered primly.

"True, but he didn't and now-"
thoughtfully. But is it working? Haven't your thoughts changed lately?

"Oh, shut up," he snapped, his voice coming out rather loudly in the quiet of the room.

"Hey, I didn't say anything, yet," Killian breezed in the room, Robin hot on his heels.

They were up to something, but exactly what it was, he wasn't sure. "Sorry, just talking to myself."

"You know," Killian sauntered closer, "talking to oneself is one of the signs of dementia."

"Or," Robin continued, "a sign that one might be working too hard."

Liam looked at Killian on his right and then at Robin, who happened to stop on his left "Just what are you two trying to say?"

"Come with us and you'll see," Killian told him, but before he could formulate a thought and tell them he had to get to an appointment, they each took an arm and escorted him out of the building.

"Kilian, this is crazy," he tried to explain, "I've got to be somewhere before they close."

"Now, now, Liam," Robin hushed him, "we're doing this for your own good."

"Exactly," Killian agreed. "Everything we do is for your own good. You love Elsa and..."

"Strangely enough she loves you," Robin added.

"And we just want you to be as happy as we are," Killian finished.

A light clicked as to where they might be taking him, and instead of fighting, he relaxed and went along for the ride. It wasn't long before the cab pulled up in front of Hidden Gems and his thoughts were confirmed. "A jewelry store? This was your destination?" He pushed open the doors, entering the quiet elegance of the showroom.

"I don't see my pop," Robin told them, as there were a few customers looking in the glass cases, but the employees helping were females. "Let me go see if I can find him," was barely out of his mouth before Marco came around the corner from the direction of his workroom.

"Robin, my boy," he quickly made his way to their side, "I didn't know that you and Killian were coming with Liam today." His smile was large, his eyes twinkling with a secret.

Robin and Killian sent Liam a look, expecting an explanation, and while Liam thought about leaving them in the dark, they did need to get to the airport. "I told you I had an appointment to get to." He turned to Marco, "Is it ready?"

"It is," Marco signaled them to follow. "You made a very good choice."

He could hear Robin and Killian sputtering behind him, but as soon as Marco handed him the ring, the only thing inside his head was imagining Elsa saying yes when he asked her to be his wife.

The Cabin
Portland, Maine
August 2018

Killian finished changing almost one-year-old Brennan's diaper, disposed of the soiled one, and barely had time to pull down his son's little shirt before the squirming started. "You have someplace to be, little lad?" He tickled his tummy before finally letting Brennan scramble onto the floor. The
little boy peeked over his shoulder and giggled, then took off on his little chubby legs, causing a lump to lodge in Killian's throat. How did he get so blessed? The thought ran through his mind many times a day, but none more so than in August of every year. Not only was it the anniversary of when he had met Emma, but because everyone congregated at the beach.

A time to truly appreciate everything life had given them...all of them, except...he got a whiff of Katherine's diaper that Liam had just opened. "Bloody hell, Liam, is your daughter trying to kill us all?"

"Oh, come on," Liam wrinkled his nose, "I'm sure Brennan has some pretty ripe smelling ones." Generously using the clean smelling diaper wipes Elsa insisted on, Liam cleaned up the little girl, fastened her onesie and placed her in her stroller. "How is it we got stuck with diaper duty and our wives are out on the sand?"

Killian took the offending diaper and shoved it into the diaper genie before answering, "Because we're 21st century men?" When Liam rolled his eyes, Killian laughed, "In my case Emma said, 'I carried him for nine months, you have a lot to make up for.'"

Liam nodded, "Sounds like Elsa, except she starts talking about the delivery," he wrinkled his nose, "and I can't stand thinking about the pain she must have felt, and so..." he shrugged, "here I am."

Killian studied Liam for a second. "You love it though, don't you?"

And Liam's smile gave him the answer before the words were ever spoken, "More than life itself."

He grabbed a couple of cold bottles of water and they took Brennan and Katherine out onto the patio where they could watch over their families. Their wives were relaxing under the sun with Ruby, and out in the water he could see Robin, Victor and Sean watching over the older kids.

Henry was close to becoming a teenager and the possibility of having to explain about girls...and the birds and the bees weighed heavily on his mind. He was working on a good reason to convince Emma that she would be much better at that job than he...but the perfect wording still escaped him.

The other boys from Sister Blue's Group Home had ended up becoming parts of their family also, and while Roland and Henry were the only two that had officially been adopted with name changes, he had a feeling that wouldn't be so for long. Wyatt had taken a piece of Liam's heart and was living with him and Elsa and J.J. was living with Robin and Regina.

Interestingly enough, Victor and Ruby had shown up this summer with Alli and Maddy, but with the girls at that age where they always liked to be in the middle of conversations, he hadn't gotten the full story; however knowing his wife, she probably heard the whole thing it.

Killian glanced at Liam, who appeared to be lightly dozing. "Tired, old man?" He poked Liam on the arm.

Liam sent him a dirty look. "The baby was up several times last night. Elsa said she's teething." He leaned his head back on his hand and closed his eyes.

Killian remembered those nights. and how functioning at work the next day was a challenge. Thankfully, Brennan slept through the night and had for quite some time. "Why don't you go take a nap. I'll keep an ear out for the baby."

Liam's eyes popped open. "You mean it?" he asked hopefully.

Killian laughed, "Go. You're not getting any younger."
"Wanker," Liam stood up, "thanks, Brother."

Life was good, Killian thought as Liam disappeared into the house and his eyes were pulled back to his beautiful wife.

~~~CS~~~

Emma watched Roland run out of the waves giggling, Robin following closely behind, and the thought that it would be Brennan and Killian in a few years crossed her mind. "I wonder what the men are doing?" she asked Elsa who was sunning next to her.

"Knowing my husband, napping," Elsa laughed, "but," she yawned, "I do have to admit that sounds pretty good. Last night we were up more than not."

"I remember those days," Emma smiled at her sister-in-law, which still felt a little strange. "Why don't you go take a nap?"

"You wouldn't mind?"

"No, no," Emma waved toward the cabins, "I'm sure Liam and Killian are fine. We'll see you after a while."

"Thanks, Em." She grabbed her towel and Emma watched her disappear inside.

"That was nice of you, Emma." Ruby took over the chair that Elsa had vacated.

"Well, I can't take all the credit." Emma glanced toward the patio where she knew Killian was sitting and watching Brennan and a sleeping Katherine.

"What did you do?" Ruby looked back toward the cabins.

Emma laughed. "Just plotted with my husband to give the new parents a little alone time, that's all."

"Oh, that's sweet." Ruby sent a huge smile. "Speaking of new parents, where are Regina and Ashley?"

"The kitchen...maybe?" Emma shook her head, as she might have been dozing when they went inside.

Ruby took a drink from her glass. "I'm going to refresh my lemonade, want some?"

Emma handed her glass over and when Ruby left, her thoughts drifted back over how many changes they had been through since they had first laid eyes on one another in 2014, to when they had gotten married two years ago.

The time since their wedding had been busy, but productive. Once Henry had started school, Emma had decided that she wanted to continue painting full time. Fortunately, Ariel was excited to continue working with her, which made it easy to spend time with Mary Margaret and David and little Emma. And then the next time they had come to Portland, she had brought an assortment of her work to Cleo Foxx, who was happy to sell them in her gallery. It was the best of situations, as Ariel and Cleo handled the selling and all she had to do was...create.

Killian seemed to enjoy working with his brother and Robin, and within the past year Nemo had slowly turned over more of the day-to-day operations to them. He told them he and Cora were not getting any younger and wanted to travel while they were healthy. Emma thought they were
Brennan would be turning one in a few days and the party would grow as everyone from the Home would arrive for the day. Emma couldn’t believe her baby was going to be one, as the past year seemed to just fly by, which was one reason he loved spending August at the beach. It was a time to regroup...not only as a family, but with everyone around. Taking time to enjoy life...

Enjoy life and doze in the sun, she thought, letting the peaceful sound of the waves and the happy sounds of splashing in the ocean lull her into a light sleep. Not nearly deep enough, though, that the snicker didn’t alert her before Henry, J.J., Wyatt and Roland came running toward her, hands behind their backs, mischief on their minds. "Hold it right there," she stopped them cold before they got too close, "chocolate chip cookies anyone?"

All four boys, looked at each other, then back at her and nodded their heads.

"Then drop your weapons and go have some." She smiled as a few water guns and water balloons dropped to the sand before they scampered inside.

"You make this parenting thing look like a breeze," Robin laughed, as he made his way toward her taking the chair Ruby had vacated. 

Emma shook her head. "Parenting is never easy...but...I saw them do the same thing to Killian yesterday, so..."

"Ah, gotcha." He stretched his legs out in front of him, tilting his chin up to the sun. "Where is Killian, by the way?"

"He's on the patio with Katherine and Brennan, I think." She smiled, anticipating his next question. "Regina was feeding Rebecca the last time I saw her."

His smile could have lit up the room, so big it was at the mention of his new daughter and wife. 

"Thanks, Emma. I think I'll go check on them." With one last smile, he headed toward the cabin he shared with Regina and their family.

*The sun is shining on this family again*, she thought, as it had been a year of highs and lows for the Locksley family. J.J. had moved in with them early in 2017, and with two growing boys, and both working in Westchester County, Robin and Regina had purchased a house and moved to Irvington, and then...Regina had discovered she was pregnant. 

Sadly, she had miscarried early in the pregnancy and it had been a long road for her to reach a point where she was willing to risk her heart again. But...they had been blessed with a sweet baby girl two months ago, around the same time as Ashley's new baby. With two older brothers, doting parents, and grandparents like Cora and Nemo, the little princess was already ruling the house.

"Babies everywhere," she murmured, "except for Ruby and Victor, and she wasn't sure what was going on there. Currently, they had Maddy and Alli staying with them, giving their grandmother a few weeks rest, but once they were gone, she didn't know. However, with all the babies around this summer, she figured it would either push Ruby to want one or push her to run the other way."

"Penny for your thoughts, Swan." Killian stood over her, Brennan in his arms.

She squinted up at him, "Only a penny? Surely they're worth more than that."

"Down." Suddenly Brennan came alive. "Down."
Killian put him down and as soon as he got his balance, he took off, both hands reaching, "Ba...ba...ba,"

Emma and Killian looked at each other, before following their son, who had stopped and was pointing at the basket holding all the beach toys. "Ba...ba...ba..."

Killian dug around before pulling out a big, red ball. "Here you go, little lad. Your ball."

Brennan squealed, "Ba!" then took it from his father's arms and toddled off.

"New word." Killian put his arm around Emma, holding her close to his side as they kept an eye on the toddler. "See, Emma. I told you he was smart."

Emma silently agreed but decided that Killian's ego didn't need feeding.

"Want to take him in the water?" she asked as Brennan was staring longingly out to sea.

"If you'll come with us." Killian already had his shirt off, and before she had a chance to agree...or disagree...he had picked up the baby, and together they took off running toward the waves.

~~~CS~~~

Later that evening, Killian stood next to Robin and Liam, watching the kids roast marshmallows over the firepit. "Is this what you imagined when you thought about the future?"

"Did I?" Robin asked himself. "Once Regina and I adopted Roland, I think that was about as far as I was willing to dream...but somehow, now that I have what I have, I can't remember a time I didn't want it. Does that make sense?"

"It does to me," Liam answered. "After everything with Lily, I gave up on having a family...a future, and now...this is the very best time of my life."

"Here here, Brother." Killian clinked his bottle against Liam's and Robin's and, taking a drink, his eye caught Emma's on the other side of the fire nibbling on a S'more. "If you gents will excuse me, I think I'll see if Emma wants to take a little stroll on the beach. Will you keep an eye on Brennan?"

"Go, Killian, we've got him."

Emma wasn't hard to persuade and they strolled along the beach, quietly hand in hand...talking...listening...to each other...to nature.

"Liam said something earlier," Killian stopped walking and pulled Emma into his arms. "He said, 'this is the very best time of my life,' and he's right, Emma. I don't tell you often enough just how much having you...and Henry...and Brennan means to me. You are the very best things in the world. You give my life meaning...and make each and every day better than the one before. I love you."

"I love you too, Killian," Emma sniffed, "and we do know how you feel. Every little thing you do...every word you say...and every song you sing shows us."

He kissed her, pouring his feelings into the kiss...telling her with his lips exactly what he had just told her with his words, and when that wasn't enough, "Dance with me?"

She smiled up at him, "There's no music."

"Come now, Swan. Can't you hear it?" As they swayed on the sand, Killian sang in her ear, a song that fit exactly how he was feeling.
Because I've had the time of my life
No, I never felt this way before
Yes, I swear it's the truth
And I owe it all to you
'Cause I've had the time of my life
And I've searched through every open door
'til I found the truth
And I owe it all to you

~~~CS~~~

The fire had burned itself out and it was time to go their separate ways, but letting go of good things was always tough. "Goodnight, everyone. We'll see you tomorrow." Emma waved at her friends as they all went back to their own cabins.

Liam, Elsa, Wyatt and the baby to the cottage toward the left. Robin, Regina, Roland and baby went to theirs on the right, and Victor, Ruby, Maddy, Ali and Sean, Ashley, Alex and Shane headed up the beach to the one they had rented for the month.

"Emma?" Killian wrapped his arms around her. "What's troubling you, love? You seem," he shrugged, "I don't know, sad."

Emma tightened her hold around her husband's trim middle. "I...was just having a really good time and am sad it's over."

"It's not the end, Swan...it's just the beginning." He kissed the top of her head, making her feel safe...and secure in his arms.

Emma thought about the secret that slept under her heart and decided perhaps Killian was right. "Ready for bed?"

"With you, love...always."

She followed Killian and the boys inside, and as he turned to pick up Brennan, she slowly closed the door. "Goodnight," she whispered, flipping the switch to extinguish the lights.

And for all the days of their lives, they lived happily ever after.

~fin

Anyone catch my parallel in that last scene? I hope you enjoyed reading The Promise as much as I enjoyed writing it. If you stuck with me for the past 6 months, thank you! If you picked it up recently, thank you! If you've not stopped by and let me know what you think, please do soon. I have also put together a compilation of a few things from the story as well as The Promise playlist in the next chapter.

I'm going to miss this verse so if you have any one-shots you'd like to see, toss them my way.

In the meantime, I'm going to finish the CS baby story I started last March and haven't posted on since July as well as work on a one-shot for my Beach House verse (and if you haven't read The Beach House and enjoyed this story, you might enjoy it as well.) Thanks again.
Chapter Summary

Details about the story as well as The Promise playlist.

The Promise Compilation

Word count for the story ~208K

The story takes place in Boston, Portland, Maine, New York, NY, Newark, NJ, Key West, FL, Seattle, WA, Treasure Island, FL

There are 85 characters named and several more that are not named but just mentioned.

The story is loosely based on a movie with the same name that can be found here.

There are 34 songs used in the story, many Killian sings to Emma. You can find the links to each song here.

Hello
Ships
Hopelessly Devoted
Wake Up Little Susie
Unforgettable
Johnny B Goode
When I Fall in Love
Don’t Want to Miss A Thing
When You Say You Love Me
Believe
Secrets
Heaven and Earth
Talk Dirty To Me
Welcome To The Jungle
Waiting For a Girl Like You
Can’t Help Falling in Love
Rock and Roll All Night
Sweet Emotion
Don't Stop Believin
Sharp Dressed Man
Somebody to Love
Hey, Soul Sister
Wonderful Tonight
I'll Never Say Goodbye
Through The Eyes of Love
Close Your Eyes
Lips Are Moving
Beat It
Can You Read My Mind
Here and Now
Up Where We Belong
Can’t Fight This Feeling
Truly
Time of My Life

I’ve created gifs to bring each chapter alive. They can be found here.

End Notes

If you haven't watched the amazing preview trailer my friend Giennie - made for this story, check it out here. post/163858207412/the-promise-a-captain-swan-au-chapter-1-pops-up

Also come find me on tumblr as I have made visuals for each chapter.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!