Dark Hook Comes to Storybrooke

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Summary

Moments before the Evil Queen’s Dark Curse whisks our beloved fairytale characters to Storybrooke, Captain Hook finally gets his revenge on the Crocodile.

Notes

This is a collaborative effort from us both for our good friend, Krystal (@kmomof4) in honor of her birthday. HAPPY BIRTHDAY KRystal!!!

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out!
Prologue

Twenty-Eight years ago in the Enchanted Forest on the day of Regina’s curse...

The dank decay of the dungeon permeated all of Hook’s senses, but he paid it no heed for fortune was surely smiling upon him this day.

Cora had been correct. The dagger was exactly where she said it would be. Another useful piece of information he’d been able to charm from her before he’d completed the mission Regina had sent him to Wonderland for in the first place.

Hook sneered with slight amusement at the memory of Regina’s face when he’d told her that even though he had dispatched Cora at her behest, he no longer had need of her curse to enact his revenge. Cora had told him the curse wouldn’t truly give him what he wanted anyway, and he was tired of waiting.

Revenge would be his, and since the moment he’d stepped foot on the castle grounds it seemed that fate agreed with him. He’d met little resistance from the Prince and Princess’ guards. It seemed there were other matters of concern facing the castle. From his vantages in dark corners and shadows it was clear that the entire household had been turned on end with the news of the Princess’ labor and the impending arrival of not only a new little royal, but the Evil Queen as well.

All those lovely distractions had made it too easy for him to retrieve the dagger from its hidden place within the vaults, and make his way down to the cells under the castle proper. Now all that remained between him and his quarry were two guards, but as it had been all that day, luck continued to be on his side. The sound of the alarm bell rang out causing the knights to abandon their post, leaving just Hook and the old crocodile to face each other one final time.

Hook weighed the dagger in his hand, his gaze resting on his forearm at the memorial he’d inked into his skin for his beloved Milah. “We’ve done it, my love,” Hook murmured. “The vile imp is about to meet his fate, and you will be avenged at last.”

Hook closed his eyes and tamped down his heartache, allowing the hate and rage to boil up within him once more, he fortified the emotions that would see his quest through to the end. With one last bracing breath, Hook slipped a sinister smirk on his face and emerged from the shadows.

“Well, well, well, look what we have here. A toothless crocodile in a cage,” Hook taunted as he sauntered up to the bars. “How does it feel, Dark One? To once again be utterly powerless? To once again be at my mercy?”

“Well, Dearie .” The Dark One sang as he approached the bars to face his foe. “I might be caged, but I’m hardly at your mercy,” the depraved demon giggled as he began to turn away from the bars.

The final remnants of Hook’s control snapped as he plunged his hook into the back of the Dark One’s shoulder and pulled him forward, pinning him against the bars. “I wouldn’t be too sure of that,” Hook growled through his teeth as he plunged the dagger deep into the scourge’s gut.

He delighted at the sound of the crocodile’s shocked inhale and guttural rasps that gave evidence to
the severity of the wound, and thought there was, perhaps, no more satisfying a sight he could ever behold than that of the life slipping from The Dark One’s eyes. Hook expected begging. Expected pleading and groveling from the cowardly creature, but was instead met with one last barb.

“You think you’ve seen the last of me?” he wheezed. The curse vanished from his visage as the man Hook once taunted on the deck of his ship became more prevalent in his last moments. “You can’t get rid of me that easily, Dearie.”

“What do you mean?” Hook demanded, his hand still gripping the blade that was buried within Rumplestiltskin.

“You’ll see,” Rumple replied with his last breaths. “Magic… always comes… with a price… and now… it’s yours to pay.”

As the man’s life gave way, his body became dead weight against the pirate’s hook and the dagger. Releasing him to collapse against the dungeon floor Hook felt a tingling sensation creep up his right hand. “What the devil?” Hook gasped as he saw the shimmering glint of magic encompass his hand. Swirling blackness suddenly knocked him off kilter, but just before it claimed him fully Hook balked and swallowed back the rising bile at the name he now saw gleaming from the dagger within his hand.

His own.

Pain. Torment. Anguish. Rage. An unrelenting assault cascaded over him as the darkness ravaged every fiber of his being. Just when he thought he could endure it no longer, the viscous mire receded leaving a bewildered Hook alone in a quiet clearing.

“What the bloody hell is happening?!” Hook shouted at the trees. Panic set in as his mind tried to comprehend, and simultaneously deny what had occurred.

“Well isn’t it obvious?” a voice asked. An all too familiar voice. An impossible voice. “You’re the new Dark One, Dearie.”

“No,” Hook exhaled on a desperate breath as he turned toward the voice only to see the crocodile standing before him. “No!”

“Oh, yes,” the imp smiled with glee. “See for yourself,” and he gestured to the dagger still resting in Hook’s grip.

With a trembling hand, Hook brought the blade up to meet his reluctant gaze. He’d already seen it, knew what would be etched upon its surface, but the knowledge did not prepare him for the despair that overtook him as he gazed upon the name scrolled along the odious metal.

Killian Jones.

Despair gave way to distraction as a low rumbling caught Hook’s attention. The ground began to shake under his feet as the rumbling became a cacophony within his ears, and just over the treetops Hook watched as a dark purple cloud came barreling towards him.

“What the blazes is that?!” Hook exclaimed.

“Oh, that,” the crocodile quipped, “would be the Dark Curse.”

Hook paled at the realization that there was no escaping the onslaught.
“Lucky you,” the imp muttered as the purple smoke began to descend and swirl around them. “Twice cursed in one day.”

For the second time, Hook succumbed to an unknown darkness as the Evil Queen’s Dark Curse enveloped him.
Chapter One

Chapter Summary

Moments before the Evil Queen’s Dark Curse whisks our beloved fairytale characters to Storybrooke, Captain Hook finally gets his revenge on the Crocodile. Twenty-eight years later, Killian Jones awakes in Storybrooke expecting just another ordinary day, that is until a number of abnormal occurrences disrupts his otherwise scheduled life. The greatest of which is a new face in town. A young woman by the name of Emma. Emma. What a lovely name...

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

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Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

Chapter One:

Twenty-Eight years later...

The incessant beep of the alarm was finally quieted by his outstretched hand. He wasn’t even sure why he bothered to set the infernal thing. He’d risen with the sun for… well, for as long as he could remember; a habit he’s never understood, nor been able to break.

Killian Jones crawled out of his overly large king sized bed and started his morning routine. The same routine he’d done every morning since… well, nevermind.

While showering he mentally ran through his daily itinerary; who to visit for rent money, who to visit to threaten about past due rent, which threats to make good on, and what supplies he would need to collect to continue work on his one true love, his ship the Jewel.

As one of the largest landowners in town, with approximately half of Storybrooke’s deeds in his
name, just about everyone in town had dealings with Mr. Jones. Some more amicable than others. But being the town landlord, amongst other, less savory, occupations took its toll, so in an effort to balance the stress of day-to-day life, Killian made time for one gratifying outlet, as well as one vice.

Restoring the old mid century brig in the harbor was Killian’s one true passion, while his free supply of top shelf rum from The Rabbit Hole's proprietor was his solace.

Drying off after his shower, Killian subconsciously rubbed his right forearm with the niggling feeling that something was missing. Putting the strange thought from his mind, what could possibly be missing, he dressed and vacated his expansive home. Some in town referred to it as the Jones Manor, as it exceeded even Mayor Mills’ mansion in style and grandeur.

It was a fine day. The late October weather had just begun to turn a bit too crisp, but still offered that pleasant cozy autumn feel, so he opted to make his way on foot to his first stop of the day - Granny’s. Always Granny’s. Everyday, without fail, Killian found himself on that familiar path to the local diner. Sometimes for business, but mostly for coffee, and to make his presence known to the townsfolk that he’d started his daily rounds. This morning was no different than any other.

In fact, most mornings were no different, he mused briefly. The same house, the same ocean, the same walk from the private bluff his home, and one other house, which currently stood vacant occupied, the same people, the same activities. Everything was much the same from one day to the next, which was probably what made the sight of the Mills lad peddling like mad down Main Street stick out in such sharp contrast to everything else occurring around Killian.

*The lad must have missed the bus*, Killian reasoned. Strange. It’s not like Henry to be running late for school. I’ll have to remember to ask him about it later when we meet at the Jewel.

Henry Mills.

The one bright spot in Killian’s otherwise dark and lonely existence. A good lad, despite his insufferable mother’s upbringing, and one that Killian had taken quite a shine to the moment he’d caught him on the Jewel all those years ago. The lad had been what, seven, eight at the time? Hard to remember…

Henry was quite possibly the only person who ever sought out Killian’s company, and didn’t seem the least bit put off by the salty, old, sea dog’s moods or reputation. To be fair, Killian wasn’t sure just how much the lad was privy to when it came to his dealings around town. Nevertheless, something about Henry Mills had immediately endeared itself to Killian and he now found himself with a ten-year-old sized shadow following him about each day as he imparted all manner of sailing and other knowledge to the lad.

The hours spent with Henry were the best of Killian’s day, but they always came with a price. For inevitably it would be time for the lad to say his good-byes, and once again Killian would find himself alone, with only his demons to keep him company. This was usually about the time he’d make his way to The Rabbit Hole and attempt to drown said demons with a bottle of rum - the aforementioned vice.

Everyday. Always the same.

Except today it seemed. For not only had Henry apparently missed the bus to school, but he didn’t join Killian on the Jewel afterward.

If it didn’t mean that he’d have to actually engage with the boy’s mother, Mayor Regina Mills, Killian would have called to check up on the lad. However, he was rather certain that Regina had no
idea where her son spent his afternoons, outside of the odd therapy session with Dr. Hopper, and
Killian did not want to expose their meetings; both to protect Henry, and, more selfishly, prevent the
loss of the boy’s camaraderie.

Though he was anxious something dire might have happened to prevent the boy from seeking their
standing afternoon engagement, Killian was more tormented by the thought that Henry had opted not
to come of his own accord. Killian would be lying if he said the thought hadn’t occurred to him that
one day Henry would learn the truth of just who Killian Jones was - unsavory and corrupt
landowner, emotionally bankrupt shell of a man, ruthless scoundrel, and would wish nothing more to
do with him.

Henry had once jokingly called Killian a pirate, fixating on the more romanticized and white-washed
aspects of such characters, but Killian knew he’d done his fair share of pillaging and plundering in
this god-forsaken town to earn him just such a moniker - or worse.

It was with that trepidation - Henry’s absence that day might be because the lad had finally come to
his senses about the company he keeps - that Killian found himself once again in the corner booth of
The Rabbit Hole, nursing his bottle of rum with a new demon added to the haunting. As Killian
contemplated this new demon added to the fold, he realized there were a number of new and strange
occurrences that day, other than just the additional specter. Henry missing the bus and peddling
down Main Street. Henry missing their afternoon lesson. And that flash of yellow he’d caught out of
the corner of his eye as he’d turned towards The Hole, a flash of yellow that had disappeared when
he’d looked back to see whose car it was. He can’t remember ever seeing a vehicle of that shade
before.

These notions were still plaguing him the next morning as he made his way to Granny’s once again,
with new thoughts to add to his musings.

Parking his motorcycle out front, Killian made his way into the diner for a quick breakfast. The
Sheriff had contacted him first thing that morning about the damage to the town sign, a ‘gift’ he’d
donated to the town long ago. After his meal, he planned to meet Marco, Storybrooke’s handyman,
out there, to discuss the repair costs. It seemed, however, that fortune would save him that trek out to
the town line, as the man in question was currently conversing with the town shrink in one of the
diner’s booths.

Killian approached the pair, but then hesitated as he heard Henry’s name mentioned.

“I saw him late last night. He said he’d been on a field trip and forgot to tell me, but I know that isn’t
true… then there was that strange woman with him. Henry said she was-”

“Can we help you, Mr. Jones?” Marco interrupted, cutting off his friend’s concern about the boy.

No matter, though. The lad was safe, and that was all that mattered to Killian. Whether he’d been
honest about the field trip or not, Killian was bolstered by the fact that it hadn’t just been him that
Henry had avoided yesterday. Whatever was going on with the lad didn’t seem to have anything to
do with Killian personally, and he was sure he’d get the full story from Henry later that day, now that
he knew the lad wasn’t avoiding him.

“Aye, Marco,” Killian answered as he pulled up a seat to join the men - much to their dismay. “The
Sheriff phoned me this morning about the accident at the town sign. Have you been out to survey the
damage yet this morning?”

“Not yet, Mr. Jones,” the old man answered nervously. “I was heading out there just after breakfast.
You’ll be joining me, I assume?”
“I’m a busy man, Marco. I’ve no time for these trivial matters, so let’s you and I come to an agreement here and now, shall we?” He posed the question, though he did not wait for the man’s agreement before he continued. “I will pay cost for all the supplies and materials, and my usual flat rate for the labor. I expect the work to be done by week’s end or a twenty percent discount will be applied to the final bill. Do we have a deal?” For some reason that last word made Killian cringe internally. It always had.

“W-week’s end?” Marco stammered incredulously. “Mr. Jones, sir, I cannot possibly have the sign fixed by-”

“Oh, I have faith in you Marco,” Killian offered in mocked support. “It’s either that, or I amend the lease agreement that’s about to come due on your shop. What do you say? Ten, fifteen percent increase in rent?”

“Now, Mr. Jones, be reasonable,” Dr. Hopper interjected.

“I don’t think this concerns you, mate,” Killian countered darkly. “But if you’d like to talk about the terms of your particular lease agreement, I’m only too happy to oblige.”

The men sat silent before him, bested and helpless against such power and authority.

Killian offered them an empty smile as he stood and took his leave. “Pleasure as always, mates,” he called out over his shoulder exiting the diner. The thought of breakfast was long forgotten as he started his motorcycle and headed towards the docks.

Just as he rounded the corner from Main Street to the road leading to the marina, that flash of yellow caught his periphery once more. A yellow Volkswagen was parked in the city impound lot. A yellow Volkswagen that Killian was sure did not belong to anyone residing within Storybrooke. Curious.

Hours later Killian still couldn’t shake off the unease and… something else he couldn’t quite put his finger on, regarding all the strange occurrences that had happened the past two days. Henry had once again failed to join him on the Jewel, and Killian had resolved to seek out the lad to try and ascertain just what the blazes was going on.

A man could only take so many disruptions to his otherwise orderly existence, after all.

Killian had just crested the berm that overlooked Henry’s castle when he saw the lad heading off in the opposite direction with someone. A blonde someone. A female, blonde someone, as a matter of fact.

His brow twitched toward his hairline as he wondered who the woman might be. Even as he mentally thumbed through his mind’s rolodex of every blonde lass in town, he knew none quite matched the figure retreating in the distance.

An unexpected conflict rose within Killian. If he didn’t know himself better he’d almost call it jealousy. He supposed he ought to be glad the boy had another person in this world that cared for him - if the stranger’s arm draped over the lad’s shoulders held any indication of such a regard. Though he couldn’t help but feel a bit slighted that whatever Henry was facing, he hadn’t chosen to confide in him. Unwilling to examine those feelings any further than he already had, or at all, he decided it was the perfect time to call it a day and find his booth in the dark corner of The Rabbit Hole, with a bottle or two to keep him company, and the demons at bay.
Emma watched as Henry ran past Regina, going inside and disappearing upstairs.

“He seems to have taken quite a shine to you,” Regina said, with a vapid smile and an insincere air of civility.

“You know what’s kind of crazy?” Emma began, overwhelmed by the events of the last twenty-four hours, and trying to make sense of this curve ball life had thrown her way. “Yesterday was my birthday, and when I blew out the candle on this cupcake I bought myself, I actually made a wish. I wished I didn’t have to be alone on my birthday. And then, Henry showed up.” Emma stuck her hands in her back pockets and settled back onto her heels, as she continued to ponder the coincidence of Henry’s timing.

“I hope there’s no misunderstanding here,” Regina commented, pulling Emma from her thoughts.

“I’m sorry?”

“Don’t mistake all this as an invitation back into his life.”

“Oh…”

“Miss Swan, you made a decision ten years ago. And in the last decade, while you’ve been… well, who knows what you’ve been doing."

Regina’s thinly veiled speculation and disapproval caused Emma’s brows to shoot up in offense.

“I’ve changed every diaper. Soothed every fever. Endured every tantrum. You may have given birth to him, but he is my son.”

“I wasn’t…”

“No!” Regina interrupted harshly. “You don’t get to speak. You don’t get to do anything. You gave up that right when you tossed him away. Do you know what a closed adoption is? It’s what you asked for. You have no legal right to Henry and you’re going to be held to that. So, I suggest you get in your car, and you leave this town. Because if you don’t, I will destroy you if it is the last thing I do. Goodbye, Miss Swan.” Turning on her stilettoed heel, Regina headed back to the house, but Emma called after her before she managed to shut the door.

“Do you love him?”

“Excuse me?” Regina looked up with a sneer on her perfectly painted face.

“Henry. Do you love him?”

“Of course I love him.”

Emma Swan hadn't been given much in her life, but one thing she'd come to rely on was her gift of sensing when someone was lying to her. She called it her superpower and although it wasn’t pingin per se, something about this entire interaction, hell, this entire town, just wasn’t sitting right with her. With Regina all but shutting the door in her face, effectively ending their conversation, Emma got back in the bug and pulled away from the curb.

*Oh great, a headache, I’m too sober for this shit,* she thought sardonically as she tried to remember the way back to the one bar she’d seen in town.

As Emma was driving down Main Street, she took in the names of a few of the businesses she
passed on her way to the bar. “Game of Thorns, Dark Star Pharmacy, Any Given Sundae, where in hell have I landed myself?” she muttered. Finally, reaching her destination, she looked up at the decrepit sign attached to the side of the building, “The Rabbit Hole, seriously? Well, this town does seem to be on drugs, why not shrooms, too?” Parking her bug in the lot out back Emma decided to go in and see about that drink.

Upon first glance the place was dark and kind of dank. With a rowdy group near the pool tables, she made a beeline for the far end of the bar, to a corner slightly more shadowed than the rest. Thankfully she wasn’t even completely situated on her barstool before the bartender was asking her, “What’s your poison sweetheart?”

“Rum, straight up, make it a double.”

“Oooh, the lady knows what she likes… I like it.”

“Not interested Romeo, just pour the drink, or I’ll get it myself.”

“Feisty. Well, if I can do you for anything else sweetheart, just yell for me. Name’s Will.”

Seated in the far corner of the bar, Killian nursed his nightly rum. He sat in the same booth as always, the one with the burnt out bulb that never seemed to get replaced, but Killian didn’t mind, he found solace in the rum and darkness.

He’d been brooding in his seat for the better part of an hour when the door swung open admitting what could only be an angel; at least, that’s what the more fanciful part of his brain perceived as the setting sun illuminated an almost ethereal glow around her golden tresses and continued the aura down the length of her lithe body. Curiosity piqued, he watched as the beautiful blonde walked in and situated herself on the barstool closest to his booth.

Killian was certain he had never seen her before, certain he could never forget a woman that beautiful. But, nobody comes to Storybrooke, ever. Who is this woman and what has brought her here to me? To me? What the bloody hell has gotten into me? Killian continued to study her over the rim of his glass as she sat and ordered a rum, not taking any of Will’s shite, and giving it right back as good as she got. Smirking to himself, Killian decided he just might like this tough lass.

Emma nursed her rum while thinking about everything that had happened in the last twenty-four hours, from Henry finding her in Boston, to the car ride back to Storybrooke, Maine. I mean Storybrooke, come on… When her mind landed on Regina and her threats, the subtle, and not so subtle, Emma slammed back the rest of her drink and signaled Will, the smart ass bartender, for another. When he brought her the next round he had the decency to keep the innuendo to himself. So absorbed in her mental back and forth about what would be best for Henry - should she stay, should she go - Emma didn’t realize someone had slid onto the barstool next to her, until they cleared their throat. Startled, she looked up and was overcome by the man before her, in a word, Emma was fuckstruck. Who knew that was an actual thing? she mused, this man is gorgeous.

“Didn’t mean to intrude love, but did I happen to see you with the Mill’s lad on the beach earlier?”

Fuck me, an accent too? Wait… what’s he want with Henry? “Possibly. Why would it be any concern of yours?” As she asked, she sized up the stranger next to her, who seemed a touch too interested in Henry for her comfort. He was the gorgeous, dark, and brooding type, all leather clad
with charms on a chain around his neck. *Is that an anchor, and a compass?* A couple of rings adorned the fingers of both hands, with a notably vacant left ring finger... *How is this man single? Guyliner? He really is going for the bad boy persona isn’t he, and... it works for him... get it together, Emma.* As she finished her assessment of her tall, dark, and accented bar fellow her eyes made their way back to his face, noting the lifted eyebrow, and unrestrained smirk.

“I’m sorry. What?”

“Something pique your interest there, lass?”

Emma rolled her eyes at his attempted flirting.

“As I said. Henry’s a good lad, and he’s been having a rough go of it lately. I’ve been concerned about him.”

“And how does someone like…” Emma waved the hand unoccupied by her current drink up and down to encompass his person, “you, know Henry?”

“Small town lass, everyone knows everyone, yet, I don’t know you,” the man stated with a teasing quirk of his brow.

Emma smirked at his response, and the ploy to get her name. “That’s because I’m not from around here. Actually, I’m Henry’s birth mom.” Slightly uncomfortable at her unexpected admission to this handsome stranger, Emma decided it was a good idea to gulp down about half of her still mostly full drink. *Why did I tell him that?*

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“Ah. I see. I take it the boy found you, and persuaded you to come here?” Killian pressed, even as he tried to hide his astonishment that the boy had actually taken his advice on the matter.

Knowing how miserable Henry had been recently, working himself up into believing that his entire life was the result of some sort of curse, Killian had suggested learning more about his beginnings, as it might offer him some solace. Good advice it seemed, if the evidence of such a lovely creature before him was any indication.

“Something like that. I just brought him back, it’s not like I’m staying.”

“Now that is a shame…”

“Really? You’ve known me all of two minutes, how do you know that Henry isn’t better off with me gone?”

“Because love, I’ve seen his upbringing thus far, and it leaves much to be desired.”

The lass’s face crumpled at that revelation. “I had hoped when I gave him up he’d have a great life,” she confessed in a despondent tone.

“Well, you’re here now, what say you? A toast? To Henry, and giving the lad his best chance?”

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Emma was taken aback by his choice of words. Hearing her justification parroted back to her by a stranger, had her reeling as she heard him continue, “I’m happy the lad has another person in town in his corner.”
“Who says I’m staying?” Emma bit out somewhat harshly.

He just gave her a knowing smirk, “If you weren’t you’d have left by now.”

Emma crossed her arms defensively over her chest as she retorted, “Oh, really? You think you know me so well?”

“Well, love. You are something of an open book.”

“Ugh. If I never hear another word about books it’ll be too soon.”

“Oh? Would you be referring to the lad’s story book then… and the curse?”

Emma looked back at him with a critical eye and wondered who Henry believed this cursed man really was.

Wait, no, there isn’t a curse. “You really don’t seem cursed to me.”

“Well love, you’ve only known me a few minutes, give it some time, and you’ll probably change your mind.”

“I can tell you what cursed is,” she muttered with a hint of self depreciation and loneliness in her voice.

“Not having someone.” She heard him say.

Emma’s eyes snapped to his and she saw a spark of recognition at the loneliness she had been attempting to tamp down ever since she blew out that stupid birthday candle.

“That’s the worst curse of all, isn’t it?” he finished, and the look that broke across her face must have cemented to him that he’d hit his mark with his words as he offered her a empathetic smile.

She gaped at him realizing just how painfully accurate that statement truly was. That realization made her think that this could be her chance to finally have someone want her, Henry came looking for her after all. They both sat there for a moment, introspectively, before Emma finally spoke, “Can I get you another drink Mr.?”

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“Where are my manners? We haven’t been formally introduced. Jones. Killian Jones,” he offered, hand extended before him, which she accepted as she replied.

“Swan. Emma Swan.”

Killian felt his grip tighten slightly around her hand as something inside him shifted, and without coherent thought as to why, he heard himself declare, “Emma. What a lovely name,” even as visions overtook him. Visions that told of another life - his life - and brought forth a surge of panic that he quickly tried to squelch as Emma looked for Will to order them another round.

“Actually, love, I’m afraid I must decline,” he said, hastily leaving his seat.

“Everything okay?”

“Everything’s fine,” he assured quickly, not wishing to appear as if anything was amiss. “I’ve just remembered… something, and I want to see to it before I forget again.”
“Alright, well… see you around, Jones.” She flashed him a smile that confirmed her decision to stick around for a while.

“Aye. Welcome to Storybrooke, love.” Killian managed to offer the sentiment with a reasonable amount of genuineness before he exited the bar, but as he met the brisk night air panic enveloped him once more. Attempting to calm his racing pulse and labored breathing, Killian looked up into the night sky and noticed an astonishing sight.

*It now read 8:16 on the clock tower.*
Moments before the Evil Queen’s Dark Curse whisks our beloved fairytale characters to Storybrooke, Captain Hook finally gets his revenge on the Crocodile. Twenty-eight years later, Killian Jones awakes in Storybrooke expecting just another ordinary day, that is until a number of abnormal occurrences disrupts his otherwise scheduled life. The greatest of which is a new face in town. A young woman by the name of Emma. Emma. What a lovely name...

His hands wouldn’t stop shaking. Hands. Plural. As in, he had two of them again. How?
Was it a side effect of Regina’s curse or from his being...
The Dark One.
The bloody Dark One.
I’m the bloody Dark One!

It had all come back in a rush. Fast and sporadic flashes of memories - his memories - that told the story of his long life. A life that spanned centuries, and yet the truth of it had hit him in an instant. The truth of who he truly was.

Killian Jones.
Orphan.
Slave.
Lieutenant.
Pirate.

Captain Hook.

Dark One.

Killian shuddered at that final memory, and then panic seized him once again. He spun around surveying the room, expecting the Crocodile to manifest himself at any moment with his mocking and jeering. But he hadn’t appeared. Not in the bar. Not on the long walk home. Not even now as Killian paced the length of his manor.

Why?

‘This new realm is a land without magic’, he remembered suddenly. Regina’s words, just before she’d solicited him to kill her mother, echoing in his ear.

A Land Without Magic.

‘Where The Dark One will be stripped of his power.’

For the first time in what seemed like hours Killian took a deep, steadying breath. The Dark One had no power in this land. He had no power in this land. Even still, Killian could feel the rage, the anguish, and the all encompassing darkness he’d felt in that clearing. The memory of their collective presence haunting him more severely than any of his other demons ever had.

And even if they now lay dormant within him, it didn’t change one other fact… he was still Captain Hook. A villain in his own right. A scourge and a scoundrel out for only one thing. Revenge.

Killian pressed his fingers onto the now vacant space on his forearm. Milah.

Revenge had been his, but at what cost?

He’d become the very thing he hated the most. The very thing she hated most. Rumplestiltskin may not have been The Dark One when they’d been together, but Killian had seen it in her eyes when he’d told her of his run in with her husband turned Dark One on the docks; the loathing at what he’d become coursing through her.

For centuries Killian had justified his own depravity and darkness because it was all in pursuit of avenging her. He believed that she’d understand, would offer him absolution for his actions because the ends would justify the means. But now…

Now all he felt was shame. Shame at what he’d become, and thankful to all the gods that she had not lived to see how far he’d fallen in his quest for vengeance. And not just Milah, but Liam as well.

Liam.

Killian clasped at the chain hanging from his neck, but knew it would not hold what he sought. Liam’s ring. What had become of it? What had become of all his possessions? His hook, his coat, his sword, his…

Dagger.

The Dark One dagger.

It had been in his hand when the curse hit, and even though he knew it no longer had the power to control him (at least, that is, as long as Regina’s curse and the lack of magic in this land kept The
Dark Ones at bay) he in no way wanted it in anyone else’s possession other than his own.

Killian tore the manor apart in his search, upending rooms he had no memory of ever even entering before. Memories of his cursed life interspersed with his real life. Bloody hell, leave it to Regina to over complicate matters. As if three hundred years of his own memories weren’t enough for his mind to contend with, now he had twenty-eight years of practically the same day recurring over and over again in his head. The only detail making the days distinct from one another was Henry.

Henry. He knew.

The lad knew about the curse. He’d mentioned it before, his suspicions that the stories in the book his teacher had given him were true. Killian had recognized it as a coping mechanism, a way for the lad to try and escape the reality of his unhappy life. A way to ground himself to something more hopeful.

Killian now understood why Henry Mills had come to mean so much to him. He was a lost boy, just like Killian.

On some level Killian had recognized that trait in Henry, even as he had forgotten his true self. It’s probably what had prompted him to suggest that the boy seek out information about his birth parents in the first place. Of course, he never considered that Henry would actually run off in search of the woman who’d given birth to him. But seek her out, the lad had, and her presence in Storybrooke had already begun to change things.

The mystery of why her name broke the spell he had been under notwithstanding, Killian knew he’d only just scratched the surface of the intrigue Emma Swan possessed. But he couldn’t focus on that now. On her. He had a dagger to find and a secret to keep.

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As Emma dressed the next morning, and thought about stopping at the diner for breakfast, she heard a knock on the door. Answering it revealed Regina with a basket of apples in hand, and a fake smile plastered on her face. Great, I have to deal with her crap before I’ve even had the chance to drink my first cup of coffee? Just great. Before Emma could manage a polite hello, Regina thrust an apple toward her and started in on some random spiel.

“Did you know the honeycrisp tree is the most vigorous and hardy of all apple trees? It can survive temperatures as low as 40 below and keep growing. It can weather any storm. I have one that I’ve tended to since I was a little girl, and to this day I have yet to taste anything more delicious than the fruit it offers.”

“Thanks,” Emma responded dubiously as she took the proffered apple Regina extended to her, still clutching her cup in her right hand.

“I'm sure you'll enjoy them on your drive home.” Regina tried to hand over the full basket of apples, but Emma took a half step backward, refusing to reach out for it.

“Actually, I'm gonna stay for a while.”

A brief flicker of anger and agitation crossed Regina’s face at Emma’s declaration and refusal before she schooled her features into a mask of pleasant nonchalance. “I'm not sure that's such a good idea. Henry has enough issues. He doesn't need you confusing him.”

“All due respect, Madam Mayor, the fact that you have now threatened me twice in the last twelve hours makes me want to stay more.”
“Since when were apples a threat?”

“I can read between the lines. Sorry. I just want to make sure Henry's okay.”

“He's fine, dear. Any problems he has are being taken care of.”

A concern for Henry’s well being swelled within her chest at Regina’s words, prompting her to ask, “What does that mean?”

“It means I have him in therapy. It's all under control. Take my advice, Ms. Swan, only one of us knows what's best for Henry.”

That’s right, Emma thought. She remembered meeting Henry’s therapist the other night when she brought him back to Storybrooke, he was the kind man that had given her directions to Regina’s place. She remembered as a sense of relief flooded through her that Regina wasn’t referring to something more sinister. Great I’m starting to think like Henry, she’s not the Evil Queen, just a concerned parent, most likely a bad parent, but concerned nonetheless.

“Yeah, I'm starting to think you're right about that.” Emma didn’t miss the glare Regina sent her way at that comment.

“It's time for you to go.”

“Or what?” Emma challenged.

“Don't underestimate me, Ms. Swan. You have no idea what I'm capable of.” Considering that the end of the disturbing conversation, Emma shut the door without another word to Regina, and locked it before going back to getting ready for the day.

Thirty minutes later, Emma found herself perched at the counter in Granny’s diner. Perusing the menu, she debated what to order, when Ruby set down a hot chocolate with cinnamon and whipped cream in front of her.

“Here you go.”

“Thank you, but I didn’t order that.”

“Yeah, I know. You have an admirer.” At that comment, Emma turned and tried to tamp down the hope that it might be from a certain blue eyed gentleman who had haunted her dreams the night before, only to see Sheriff Humbert. Her disappointment swelled within her as she picked up the cocoa and approached his table, intending to let the poor man down gently.

“Ah, so you decided to stay.”

Was it really that much of a surprise to him? “Observant, important for a cop.”

“It's good news for our tourist business. It's bad for our local signage.” Graham looked a little uncomfortable with the awkward pause as his joke fell flat. “It's... it's a joke. Because you ran over our sign.”

The only immediate response she can muster is to roll her eyes at his terrible attempt at a joke. “Look, the cocoa was a nice gesture, and I am impressed that you guessed that I like cinnamon on my chocolate, 'cause most people don't, but I am not here to flirt, so thank you, but, no thank you.” Gently placing the cup on the table, she considers whether or not she would have accepted it from a different, accented man.
“I didn't send it.”

“I did. I like cinnamon, too.”

Her head shot towards the front table by the window at the sound of Henry’s voice. How did I not see him there earlier? “Don't you have school?”

“Duh. I'm ten. Walk me.”

He’s definitely my kid with that eyeroll. Without so much as another look at the sheriff, Emma placed a hand on Henry’s shoulder and began steering him out the door towards the bus stop.

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Killian stopped abruptly in the back hallway of the diner as he watched the Swan girl and Henry make their way out of the diner and along the sidewalk that led to the bus stop. He was going to have to come up with some sort of excuse for avoiding Henry, as he was not quite ready to bring himself to lie to the boy by keeping up with his cursed facade in the lad’s presence. For now, he had a more pressing issue at hand; one he hoped the good Sheriff might be able to assist him with.

Killian prided himself on possessing a stealth that served him well in keeping people on their toes, or catching them off guard with his approach, but he’d never been able to get a jump on the Sheriff. The man somehow always knew when Killian, or anyone else, was approaching him, he seemed to have a sixth sense about him. In light of Killian’s regained memories he wondered just who Graham was back in their realm, and what the man would say if he knew that it was the infamous Captain Hook, or The Dark One for that matter, that was making himself welcome in his booth.

“Good morning, Mr. Jones. Something I can assist you with?” the Sheriff questioned, his disdain only slightly veiled in his tone.

“Actually, Sheriff. I’ve come to do my civic duty as a responsible citizen and business owner,” Killian replied as he placed a hand gun on the table between them, causing the Sheriff to tense momentarily before Killian could add, “I found it at the docks. Thought it best to turn it in to the proper authorities.”

The truth was Killian had found it during the search of his home overnight. Guns, knives, legal documents, and all manner of possessions had been uncovered. While not completely inconsistent with his nature, the items weren’t altogether authentic to who he was, cursed or otherwise, either, and no dagger had been found among them. It was only after he’d felt certain that no location within his home had been overlooked that Killian began to consider where within the town he might continue his search.

The stash of weapons he’d found concealed in various rooms had led him to the idea that the dagger may lay unclaimed within the Sheriff’s station. Not wanting to tip the lawman’s suspicions any further than they would be prone to, Killian had devised the ruse of turning over the firearm in hopes of naturally opening up the opportunity to question Graham about unclaimed blades.

“You found it?” Graham questioned suspiciously.

“Aye.”

“At the docks?”

“Aye.”
“And you’re just turning it in?”

“Would you rather I not?” Killian quipped inquiringly. “Too much paperwork involved, or are you running out of room to store unclaimed weapons at the Sheriff’s station?”

“We don’t have any unclaimed weapons at the station,” Graham admitted, unaware that he’d just provided the pirate with the very information he sought.

Damn! Killian cursed to himself. He’d have to continue his search elsewhere.

“Right. Well, first time for everything I suppose. I’ll leave you to it then, Sheriff.”

Killian exited the booth and took purposeful strides toward the door. He ran through his mental list of potential locations the dagger could be hiding, as he made his way to the sidewalk a flash of blonde curls and red leather caught his eye. He watched Emma make her way through the door that led up to Dr. Hopper’s office, or according to Henry, Jiminy Cricket’s office, and was once again struck by the urgent pull he felt toward the beguiling woman.

Shaking off such fanciful notions he turned himself towards the docks. He had a dagger to find and a day of searching through warehouses, offices, and his beloved Jolly Roger ahead of him.

Emma lounged on her bed at the B&B as she scoured the files that Dr. Hopper had given her about Henry. So far nothing was jumping out at her, but she wasn’t completely sure what she was looking for. She wasn’t a therapist, and until about three days ago she hadn’t considered herself a parent either. Not that she did even now that Henry was in her life.

A sharp knock at the door added to her current disgruntled state. When she found Sheriff Humbert on the other side she couldn’t help the sarcastic greeting that fell from her lips.

“Hey there. If you're concerned about the Do not disturb signs, don't worry, I've left them alone.”

“Actually, I'm here about Dr. Archibald Hopper. He mentioned you got into a bit of a row with him earlier?”

“No,” Emma clipped firmly as she placed her hands on her hips in annoyance.

“I was shocked, too, given your shy, delicate sensibilities,” Graham mocked, earning him an eyeroll.

“He says you demanded to see Henry's files and when he refused, you came back and stole them.”

“He gave them to me.”

“Alas, he's telling a different tale. May I check your room, or must I get a search warrant?”

Unbelievable. Emma turned and allowed Graham to enter. There was no point in delaying the inevitable.

“Is this what you're looking for?” she asked, gesturing to the numerous papers scattered across the bed.

“Well, you're very accommodating,” Graham needled as he picked up a few papers before delivering the news Emma had been waiting for, even as she reeled at the outrageousness of it all. “I'm afraid, Ms. Swan, you're under arrest. Again.”

“You know I'm being set up, don't you?” It was more a statement than a question as Graham affixed
cuffs to her wrists.

“And who, may I ask, is setting you up?”

Emma continued to proclaim her innocence, casting accusations at Regina all the way from the B&B to the Sheriff Station. She questioned Graham about Regina’s hold and influence on the town even as he booked her.

“Regina may be a touch intimidating, but I don’t think she’d go as far as a frame job,” Graham argued.

“How far would she go? What does she have her hands in?”

“Well, she’s the Mayor. She has her hands in everything.”

“Including the police force?” Emma accused.

“Hey,” an excited voice echoed from the hallway.

“Henry, what are you doing here?” Graham asked.

“His mother told him what happened,” Mary Margaret supplied, having accompanied Henry to the station from school.

“Of course she did,” Emma exasperated as she stared pointedly at Graham before addressing her son with a bit of trepidation. “Henry, I don’t know what she said-”

“You’re a genius,” Henry interrupted.

“What?”

“I know what you were up to. You were gathering intel for Operation Cobra,” Henry speculated with hushed excitement.

“I’m sorry. I’m a bit lost,” Graham confessed.

“It’s need-to-know, sheriff,” Henry said dismissively, “and all you need to know is that Ms. Blanchard’s gonna bail her out.”

“You are? Why?” Emma questioned incredulously.

“I, uh, trust you,” the petite woman stated skittishly.

Looking between Henry’s smug face and Mary Margaret’s quiet understanding Emma felt her need for retribution spike as she turned to Graham with her hands out in front of her.

“Well, if you would uncuff me, I have something to do.”

Killian aimlessly wandered along the streets of Storybrooke, having had no success in locating the dagger. Though, he had uncovered more intriguing items that would require his attention and focus once the bloody damned blade was back in his possession.

He was starting to wonder if the infernal thing had come over in the curse at all. For all he knew, it remained in the Enchanted Forest sealed away in the vault he had emerged from after the Crocodile’s
death. The only way Killian could be truly sure was to either keep searching and find the bloody thing or march into the Mayor’s office and ask Her Majesty. The latter option was not one he was willing to entertain, so he continued his trek as he ticked off all the locations he’d already explored.

Not in the manor, not at the Sheriff’s station, no sign of it in any of my usual hiding places within the Jolly. The warehouses and dock offices were a bust as well. Perhaps I should… what is that blasted noise!

The sound of a motor cut through Killian’s internal mutterings as he realized he was just across the street from the Town Hall. His curiosity piqued at the unusual sound, Killian made his way towards the building’s courtyard to investigate, but then quickly had to find a place to tuck himself away as he saw the Evil Queen exit the building.

“What the hell are you doing?!” the mayor exclaimed as she rushed across the courtyard towards the racket that continued to permeate the area.

A racket, that Killian could now see was being caused by the lovely Emma. She was wielding a chainsaw, ruthlessly plundering the Mayor’s prized apple tree as she made a quip about picking apples. Now, more than just Killian’s curiosity was piqued at the sight before him.

“You’re out of your mind.”

“No, you are, if you think a shoddy frame job’s enough to scare me off.”

Frame job? What else have I missed? Killian wondered.

“You’re gonna have to do better than that. You come after me one more time, I’m coming back for the rest of this tree. Because, sister, you have no idea what I’m capable of.”

Killian watched as Swan violently tossed the chainsaw aside and challenged, “Your move,” before stomping away. A fresh appreciation for the tough lass washed over him. So, she and the Queen are at odds, then? Not surprising, he supposed, Regina’s at odds with everyone in this accursed town.

Just as Killian was preparing to extricate himself from the dark cluster of shrubbery he’d hidden away in, Sheriff Humbert pulled up in his police cruiser, no doubt having received a complaint about the noise of the chainsaw. Killian decided to remain tucked away for their exchange. Treasure and priceless commodities came in many forms, none more valuable in his experience than good, old fashioned gossip. Information that one could use against one’s enemies was a prize worth harboring in the bushes for.

Killian patiently listened as Regina expressed her desire to once again have Swan arrested, only to have the Sheriff question the effectiveness of such an action, even as he inferred his suspicions that Emma had, indeed, been set-up for her earlier transgressions.

“I think your schoolboy crush is clouding your judgment,” Regina barbed accusingly at the Sheriff.

The accusation caused a spark of rage to ignite in Killian’s chest, he bit back a growl that threatened to reverberate from within. Taken aback by having such a fierce response to the implication that Graham may harbor feelings for the same woman who had so ensnared him, Killian nearly missed the remainder of their exchange.

“You want me to arrest her again, I will,” Graham complied.

“Good.”
“But she’s gonna keep coming at you, and I know you, you’re gonna keep going at her, and you will do whatever it takes to get her out of here and you may succeed—”

“No, I will succeed. He’s my son. It’s what’s best for him.”

Killian could barely contain the scathing retort that burned his throat, knowing now just how manipulative and cruel the woman had been in regards to the boy.

“I know that’s what you believe,” Graham stated sympathetically, “but if this escalates, it seems to me the only one who will get hurt is Henry.”

Killian watched as Graham departed, leaving both he and Regina to stew in their thoughts of how the repercussions of Emma’s presence in Storybrooke would ultimately affect the boy. Even with the gut-wrenching realization of his true self, and the knowledge of what lay dormant just beneath his surface, Killian could not bring himself to resent Henry for bringing his birth mother there, and ultimately waking him from his cursed state. She was changing things, and Killian believed that such changes would only benefit Henry. It was apparent, however, that Her Majesty did not share this sentiment.

“There has got to be a way of getting rid of that woman without Henry blaming me,” Regina muttered to herself, as she passed Killian’s hiding spot. “If ever there was a time I needed my powers… wait—”

Killian’s attention sharpened at Regina’s mention of her powers. I thought this was a land without magic?

“Perhaps that little imp had something stashed away. Somehow my curse failed to bring him over, but perhaps there is something in the pawn shop that could be of use.” Regina’s speculations prompted her to abandon her immediate concerns for the mangled tree, and Killian watched as she rushed back into her office building - presumably to grab her purse and keys.

The Crocodile. Regina didn’t realize the truth of just why the curse had failed to deliver Rumplestiltskin to this land. But she believed something useful of his might be hidden away within the abandoned pawn shop?

Killian began to wonder whether or not a certain item he’d been in search of might be located there as well. He was at a disadvantage, seeing as he was on foot and Regina would have her car to get her there ahead of him, so Killian wasted no time in making his way back towards Main Street, hoping against hope that her search would not lead to the dagger before he arrived.
Moments before the Evil Queen’s Dark Curse whisks our beloved fairytale characters to Storybrooke, Captain Hook finally gets his revenge on the Crocodile. Twenty-eight years later, Killian Jones awakes in Storybrooke expecting just another ordinary day, that is until a number of abnormal occurrences disrupts his otherwise scheduled life. The greatest of which is a new face in town. A young woman by the name of Emma. Emma. What a lovely name...

Regina’s car was already parked behind the abandoned pawn shop when Killian arrived. Windows obscured by curtains made it difficult for him to gauge whether or not she remained in the back room, or if she had moved through to the front of the store. Willing to risk his advantage, to catch her off guard, Killian made his way through the back door.

To his relief he found the back room empty, but could hear the shuffling sounds of movement coming from the showroom. Peaking through the curtain that separated the two spaces, his heart stopped as he saw the glint of metal and a familiar hilt being placed inside Regina’s purse. The slightly stunned and contemplative expression on her face confirmed to Killian that she had noted the name that now appeared upon its surface.

There was nothing for it, he’d have to confront her if he wanted to acquire the blade back. Slipping through the curtain, he took a moment’s enjoyment in seeing her startle when he cleared his throat. Quickly schooling her features to express her customary haughty condescension, Regina turned to address his intrusion.

“Mr. Jones, this is town property, what are you doing here?”

“Looking for something, as it would appear you are as well. So, how about we just cut to the chase and you give me what I came here for.”

“I have no idea to what you are referring, Mr. Jones.”
“Come now, Dearie.” Dearie? Where the bloody hell did that come from? Regina quirked an eyebrow at him as he continued. “Don’t be coy Regina, I know you’ve already found the dagger, and that you’ve seen whose name is now etched across it. My dagger, if you please,” he said as he flourishingly extended his hand towards her.

For a moment it looked as though Regina was going to outright refuse, but then her eyes widened and her face contorted with disbelief as she drew out the dagger from her purse and handed it over to him.

Curious.

“You’re awake?” Regina inquired incredulously. “And you’re The Dark One?”

“So it would seem,” Killian answered bitterly, his fingers tracing the letters of the name on the blade, willing it to change to any other than his own.

“How?”

“I gather that whoever kills The Dark One becomes cursed to carry the darkness upon themselves, as the new Dark One,” Killian explained.

“No, not that,” Regina dismissed. “I already knew that. I meant, how are you awake?”

Killian’s head snapped up as he fixed Regina with a cold stare.

“You knew?” he accused, his tone laced with a hushed menace that slipped through his clenched and ticking jaw as he advanced towards her.

“Of course I knew,” Regina confirmed, attempting to seem unaffected by his approach, even as her steps away from him faltered. “Do you really think I didn’t learn everything I could about that evil little imp?”

“And you let me pursue the Crocodile without ever mentioning a word as to the true cost of my vengeance?”

“You didn’t ask,” Regina sniped, gaining back some of her sass even in the face of his ire.

“Well, Your Majesty I have a few things I’d like answered now, and you’re going oblige me.”

Before Regina could respond, Killian gave in to the compulsion to add a please, and watched with growing interest as she seemed unable to refuse his request.

“What do you want to know?”

“My hand. Did I regain it because of your curse, or from the curse of being The Dark One?

“Your guess is as good as mine,” she answered flippantly, stoking Killian’s temper once more.

“What the bloody hell does that mean? It’s your curse, Regina!”

“I only enacted the curse, Hook.” He flinched slightly at her use of his once proud moniker. “I didn’t create it. Besides, you weren’t supposed to be included in it.” She added the last part as if it were an afterthought.

“What do you mean?”
“After you came back from Wonderland you said you had no need for my curse, so I took you out of it.” Her tone implied that she had done him a favor, only to reveal her true intentions behind such an action. “I’d planned to separate you from Rumple permanently. Deny you your precious revenge by leaving you behind, while The Dark One was vulnerable in this land.”

“But you left The Dark One written into the curse.” Killian clarified, understanding permeating his thoughts, explaining the inconsistencies he’d observed since he awoke.

“Yes.”

“So everything that you added into the curse that pertained to the Crocodile—”

“Must have transferred to you when you became The Dark One,” she finished.

After a moment’s reflection as the two of them fleshed out the meaning of such a revelation, Killian again brought forth his initial question.

“That doesn’t explain my hand, or why my tattoo is gone.”

“That’s probably an effect of the curse removing any physical attributes that could remind you of who you truly were, or would cause you to stand out in this land. Much like it changed the dwarves’ features and made the cricket human again.”

“Well, while I rather enjoy having my hand back, can you return my tattoo?” he asked quietly, bristling at the vulnerability he was exposing to her. In an effort to place them on equal footing in his moment of weakness, he added a pointed, “Please.”

“That shouldn’t still work,” she muttered angrily. “I made that deal with Rumple.”

“No, Dearie.” Damn it, Crocodile! Get out of my head! “You made that deal with The Dark One, not the coward it was possessing. Now about my tattoo?”

“I can’t put it back. Though, I’m sure there’s a lovely cursed tattoo parlor in town, somewhere,” she ribbed with an insincere smile plastered on her face as he glared at her. “Now I have question for you, Captain. How did you get your memories back?”

Now it was Killian’s turn to grin disingenuously. “It seems the Crocodile didn’t trust you, so he apparently had a back door built into the curse, a failsafe as it were, to get his... rather my memories back.”

“I guess I should have read the fine print more closely,” Regina muttered sarcastically.

“So now what?” Killian asked.

“What do you mean?”

“The curse, Regina. What do you plan to do about the curse?” Killian asked exasperatedly. Surely things couldn’t go on as they had, not when he had his memories back and Henry suspected the truth.

“Nothing.”

“What do you mean, nothing?” Killian asked incredulously at her flippancy.

“Just as I said. I’m sorry that your revenge didn’t give you the happy ending you were hoping for, but mine is working out exactly as I had planned.” He wasn’t sure who she was trying to convince
“Really? Everyone’s misery is giving you the happy ending you wanted? Even Henry’s?”

“Leave my son out of this,” she snapped.

*Well, that certainly struck a chord. Finally.*

“Henry will be just fine as soon as I get rid of that woman he brought here.”

“Getting rid of Emma isn’t going to change the fact that Henry knows about the curse. Knows who you really are… Your Majesty.”

“Children believe all sorts of things, Hook. He’ll grow out of it eventually.”

Killian was dumbfounded by Regina’s insistence on keeping Henry in the dark. Not that he could really blame her. She was The Evil Queen, and though the lad might suspect the truth, knowing for certain that your parent was a vile villain wasn’t something a young boy would be able to get over all too quickly. He should know. Still, Killian couldn’t keep his care and concern for the boy from surfacing as he continued to petition on Henry’s behalf.

“And what about in the meantime? How do you think it’s going to affect Henry long-term, knowing that people think he’s crazy for believing in a curse that we both know is real?”

A glint of menacing inspiration flickered behind Regina’s eyes sending a shuddering chill of cold dread down Killian’s spine. He could see some sort of sinister plan formulating in her mind, but before he could press her further she collected her purse and started for the door.

“Thank you, Captain,” she offered with a sickening smile. “I think you’ve provided me with the exact answer I came here looking for.”

Without another word Regina took her leave while Killian warred with himself on whether or not to follow her. Something he’d said had sparked a plan behind her eyes in regards to the Swan girl, and Regina seemed too pleased with herself. That was never a good sign, but Killian also had the matter of the dagger to attend to.

Knowing he needed to find a place to secure it before anyone else had an opportunity to see it, Killian made his way through the back room towards the exit when another glint of metal caught his eye. He stood transfixed by the sight of his hook sitting on one of the shelves, it was ethereally illuminated by the light creeping in from a break in the curtains. Retrieving it, Killian was torn between two emotions; the comfort of being reunited with the familiar, and the pain in the reminder that he was a villain.

Where he once reveled in the power, notoriety, and reactions that his hook afforded him in that infamous Captain’s persona, Killian now shuddered at the thought of someone like Henry learning the truth. He’d become a villain for his revenge, and in gaining his revenge had become so much worse. If it weren’t for the fact that his hook provided him access to the perfect hiding spot for the dagger, he’d be tempted to leave it behind. As it was, his hook was the only key that opened the hidden compartment on the *Jolly Roger*, the compartment where no one would know to look for the cursed blade.

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Killian returned to his ship, beat a determined path down to his cabin intent on hiding the accursed blade, and almost made it to the safe when he heard the sound of rushed footfalls on the planks of the
deck above. Knowing the only person that would come near his ship willingly was Henry, Killian quickly stashed the hook and dagger on a shelf, and made haste to head the lad off.

“Henry, lad! I’m surprised to see you. You haven’t.” Killian cut off his greeting at the sight of tears streaming down the boy’s face. Damn you, Regina! “Henry, my boy, what’s happened?”

Killian kept the lad on deck as he attempted to patiently listen to Henry’s account, all the while distracted by the fact that his hook and dagger were just below. He had to keep Henry from stumbling across them, but was torn in his desires.

On one hand, he’d like nothing more than to march Henry back to Emma and confess everything to the lad and his mother. The truth of the curse, evidence of an entire realm’s displacement, and assurances that Henry was not crazy. Assurances that Regina was, in fact, the diabolical villain Henry believed her to be.

But therein lies the rub. In order to affirm Henry to Emma, Killian would have to expose his own villainy to the lad, and to the woman for whom he couldn’t deny a growing attraction. Surely doing so would cost Killian every bit as much in his relationship with the boy as it would Regina. He hadn’t had the time to dwell, nor the inclination to truly analyze his thoughts and regards towards the Swan girl, but the idea that the truth of who he really was would eliminate any chance he’d have to find out left him feeling just as bereft.

“Then she said I couldn’t tell the difference between fantasy and reality, and that I was crazy. You don’t think I’m crazy, do you, Killian?” Henry asked with mournful, brown eyes, piercing him with their need to find hope and assurance.

Centuries of self-preservation won out. Killian couldn’t bring himself to confess the truth of who he truly was. Henry had come to him because he trusted him, had come to rely on their friendship, and so had he. He couldn’t lose the boy, so Killian found himself consoling a distraught Henry with the advice that he seek out Dr. Hopper’s counsel. Side stepping Henry’s insecurities of whether or not he believed him with empty platitudes of there, there as he ushered the boy off the ship with promises that everything would work out in the end.

Killian watched the still distraught lad as he made his way back towards Main Street, and vowed that he’d make it up to the boy later. He hurried back down to the cabin to secure the dagger in the safe, the satisfying click of the lock as Killian stowed the dagger in the secured compartment sent a rush of relief through him. His relief was immediately followed by regret. Regret that he had dismissed Henry in his panic and cowardice. Regret that it was his words to Regina that had sparked such a vicious set-up of entrapment for Emma and Henry. A villain he may be, but Henry deserved better. If the whole purpose of hiding his true identity was so he wouldn’t lose what he had with the boy, then he’d have to do a better job of selling the persona Henry had come to know and expect from him.

Resolved in his determination to make things right with Henry, Killian set off towards town to see what he could offer in the way of comfort and damage control. Then he’d deal with Regina.

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With Mary Margaret’s words on repeat in her head, ‘If you won’t protect Henry, then who will?’, Emma burst through Dr. Hopper’s office door to find a despondent Henry on the couch.

“Ms. Swan,” Dr. Hopper exclaimed as he shot out of his chair and came towards her. “Look, I can explain. The Mayor forced me.”

“I know,” she said, cutting off his explanation. “Don’t worry about it. I get it.” She wasn’t really
interested in assuaging the man of his guilt, but she’d need him on her side if she was going to make things right. “Henry, I’m sorry.”

“I don’t want to talk to you,” Henry muttered, refusing to look her way.

“Ms. Swan, if she knew you were here,” Dr. Hopper warned.

“To hell with her!” Emma snapped before settling herself in front of Henry, addressing him in earnest. “Henry, there is one simple reason I stayed here. You. I wanted to get to know you.”

“You think I’m crazy,” Henry argued, still refusing to look at her.

“No, I think the curse is crazy, and it is.” She paused to collect her thoughts, carefully choosing her next words. “But that doesn’t mean that it isn’t true. It is a lot to ask anyone to believe in, but there are a lot of crazy things in this world. So what do I know? Maybe it is true.”

Henry cast a furtive glance her way, and a sense of hope swelled within her that maybe she was getting through to him.

“But you told my mom—”

“What she needed to hear,” she insisted, a surge of inspiration hitting her on how to manage the fallout of Regina’s heartless actions. “What I do know is that if the curse is real, the only way to break it is by tricking the Evil Queen,” Henry finally met her gaze, “into thinking that we are nonbelievers, because that way, she’s not on to us. Isn’t that what Operation Cobra was all about? Throwing her off the trail?”

As she spoke, Emma could see that her words were making an impact. Henry became enthralled with the plan she was laying out before him, and Dr. Hopper gave her an encouraging smile of support. When she’d finished, Henry leaned forward excitedly as he praised her.

“Brilliant.”

Bolstered by Henry’s renewed spirit and enthusiasm towards her, Emma continued in her efforts to re-establish the camaraderie and trust they had shared since he’d brought her to town.

“I read the pages, and Henry, you're right, they are dangerous. There is only one way to make sure that she never sees these.” Emma stood and made her way to the fireplace, she placed the torn out pages of the storybook she’d been holding into the flames. “Now we have the advantage,” she declared as she turned to face him once more, only to be met by Henry’s crushing hug around her middle.

“I knew you were here to help me,” he said as Emma wrapped her arms around him and brought a hand to the back of his head, stroking his hair as she rested her chin atop it.

“That's right, kid. I am,” she affirmed with conviction. Before releasing him, she added, “And nothing, not even a curse, is gonna stop that.”

Henry smiled and wrapped himself around her once more, Emma tamped down the feelings that made her want to run. She’d told Mary Margaret that the reason she’d planned to leave was so Henry wouldn’t keep getting hurt, but she knew that wasn’t the only reason. ‘What happens if you go?’ the woman had asked, and Emma hadn’t just thought of Henry in that moment.

She’d thought of her own loneliness. Going back to a life with no promise of anything more than being alone. It was a safe life, one that she could control, but was it what she wanted? In the three
days since Henry had brought her to Storybrooke Emma had started to rethink many things about her life. Staying meant being a mom to Henry, and promises of friendship with his teacher, a woman who had confessed feeling a kinship with her from the moment they met.

Kinship.

The word drummed up potential promises of other new connections, as well, and her mind went back to the bar where she’d shared a drink with the mysterious Killian Jones. A man who had professed to being on Henry’s side, who read her like an open book, and stirred in her a desire to stay. A desire that, once again, had her wanting to run for the hills.

‘I think the very fact that you want to leave is why you have to stay.’ Mary Margaret had been talking about Henry and his best interests when she’d spoken those words, but Emma knew in that moment, as Henry held on tightly to her, that choosing to stay and fight for his best interest just might mean fighting for her’s as well.

She and Henry said their goodbyes to Dr. Hopper and made their way out of his office and back towards Henry’s house. Henry was bubbling with excitement over the next step in Operation Cobra, and Emma, though still unsure of her role in his life, couldn’t help but smile at him and bask in the pride she felt that, just maybe, she’d be able to give him his best chance after all.

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As Killian rounded the corner by the Cricket’s office he was heartened to see Henry and Emma emerging with smiles and an easiness about them which pulled at the corner of his lips as he gave over to a wide grin. Relieved that everything seemed to be back to rights between mother and son, Killian resisted the urge to interrupt their moment together as they headed back towards the Mayor’s home. Knowing that Regina would be headed that way soon as well, Killian changed his course.

He wanted to give Henry and his mother some uninterrupted time together to say goodnight without Regina’s interference, and, well, rubbing in the fact that her plan to drive a wedge between them had failed was just too good a boon to pass up. As he made his way to Regina’s office Killian was struck with a feeling. I feel… content, happy even. He thought, perhaps, for the first time in twenty-eight years, (or a few centuries for that matter) he may not need to find solace at the bottom of a bottle that night.

Killian found Regina attempting to salvage the damage Swan had inflicted on her beloved apple tree, and the image of the brazen woman holding the chainsaw flashed through his mind sending an unexpected jolt of desire through him. Now’s not the time, mate, he admonished himself as he tamped down feelings he hadn’t experienced since… Yeah. Definitely not the time.

“I am Henry’s mother,” she snapped, momentarily losing the cool facade she had been presenting.
Once she was able to school her features, she added, “Besides, we no longer need to worry about her. I just rid the town of the unwanted nuisance.”

“Really?” he questioned with an air of mock surprise.

“Yes. I imagine she's halfway to Boston by now.”

“Oh, I wouldn't bet on that,” he chortled, popping the t as he made his way back around to stand before her. He didn’t want to miss the expression on her face as he revealed this next part. “I've just seen her strolling down Main Street with the lad. Thick as thieves, they looked.”

“What?”

“Seems you’ve underestimated her, as you tend to do with everyone,” he jeered.

“You mean you?” she snarked. “Don’t kid yourself, Hook. You and I both know the reason why you aren’t going to say anything to Henry or that woman about the curse. You’re a villain. Actually, no.” She paused as she assessed him with malice and contempt. “You’re worse. You’re The Dark One.”

Regina swept past him, leaving him to stew at her words, but not before he had the satisfaction of seeing the rage and panic behind her eyes. Not so unaffected by the news that her scheme hadn’t worked, it seemed. His gratification was short lived, however, as he considered her taunts. He was worse than a villain, and now, more than ever, he had to keep the truth from Henry. From everyone.

Once again he found himself in the familiar company of self-loathing and misery, and began to trod his usual path to The Rabbit Hole. It seemed he would not be receiving a reprieve from his demons that night after all. Despite the dark musings swirling around him, he could not help but hope that perhaps the fates would show him a kindness. Perhaps, a certain, spirited blonde just might be occupying a barstool when he arrived.

So caught up in his thoughts, Killian did not notice the yellow bug parked on Main Street. The yellow bug that housed the very woman he’d hoped to run into. Emma Swan sat looking through the Storybrooke Mirror in the hopes of finding a place to stay.
Chapter Four

Chapter Summary

Moments before the Evil Queen’s Dark Curse whisks our beloved fairytale characters to Storybrooke, Captain Hook finally gets his revenge on the Crocodile. Twenty-eight years later, Killian Jones awakes in Storybrooke expecting just another ordinary day, that is until a number of abnormal occurrences disrupts his otherwise scheduled life. The greatest of which is a new face in town. A young woman by the name of Emma. Emma. What a lovely name...

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out!

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

Emma sat stewing in her bug as she scanned the rag of a newspaper for any possible vacancies. How can there not be a single, available room? She couldn’t bring herself to be upset with Granny, she didn’t want to invite trouble on innocent bystanders in her feud with Regina, but she really wished more people in town would show some backbone when it came to Madame-High-And-Mighty-Mayor-Mills. Not that she could really blame them, she wasn’t exactly looking forward to her next run in with the Evil Queen either.

Honestly, Emma was having a hard time believing that she’d actually agreed to stay. Not just that she’d agreed, but that she was sitting in her bug, after having been evicted from the town’s only overnight lodging, getting irate at the lack of options available to making her stay more permanent. If she truly allowed herself to think about the implications of exactly what her decision meant, she was liable to start her bug and head for the town line. But she couldn’t do that. She’d promised Henry… and herself.

For as much as she was staying for her son, she was staying for herself as well. For a chance to be a part of something. She just wasn’t sure what that something was going to include, or if she was ready for it.

“Hey. You okay?” Emma was startled to see Mary Margaret outside the driver’s side door, and
attempted to shake off the vestiges of her self-doubt and irritation as she responded.

“Oh, in the world of tight spots I've been in, crashing in my car doesn't even rank in the top ten,” she explained.

“You're sleeping here?” Mary Margaret asked incredulously.

“Until I find a place.”

“You decided to stay. For Henry.”

“Yeah. I guess,” Emma replied as she stepped out of the car. No need to explain to this woman, who was little more than a stranger, that she had decided to stay for more than just Henry.

“This town doesn't seem to have many vacancies. None, actually. Is that normal?” Emma inquired as a way of steering the conversation away from her reasons for remaining in town.

“Must be the curse,” Mary Margaret answered cheekily, apparently having no other plausible explanation to offer. The answer diffused some of the tension Emma had been holding onto and allowed her to focus her attention on the woman before her.

“Why are you out so late?”

“Well, I'm a teacher, not a nun,” Mary Margaret quipped before answering sullenly, “I had a date.”

“From the looks of things, it went well.” The sarcasm was not lost on either of them.

“As well as they ever do.”

“Tell me he at least paid.”

“Mm,” Mary Margaret hedged, drawing out an *eww* from Emma. “Well I guess if true love was easy, we'd all have it,” Mary Margaret speculated. Her statement hung between the two women for a moment before she offered, “You know, if things get cramped, I do have a spare room.”

Suddenly, the tension and desire to run overtook Emma once more, causing her to reject the woman’s kind offer. “Thanks. I'm not really the roommate type. It's just not my thing. I do better on my own.” As she said the words a realization occurred to her. The words were absolutely true, but she no longer wanted them to be. Just like on her birthday, Emma wished she wouldn't have to be alone, but the words had already been spoken, and she didn’t know how to take them back.

“Well, good night. Good luck with Henry,” Mary Margaret encouraged as she headed down the street towards her home.

Home.

Something Emma knew little about, but longed for with every fiber of her being. A home of her own. She tamped down the feelings of longing and loneliness and resettled herself in the front seat of her bug, tucking in for what was sure to be a long, cold night.

It had been a long, lonely night for Killian as he sat at The Rabbit Hole. Much of the night had been spent in thoughts of his confrontation with Regina, as well as the continued remorse he felt over his interaction with Henry. He awoke the next morning with fresh disappointment in not having run into Emma at The Hole the night before as he’d hoped, but also with a renewed resolve to make things
right with her boy.

As he labored long, hard hours on the Jolly Roger, Killian tried to determine the best way to seek out the lad and apologize, never expecting that the boy would actually come to him. Hearing the thud of footsteps ascending the gangplank, Killian was heartened by Henry’s presence and hastened to the deck to meet him. Perhaps the lad would be able to find a way to forgive his thoughtlessness from the night before.

“Henry, I want to apolo-”

“I’m so sorry, Kil-”

Both began their apologies at same moment, Henry’s offer of remorse taking Killian by surprise.

“What do you have to be sorry about, lad?” Killian questioned incredulously. “I’m the one who exhibited bad form last night. I shouldn’t have dismissed you the way I did. I apologize.”

“No, I’m sorry,” Henry insisted. “I haven’t been around lately, and then I just show up all… upset. I’m sorry I haven’t been by to help you with the Jewel.”

“Well, I gather you’ve been rather busy with your mother. Your birth mother, that is. Emma?”

Henry’s head dipped in a chagrined manner before he met Killian’s gaze with more unnecessary apologies.

“Yeah. I’m sorry I didn’t tell you that I found her.”

“It’s alright, lad,” Killian comforted. “I’ll not hold the past few days against you, if you’ll not hold last night against me.”

“Deal!” Henry agreed enthusiastically.

Killian attempted to tamp down the shudder forcing its way up his spine at the lad’s use of the word that held no sense of pleasant meaning to him, and steered their course back to the matter of his mother. Emma. A word that gave him an altogether different kind of shudder, one that he was less inclined to tamp down.

“So, I take it all is well between you and Emma again?”

“Yeah! She was just trying to throw my mom, my other mom, off the trail. You know, about the curse.”

Off the trail? Does Emma truly believe in the curse, or is she humoring the lad as I did before I woke? Killian filed the question away for later pondering.

“We’re gonna find a way to break the curse, and bring back all the happy endings. That’s actually why I’m here.”

Panic gripped Killian as he began to wonder if the lad knew about his current cognizant state. Did he know his mother’s name had awoken him? How would he have figured it out? Not Regina, surely?

“I wanted to tell you that I can’t stay today either, because I found Emma’s dad and I need to go and tell her!”

His panic dissipated, only to be replaced by confusion.
“You what?”

“Found my mom’s father. Prince Charming! I’ve got to go tell her. If we can get her parents back together, it might just be the first step in breaking the curse!” Henry was halfway across the deck in his excitement to get back to Emma.

“Emma’s father is Prince Charming?” Killian called out after him.

“Yeah! So, I’ve gotta go and tell her the news. I promise to come and help out with the Jewel soon. Bye, Killian!”

Henry raced back down the gangplank leaving Killian dumbfounded, a thousand questions storming his mind: Swan was from their land? How did she end up here if she wasn’t brought over in the curse? Her father is Prince Charming? That had to be a moniker of some sort. There weren’t any prince’s actually named charming in the Enchanted Forest, though he knew from his cursed memories that this land applied that name to a few different prince’s in its retelling of their stories.

Prince Charming.

The designation tickled at something in the back of Killian’s mind, a pet name he’s sure he’d heard before. Suddenly the memory of the castle that The Dark One had been imprisoned in flashed in his mind and it’s then that he makes the connection. That castle was the home of Princess Snow White and her husband, Prince James, whom she lovingly referred to as Charming. Snow had been in labor that night. Was Emma the child that had been born on the cusp of the curse?

A fresh wave of intrigue about the mysterious woman stirred within him as he wondered again how it was that her name had awoken him from the curse. The Crocodile had put in the failsafe using the lass’ name, but how? Killian considered the probability that more answers might be found at the pawn shop, and he set off to the imp’s shop of horrors, once again on a hunt for answers.

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“You want me to read to a coma patient?” Mary Margaret’s wary tone matching the one Emma gave Henry earlier when he claimed to have found her father. Prince Charming. As if.

“Henry thinks it will help him remember who he was,” Emma explained as she accepted the mug of hot chocolate, hedging her words as she felt out Mary Margaret’s willingness to help with this new plan. Her plan, not Henry’s.

“And who does he think he was?”

“Prince Charming,” Emma declared pointedly.

“And if I’m Snow White, he thinks he and I…” Mary Margaret rolled her eyes, a bit exasperated, as she caught on to Henry’s scheme. Emma smiled understandingly at her… friend?

“He has a very active imagination, which is the point. I can't talk him out of his beliefs, so we need to show him. Play along,” Emma explained as she laid out her plan. “Do what he says, and then maybe, just maybe—”

“He’ll see that fairy tales are just that, that there's no such thing as love at first sight or first kiss. He'll see reality,” Mary Margaret finished, her tone and demeanor enforcing the logic of the plan, even if the underlying current of her words betrayed the hope and wistfulness she was trying to suppress.

Hope and wistfulness that Emma tried to combat even as flashes of meeting Killian Jones erupted in
her treacherous mind. Not that it had been anything close to love at first sight that night. Lust, maybe. She could definitely get behind lust at first sight, but not love. Love at first sight was ridiculous. Right?

“Something like that,” Emma muttered in agreement, losing some of her conviction on the matter.

“Well sadly, this plan is rather genius,” Mary Margaret affirmed, bolstering Emma’s confidence that this was the right course of action. “We get him to the truth without hurting him.”

Relieved that Mary Margaret was in agreement, Emma smiled as she picked up Henry’s storybook and placed it on the counter.

“I told him that we will all meet tomorrow for breakfast at Granny's, and you will give a full report.”

“Well, I suppose I'll get ready for my date,” Mary Margaret quipped as she took a sip of her beverage before adding, “I guess I'll have to do all the talking.” Their conversation ended with Mary Margaret’s agreement, the brunette headed for her bathroom to get ready, and Emma took that as her cue to leave.

As she made her way out of the building, Emma contemplated what to do for the rest of her evening, given the still early hour. Without cognizant thought as to where her feet carried her Emma came out of her thoughts as she approached the entrance to The Rabbit Hole. Well, this is as good a place as any, maybe a certain blue eyed patron will be willing to keep me company. Dammit Emma, get ahold of yourself.

Emma nursed a few rounds of rum, and spent more time than she was willing to admit waiting for a certain person she wanted to see make an appearance. Wanting to avoid any more awkward conversations about her current sleeping situation, she decided she ought to get to the bug, and find a place more out of sight to park it for the night. Emma tabbed out and left the hope of another run in with Killian Jones for another night.

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Killian’s search through the pawn shop had yielded no answers about the enigmatic Swan girl, though it had reunited Killian with a few more of his possessions. Frustration that he wasn’t even sure what it was he was looking for coursed through him and he ran a hand down his face as he reviewed the list of questions he sought answers for.

What made Emma Swan so special? Why did her name wake him up? Why did Regina want her gone so badly? Was it just some territorial or maternal urge to lay full claim over Henry?

The rumble of a motor and flash of yellow caught Killian’s attention as he peered out the pawn shop’s side window to the alleyway. Speak of the devil, Killian mused, the irony not lost on him that he was more closely associated with such an evil than she ever could be.

Fate was a fickle mistress, indeed. Just that previous evening Killian had longed to see her enter The Rabbit Hole, only to be disappointed at her absence; now he seemed to have summoned her with his barrage of questions and constant thoughts of her. Perhaps fate was at work. What better way to get the answers he sought than to go straight to the source?

Killian made his way to the back door, slipped out of the shop, and circled back to the side alley. Approaching Swan’s passenger side window, he greeted, “That’s quite a vessel you captain there, Swan.” His comment effectively caught her off guard. Smirking to himself, he rested his arms on the open window and leaned in to gain a better look at her.
“Jesus, Jones!” she startled, “A little warning next time.”

“Sorry, love. Didn’t mean to spook you, though in my defense I have been told my good looks are quite startling,” he winked, earning him an eye roll and a slight smile. “What are you doing out here at this time of night, Swan?”

“Where else should I be, Jones?”

“Aren’t you staying at Granny’s?”

“Well, seeing as Regina ensured I can no longer stay at Granny’s, and it’s not like this town is ripe with vacancies, even if I had the income to pay for one, this is my best option. This wasn’t exactly a planned stay if you’ll recall.”

“Regina had you evicted? How? Wait, nevermind, she’s Regina,” Killian grumbled as a shared look of understanding passed between them.

“What are you doing skulking around here at night?” Emma teased, clearly attempting to shift the conversation away from her current predicament.

“Skulking?” Killian feigned offense. “I don’t skulk, Swan. I’ll have you know I am conducting legitimate business here this evening.” The lie slipped easily off his tongue.

“Hmmm.” She considered him with a critical eye before leaning across the gear shift in an effort to trap his gaze. “I’m gonna let you in on a little secret, Jones,” she said, a slight seductive undertone playing at her knowing smirk, “I’m pretty good at knowing when someone is lying to me. So… wanna try that again?”

Killian reached back to scratch behind his ear, trying to buy him time to come up with a response. *She could parse out lies?* That would certainly make things more difficult in his attempts to ferret out the truth about her. His usual tactics would be completely useless. And what about the curse? The fact that he was no longer under its effects? How would he keep the truth of his identity concealed if she could read him so easily? Read everyone so easily.

That last thought sparked an idea in his mind. He could use such a talent to his advantage in his dealings around town, and if Swan was preoccupied with parsing out the truth in others, perhaps, she wouldn’t be as focused on him. If she worked with him it would afford him the opportunity to be in her presence more often. Learn about her. Find the answers to his questions. Spend time with her. Hell, he could even provide her with lodging.

Prompted by his newly formulated plan, Killian opened the passenger side door and slid into the seat next to her.

“Um… what the hell do you think you’re doing?” she questioned as she moved back squarely into the driver’s seat, not quite plastered against her door.

“I have a business proposal for you, Swan. One that I think will be mutually beneficial to both our current needs.”

“Okay.” She eyed him warily

“This may come as a bit of a shock to you, lass,” he began cheekily, “but I sometimes have to deal with unsavory characters in the course of my business. Having someone with your particular talent to ferret out the truth could come in handy for me.”
“Uh, huh. And what’s in it for me?” Caution was still evident in her demeanor, but an interest flared behind her eyes.

“Well, it just so happens that I own a vacant property on the outskirts of town, the house next to my own, actually. Work for me and I’ll let you stay, rent free, as well as pay you a tidy sum for your services.”

“Where is your place, exactly?” Her eyes narrowed, and he could see the interest growing as the wheels turned in her mind.

“Out on the bluff, southwest of town. There’s a quaint little house on the property adjacent to mine.”

“Wait… that mansion that overlooks the bay?”

He wouldn’t classify it as such, but nodded all the same.

“You live in that big ol’ house by yourself?”

“Not really the roommate type, love. I do better on my own.”

Killian saw emotion pass over her face at his admission, like she was startled by his words, or related to them, maybe?

“No need to give me an answer tonight, Swan,” he assured. “Think on it a bit, yeah?”

“Sure,” she said with a nod. “Um, thanks, Jones.”

“Of course, love.”

Killian couldn’t help but notice the small shiver that ran through her. Now aware of the chill that had settled around them, and loathe to see her sleep in her drafty vehicle - It’s bloody October. She’s likely to freeze - he offered, “There is a cot in the back of the pawn shop, Swan. As long as you clear out by daylight, it can be our little secret. It’ll be a lot more comfortable and warmer than sleeping in here.”

“I’ll think about it.”

Bloody stubborn woman.

Killian removed his jacket and extended it toward her. “If you’re gonna be stubborn about the cot, at least be warm, Swan.”

“Thank you, really. But you don’t need to give me your jacket.”

“Nonsense, I’ll not have you freezing to death on my watch,” he insisted as he draped it across her before exiting the car. “You can return it to me when you have your answer to my proposal. Goodnight, Swan,” he bid as he headed back down the alley.

“Night, Jones,” she called out after him.

With a smile at his lips, Killian returned to the pawn shop to retrieve the box of his discovered possessions. Suddenly he was besieged by a flash of images in his mind.

The Dark One’s cell… The Prince and Princess… The threat of the curse… A deal struck for an infant’s name.
“....no more happy endings.”

“What can we do?”

“We can’t do anything.”

“Who can?”

“That little thing growing inside your belly... Get the child to safety, and on its twenty-eighth birthday the child will return. The child will find you.”

“We’re leaving.”

“Wait! We made a deal! I want her name! Give me the name! I need the name! Missy, you know I’m right... Tell me, what’s her name?”

“Emma. Her name is Emma.”

Killian braced himself against the counter in front of him, reeling from the vision. No, not a vision. A memory. But not his memory... the bloody Dark One’s memory. The memory of Rumplestiltskin’s prophecy and provision built into the curse. The provision of the child’s name. The Saviour’s name. The one who would break the curse.

“Emma,” Killian quietly exclaimed under his breath as he looked out once more at the yellow bug parked just outside the window. She’s The Saviour?

“Bloody hell.”
Chapter Five

Chapter Summary

Moments before the Evil Queen’s Dark Curse whisks our beloved fairytale characters to Storybrooke, Captain Hook finally gets his revenge on the Crocodile. Twenty-eight years later, Killian Jones awakes in Storybrooke expecting just another ordinary day, that is until a number of abnormal occurrences disrupts his otherwise scheduled life. The greatest of which is a new face in town. A young woman by the name of Emma. Emma. What a lovely name...

Chapter Notes

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The weather was mild for late October. Only a slight chill remained in the air from the night before, and Killian took comfort in the thought that if Swan hadn’t taken his suggestion to seek shelter in the pawn shop, at least it hadn’t been too terribly cold for her in that metal contraption of hers. Hopefully she’d been able to get some measure of sleep over the long night, unlike him.

He’d spent many long hours trying to ascertain just how it was that The Dark One’s memory had come to unfold in his mind the night before. The only answer he could come up with was that it had to have something to do with Emma. She seemed to be the answer to many things related to the Dark Curse, a product of being The Saviour no doubt. Just as her name had awoken him and unlocked his personal memories, his continued interaction and time spent in her presence seemed to have gained him access to The Dark One’s memories as well. In limited amounts, at least, for he did not have all of the Crocodile’s memories, just those that seemed to relate to the fact that Emma, the product of True Love, was The Saviour.

Saviour.

A title in sharp contrast to any of his, and one that had him once again re-evaluating his thoughts about how to manage the secret of the curse, his identity, and his relationships with both Henry and the Swan girl. Warring with himself over his own self-preservation versus aiding them in fulfilling
her destiny, and ultimately losing both her and Henry once they realized the truth of his villainy, Killian had found himself no closer to a clear path of decision as dawn crested the horizon.

The only path he was sure of was the familiar one to Granny’s, which was where he found himself that morning. Having just entered the small tabled courtyard out front, he quite literally ran into Henry as the lad sprinted out the door and down the stairs.

“What’s the rush, lad?”

“Killian!” Henry exclaimed, excitement tinting his cheeks pink. “He woke up! Mary Margaret read to him and he woke up!”

“He what?”

“Well, he didn’t fully wake up,” the lad hedged, “but he grabbed her hand! We’re on our way back to the hospital so she can read to him again. Come with us!”

Killian found himself tugged along by the boy’s unnaturally strong grip. He was helpless to decline, especially once he saw Emma emerge from the diner with her mother, Mary Margaret, an amazed skepticism etched along her features as she made her way down the front steps. She glanced up as she hit the last step and faltered slightly at the sight of him.

“Jones? What are you doing here?”

“I had come for Granny’s fine coffee and breakfast special, but your lad seems to have other ideas,” he explained while Henry still pulled at his hand as they hit the sidewalk.

“I told Killian about John Doe and asked him to come with us. Is that okay?” Henry asked, large pleading eyes working their magic on the unsuspecting woman who most likely hadn’t had much opportunity to build up an immunity to them yet.

“Oh, sure, kid. Why not.”

Henry beamed and then fell into step next to Mary Margaret, pressing the woman for every detail of her encounter with the coma laden man from the night before. Killian felt Emma’s presence next to him as he followed the pair and he scratched behind his ear uncomfortably before engaging her.

“I didn’t mean to intrude, Swan. Your boy can be quite persuasive.”

“No, it’s fine. Really,” she assured. “It’ll be nice to have someone there to help temper Henry’s disappointment when he sees that this… thing that happened last night was just a fluke. Especially now that I’ll have Mary Margaret’s disappointment to deal with as well,” she said in low tones so she wouldn’t be overheard by their traveling companions.

“Are you so sure that it was a fluke?” Killian questioned, trying to gauge her stance on the curse.

“It has to be,” she declared. “I mean it’s not like he’s actually cursed, or Mary Margaret’s long lost true love, or… my father, right?”

Not a believer then, he concluded.

“None of that has to be true in order to explain his change in condition,” he parsed carefully. “Perhaps Ms. Blanchard was simply able to get through to him and make a connection at just the right moment? The mind is a mysterious place, Swan. One never knows when just the right touch might unlock the recesses and pull one back into reality.”
He hadn’t meant to give so much away, but he knew with her ability to see through falsehood that he’d have to offer his words carefully and wrap them in elements of truth. They fell into silence for several long moments as she seemed to consider his words before she changed the course of their conversation.

“I wanted to thank you for telling me about the cot in the pawn shop,” she said, casting a furtive glance at him as she continued. “You were right. It was more comfortable, and warmer than the bug.”

A smile pulled at his lips and he couldn’t help his teasing reply, “I’m only too happy to offer you another comfortable and warm bed for tonight should you wish it, Swan.”

Her head snapped toward him, a startled and wary expression taking over her entire face, though he did note the darkening of her eyes as she took in his suggestively raised brows and the enticingly seductive bite of his lip.

“In your dreams, buddy,” she responded tightly, putting more space between them as they approached the front of the hospital.

“Relax, Swan,” he appeased with a chuckle. “I was talking about my offer of the house in exchange for you working for me,” he clarified. “Though, now that I have your consent, I’ll be sure to make better use of my dreams.” He winked at her and quickened his step to reach the doors before Henry and Mary Margaret did, pulling them open and earning him a thanks from Mary Margaret and Henry, and an eye roll from Emma.

He fell in line behind the group as they made their way to the ward that housed John Doe, or Prince Charming, depending on who you asked. Henry’s exuberance spilled over at the sight of the Sheriff and hospital staff milling about the man’s room.

“You're right. He's waking up,” Henry exclaimed as he rushed ahead only to be halted by the Sheriff.

“Henry, you should stay back,” Graham warned.

“What's going on? Is it John Doe? Is he okay?” Mary Margaret inquired, her concern spiking with each question.

“He's missing,” Graham answered grimly before casting a look over his shoulder back toward the room.

A group of doctors and nurses exited the room revealing Regina standing next to John Doe’s bed. Of bloody course she’s here.

Spotting the group of newcomers, Regina rounded the bed and made her way out of the room toward them. Her eyes were trained on either him, or Emma next to him, it was hard to be certain. “What the hell are you doing here?” she asked accusingly. Before either of them could answer she turned her ire toward Henry, and both he and Emma had to restrain themselves at her harsh grasp on the boy’s arm. “And you. I thought you were at the arcade. Now you're lying to me?”

Seemingly oblivious to any other action or undercurrent surrounding her, Mary Margaret pressed again about the patient’s absence. “What happened to John Doe? Did someone take him?”

“We don't know yet,” Graham answered. “His I.V.s were ripped out, but there's no clear signs of a struggle.” Graham seemed to be relaying that last bit of information to Emma specifically, before glancing in Killian’s direction. Confusion and contempt clouded the man’s features as he assessed
the close proximity between Killian and Emma before turning his focus back on the Mayor and her
son.

“What did you do?” Henry accused.

Killian smiled at the boy’s gumption in spite of himself.

“You think I had something to do with this?” Regina hissed.

“It is curious that the mayor is here,” Emma chimed in, changing his smile to a smirk as he waited for
Regina to explain herself out of the situation.

“I'm here because I'm his emergency contact,” she explained coolly.

“You know him?”

“I found him on the side of the road years ago with no I.D. I brought him here.”

“Mayor Mills saved his life,” Dr. Whale interjected, causing Killian to take a page out of Swan’s
book and roll his eyes in disgust before staring pointedly at Regina.

“Will he be okay?” Mary Margaret inquired, trepidation lacing her words.

“Okay?” Whale scoffed. “The man's been on feeding tubes for years, under constant supervision. He
needs to get back here right away, or quite honestly, 'okay’ might be a pipe dream.”

“Well, then let's quit yapping and start looking,” Emma suggested. She turned towards Killian to
address him just as Regina interrupted.

“That's what we're doing. Just stay out of this, dear. And since I clearly can't keep you away from
my son, I guess I'm just gonna have to keep my son away from you.” Regina turned her withering
gaze from Emma to Graham, “Sheriff. Find John Doe. You heard Dr. Whale. Time is precious.” As
she passed him on her way to the exit, Regina gave Killian a pointed smirk that screamed victory.

He grit his teeth at the damnable woman.

Silence followed Regina and Henry’s departure as the remaining members considered the next
course of action.

“Well,” Mary Margaret chimed in, “where do we begin looking?”

“We?” Graham gaped.

“Yes. We,” Emma confirmed. “You’re going to need all the help you can get, so let us help you.”

Graham eyed Killian, his jaw clenched so hard Killian could visibly see it from across the room, he
was amazed he couldn’t hear the man’s teeth crack under the strain. It was clear that he had no
interest in his assistance, and without Henry there as a buffer Killian began to feel the familiar
discomfort he knew others felt in his presence. Emma’s attention bounced between the two men, and
Killian could feel her agitation at the posturing.

“Right,” Killian conceded, keeping his focus on Graham. “I am actually quite perceptive, and can tell
when I’m not welcome.” He turned toward Emma and gave her a sincere nod, “Good luck with your
search,” he bid before turning to leave.

“Killian, wait,” she called after him, catching him as he entered the hallway leading back towards the
“You don’t have t-”

“It’s alright, Swan,” he interrupted reassuringly. “You need to focus on finding John Doe, and it’s clear the Sheriff does not welcome my assistance. You heard Whale and Regina, time is precious. Go find him before it’s too late,” he urged, watching the indecision swirl in her eyes before she nodded and headed back to the Sheriff and Mary Margaret.

As Killian made his way back toward the docks he considered his actions at the hospital. It wasn’t in his nature to back down, and it had taken all of his self-restraint to conform to the Sheriff’s unspoken wishes, and bow out of the search. But Killian hadn’t done it for him, he’d done it for Emma.

Killian knew that the Prince’s situation was dire. Regina didn’t give a damn whether or not he was found, and Killian knew it would serve her purposes better if he simply succumbed to the elements and whatever medical issues still lingered. If he’d joined the search the Sheriff would have been more focused on Killian and his motives than the missing man, and Emma would be caught juggling their animosity and contempt for one another, rather than finding her father in time. And as he’d said back at the hospital, Regina had been right. Time was precious, and they had a prince to find.

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The three of them had been traipsing through the woods for the better part of an hour when Graham came to a sudden halt and dropped to one knee. He ran his hand along the ground in front of him as though he were reading a book.

Emma couldn’t take the quiet suspense any longer, and finally asked, “What is it?”

Not even looking up from his position, Graham muttered, “The trail runs cold here.”

Unable to resist needling Graham, Emma quipped, “You sure? ’Cause I thought tracking was one of your skills.”

Graham stood and moved his arm in a placating motion, tinged with a hint of agitation. “Just give me a second. This is my world. I got it,” he spoke as he stalked away from both ladies.

“Right.” Feeling like a bit of an ass, since they were all trying to find John Doe safe and in one piece, Emma decided she ought to apologize. “Sorry.”

Graham didn’t even acknowledge that he heard her speak as he continued to move off a bit deeper into the trees.

“What does he mean, his world? Isn't finding people your thing, too?” Mary Margaret looked confused as she turned to Emma, posing her question.

Emma could tell that Mary Margaret was distracted, her head on a swivel between her and Graham’s retreating form, as she responded, “Sure. Just people I find usually run to places like Vegas.”

Curiosity apparently not yet sated, Mary Margaret continued on with the small talk. “It's an interesting job - finding people. How'd you fall into it?”

“Looking for people's just what I've done as long as I can remember.”

“What made you start? Your parents? Henry told me that you were from a similar situation to his own? Did you ever find them?” Emma continued to indulge the meek yet sweet woman, while simultaneously wishing she would just stop. Though she could now see why Mary Margaret had warmed to Henry, and given him the fairy tale book, they both had the ability to be endearing and
trying at the same time.

“ Depends on who you ask,” Emma answered cryptically. She was thankful to see Graham reemerging from the underbrush, saving her from this well-intentioned enquiry.

“So ladies, I’ve picked up his trail again, he’s heading that way.” Graham pointed off into the direction at a left slant from where they currently stood.

Emma could see the hopeful anticipation as it veritably rolled off Mary Margaret, as she quickly headed in the direction Graham was pointing.

Graham fell into step next to her, as they followed in Mary Margaret’s wake, finally broaching the subject that she could tell he had been curious to explore. “So… Emma, why was Killian Jones with you when you got to the hospital this morning?”

“Henry dragged him along, I have no idea why.” She tried to be nonchalant about it since she could practically feel Graham’s distaste for Killian, as well as genuinely having no clue why Henry was so insistent Killian come.

“Well, this being the rare exception, there’s not a whole lot of work in Storybrooke for a bail bonds person. Have you thought of alternate job options?”

Temporarily confused as to where this question came from, Emma decided to answer truthfully, if not completely. “Actually. Killian made me an offer.” As soon as the words left her lips she could see the color rise in Graham’s face as it scrunched in consternation and contemplation.

“Emma, whatever you decide to do is up to you, but please heed my advice… do not get in bed with Jones.”

Emma chuckled, giving Graham an amused look as she lifted her brow at his remark.

“You know what I meant… although, don’t do that either…”

“I’ll take that under advisement Sheriff,” she sassed before firmly turning their attentions back to more important matters, “but I think we should be more concerned with finding John Doe right now, than whatever vendetta is warring between you and Jones.”

“There isn’t-”

Emma raised her hand, cutting off whatever it was Graham was going to say. She was completely done with taxing conversations from well-intentioned people today. “Now’s not the time. We need to focus on this search, and find the man in need of medical attention.”

Looking a bit chagrined at his less than professional behavior, and being called out about it, Graham nodded his head and responded, “Right. After you, Ms. Swan.”

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Killian arrived back to the Jolly Roger only to find Henry waiting for him below deck. Startled by the presence of the little spitfire sitting on his bunk, and mystified at just how he’d managed to slip past Regina, again, Killian blurted, “Henry?! How did you-”

“Did they find him yet?” Henry asked, cutting off Killian’s flabbergasted comment.

“They’re well on their way, lad. Not to worry,” Killian assured, still shaking his head at Henry’s
tenacity as he leaned against the doorway of his cabin.

“We need to go help them,” Henry asserted, hopping off the bunk and coming to stand before Killian. “I think I know where Prince Charming is, and if anyone should be out there looking for him, it should be me. I started all of this.”

“Lad, you are not to blame for any of this.” The fault lies solely on Regina’s shoulders, not the boy she claims as son, Killian seethed to himself, careful to keep his features neutral.

“But I’m the one that convinced Emma and Mary Margaret to read to him,” he argued as he began pacing the length of the room, “and now Prince Charming is out there looking for her.”

“Who?”

“Snow White!” Henry exclaimed as he came to a stop in front of Killian’s desk.

“Henry,” Killian soothed as he made his way over to the distraught boy. He fought the compulsion to once again confess the truth, holding steadfast to the decision to avoid that particular revelation until the last possible moment, and placed his hands onto the boy’s shoulders as he attempted to placate the lad. “He's lost and confused, Henry. He's been in a coma a long time.”

“But, he loves her, and the book says he’ll always find her,” Henry countered, not to be deterred. “We need to find my mom and the Sheriff so they know that Prince Charming will be looking for his Snow White.”

“Henry,” Killian groaned, pinching the bridge of his nose at the lad’s incessant belief and hope.

“Killian,” Henry whimpered, his tone betraying the vulnerability that Killian now saw pooling at the corner of his brown eyes and quivering at the tremble of his lip. “You heard what Dr. Whale said. If anything happens to him it’ll be all my fault,” he said, with his gaze pointed towards his feet before looking up at Killian with pleading eyes. “Please. I have to do something.”

Killian felt guilt clamp around his heart and squeeze as if caught in a vise. I’m no better than Regina. Killian thought he’d made the right decision withdrawing himself from the search, but Henry was right, he should be out there helping. He’d never forgive himself if they failed to rescue the prince in time and he had to watch Henry carry around such a burden, knowing he’d done nothing to help.

“Fair enough, mate,” Killian replied. “What do you suggest I do then.”

“Not you. We,” Henry responded. He wiped away the wetness that had tracked down his cheeks then gathered himself enough to let the mischievous, scheming nature Killian had grown to adore about him bloom behind his eyes as he challenged, “You have two choices: either you take me with you to join the search, or I go out there alone.”

He’d have been quite an asset to my crew, once upon a time, Killian mused. Knowing when he’d been bested, Killian picked up the spare motorcycle helmet he kept on a shelf and handed it to Henry with a heavy sigh.

“I suppose I’m taking you then,” he conceded, and watched a jubilant grin break out across Henry’s face as he raced off towards the motorcycle.

As Killian prepared them to head off in search of Emma and the other’s, Killian looked over his shoulder at a still elated Henry and grumbled, “Bloody hell. Emma is going to kill me, then you, then me again.”
Killian and Henry located the group not far from the Toll Bridge, just as Henry had suspected they would. Pulling off to the side of the road, they could see the beams from flashlights piercing through the dense foliage along one of the trails. Killian would have preferred to use a bit more stealth in their approach, but couldn’t keep Henry from crashing through the underbrush, startling Emma and Mary Margaret as he professed to know how they would locate the missing man.

“You’re the one that woke him up,” he explained to Mary Margaret. “He’s looking for you! You need to stop chasing him and let him find you.”

“Kid, you need to go home,” Emma stated as she shot Killian a look that expressed her frustration, and had him hanging back within the tree line. “Where’s your mom? She’s gonna kill me, and then you, and then me again.”

Taken aback by the parroting of his exact words, Killian noticed a wide grin come over the lad as he smirked and gave Killian a look he didn’t quite comprehend before he answered Emma’s question.

“She dropped me off at the house then went right out, so I asked Killian to bring me with him to find you guys.”

Henry took quick steps to catch up to Mary Margaret and began engaging the Princess again with his theories of how she was the key to finding the missing Prince. Killian stepped out of the tree line and sheepishly tried to explain his actions to a still agitated Emma.

“Coerced, actually,” he muttered before offering up his apologies. “I’m sorry, Swan. He threatened to come out here on his own if I didn’t bring him, and I couldn’t very well let him go off in the woods by himself, at night.”

After a moment’s assessment, Emma gave him a quick nod and an appreciative smile for the care he’d shown for her son. Turning to Henry, Emma tried to convey her wish to not have him there.

“Well, we need to get you back home immediately.”

Killian understood her concern. Neither of them wished for the boy to witness the dire outcome that could ensue.

“No!” Henry was vehement in his refusal to be sidelined, still feeling the weight of responsibility on his young shoulders.

“Guys?” Hearing the sheriff’s voice call out from the edge of the clearing that led to the river bank, Killian met Emma’s wide eyes as they both heard the foreboding note in his voice.

Crouched along the trail, Graham’s flashlight was aimed at a thin strip of something Killian couldn’t quite make out at first. As he drew closer he realized what the Sheriff had found. John Doe’s hospital bracelet smeared with...

“Is that?” Mary Margaret whispered, as if afraid of the answer that came only a second later when Emma answered with a determined edge to her voice.

“Blood.”

The heightened urgency pressed at them as they came through the clearing, continuing to follow the trail.

“Where is he?” Mary Margaret called out, desperation hanging from every word she uttered. “Can
you see him?"

“The trail dies at the water line,” Graham announced, casting their focus and efforts towards the rushing river in front of them.

Beams of light bounced across the water as everyone scanned the river with their flashlights. Suddenly Mary Margaret flung hers aside and raced towards a point off in the water with shouts of *Oh, my God!* *Oh, my God!* *Oh, my God!*

Seeing that she had located their missing man, Graham called for assistance over his radio as he and Emma ran to join Mary Margaret.

“Henry, stay here,” Killian commanded as he joined the trio attempting to pull the man from the water.

Working together they managed to lay him out along the shore, a distraught Mary Margaret collapsing at his side.

“Is he okay?” Called out a distraught Henry. Killian watched Emma run over and embrace her son, turning him from the frightening and potentially fatal scene.

“Henry, don't look, okay? Don't look.”

Killian caught Emma’s eye as Mary Margaret began compressions on the Prince, and his heart broke. He knew all too well the pain of losing one’s family and love, but he at least carried the memory of his brother and Milah with him now. Would Emma and the Princess ever know what they had truly lost should the Prince perish? Would The Saviour still be able to break the curse if the bond of True Love died there on the shoreline?

A sound Killian had heard too many times in his long sea-faring life interrupted the quiet despair that had settled around them at Mary Margaret’s perceived failed attempt to revive the man, the sound of water being expelled from one’s lungs. Relief swept through Killian at the gasping breath he heard the man take in, and he shot a wide smile in Henry and Emma’s direction.

“She did it. She did it,” Henry repeated. “She woke him up.”

“Yeah, kid,” Emma confirmed, looking at the newly revived man in utter disbelief before her eyes flickered to Killian’s to share an incredulous look as she declared, “she did.”

Moments later the ambulance arrived, they loaded the man onto the stretcher with Mary Margaret only releasing his hand when the paramedics insisted. The search party made their way back to the hospital in close pursuit of the ambulance, Henry now riding with Emma in the bug while Killian followed behind.

A flurry of activity welcomed them as they made their way into the ward once more. Killian hung back, not wishing to be in the way and unsure whether or not his continued presence was even welcomed. He was therefore the first among them to see the blonde woman rush past as she called out for someone named David.

Killian turned at the sound of heels clicking along the floor, and knew he’d find Regina making her grand entrance. His fists clenched at the insipid smile she gave as she set her sights on her true objective. His stomach turned as she wove a web of lies about the man, David Nolan, and his wife. He suppressed all manner of scathing rebuttals to refute the farce playing out before him. He could have called Regina out any number of times, but he didn’t.
And that might be what grated him most of all.

Killian just stood by and watched as Henry, Mary Margaret, and even Swan’s hopes were dashed by the cold, fictitious reality the Evil Queen had concocted. He found himself unable to meet anyone’s eye, not wishing to see the hope dissipate or the belief fade from their depths because of his inaction. It wasn’t until he heard Henry whisper a final impassioned plea to Mary Margaret that he allowed himself to fully take in the scene around him once again.

“Don't believe them. You're the one he was looking for.”

Killian couldn’t help himself, Henry’s steadfast belief brought a smile to his lips as the lad passed him and waved goodbye. Slightly bolstered by the boy’s resilience, Killian chanced a look at Swan and could see the skepticism written across her brow. She wasn’t buying Regina’s tale for a second and he grinned even wider as she shot out of her chair and chased the Mayor down the hall.

*How much did she question? Was she any closer to giving credence to Henry’s belief in the curse?* Oh, how he would love to see her go toe to toe with Regina once again, but felt it prudent to remain where he was. Even if that meant sharing space with a bereaved Mary Margaret and having no idea what comforts to offer.

After several more minutes Emma had yet to return, and Killian began to wonder if she’d left. Surely she wouldn’t leave without checking on her friend and saying goodnight. Killian made his way down the hall only to find Swan and Regina still engaged in their confrontation.

“That's why I'm willing to forgive your incessant rudeness,” he heard Regina offer up magnanimously. “Because all this has reminded me of something oh so very important. How grateful I am to have Henry. Because not having someone, well, that's the worst curse imaginable.”

Killian’s gut twisted at her words. Words he had spoken to Swan the first night they’d met. Words that he knew cut both of them deeply, which had him rushing to Emma’s side as Regina exited the building.

“You alright there, Swan?”

His presence always seeming to catch her off guard, she jumped slightly at his approach before putting her tough exterior in place to answer him.

“Yeah, Jones. I’m fine.”

“Don’t let Regina get you down, love,” he said as he took another step closer, attempting to close the gap between them without causing her any more discomfort.

“Don’t worry about me and Regina,” she waved off, masking the hurt he could sense just beneath her collected exterior as she redirected the conversation. “I wanted to thank you, for all your help tonight. Not that I’m thrilled that Henry showed up, but I appreciate you looking after him the way you did.”

“Of course, Swan. As I told you, he’s a good lad, and I don’t mind watching out for him.”

Was it just his imagination or had they somehow drawn even closer to one another? The air seemed to crackle around them and Killian couldn’t help but notice the way she licked at her lips as her eyes flickered back and forth between his own.

In a flash the moment was gone as she took a step back and stated, “Well, I should probably get back to Mary Margaret.”
“Swan,” he called after her. “Look, I don’t know if you’ve had time to consider my proposal, and despite the salaciousness of my teasing earlier, I want you to know the offer of room and board still stands. I’d hate for you to have to sneak back into the pawn shop, or sleep in your car, not when I’ve got plenty of room to accommodate you.”

It wasn’t until the words left his lips that he truly understood the full motivation behind his proposition. As much as he didn’t want her to be alone after everything she’d gone through, even though she had no idea the full breadth of what had been at stake, he didn’t want to be alone either.

Not anymore.

That revelation shook him, even as the implication had him holding out hope that she might relent. That she might provide him the solace he’d been desperately seeking, and never thought he’d find again. In that moment she was so much more to him than he ever considered she could be, which made his heart sink all the more at her response.

“Actually, I’m going to stay with Mary Margaret tonight. She said she has an extra room at her loft, and I think she could probably use the company.”

“Of course,” he nodded in understanding as he tempered his disappointment. Suddenly feeling the need to distance himself from Emma and the exposed feelings that were stirring within him, he quickly added, “Well, then I guess I should be off. Night, Swan.”

Barely waiting to heed her reply, he set off into another lonely night.
Chapter Six

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomemillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswench created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out!

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

Emma felt good. Really good. She’d gotten another decent night’s sleep, was able to provide some manner of comfort to her new friend, Mary Margaret, the night before, and now she was strolling down Main Street with Henry, not caring a whit about what Regina would say. She could do this. She really could stay, and maybe put down some roots. She had Henry, a new friend, a job offer - admittedly, it was a tad shady, but it had some terrific perks, not the least of which was an actual house next door to her would-be employer. Killian Jones. Another perk.

Emma felt good, and she wasn’t going to let last night’s confrontation with Regina shake her resolve. Something fishy was going on in this town, and she had no doubt that Regina was at the center of it, which was probably how Henry had come up with the whole cursed town fantasy in the first place. The kid was smart, he’d obviously picked up on his mother’s questionable activities in her role as Mayor and had tried to cope by putting his faith and belief in stories rather than reality. He believed that his mother was an Evil Queen to be feared. Sure, Regina wasn’t to be underestimated, but Emma sure as hell didn’t want Henry to live in fear or worry. Emma could handle Regina.

“Are you sure we should be out in the open?” Henry questioned as they made their way past the clock tower.

“Enough sneaking around,” Emma insisted. “If your mom has a problem with me walking you to the school bus, I am more than happy to have that chat.”

She hoped her firm tone and determination would be enough to relieve Henry of his anxiety. He shouldn’t have to worry about the insecurities and frustrations that were brewing between his parents.

“You're brave,” Henry complimented her.

Mission accomplished, apparently.

“You'll need that for Operation Cobra. Speaking of, do you think we need code names?”

“Isn't cobra our code name?”

“That's the mission. I mean us. I need something to call you.”
Emma was pretty sure she had muscle memory to thank as the force that kept her legs moving as she and Henry continued to walk down Main Street towards the bus stop. Not moments ago he had called her brave, and now here she was, metaphorically frozen in fear - muscle memory, had to be muscle memory - at the prospect that Henry might be asking if it was okay to call her mom.

She was pretty sure that he had referred to her by that designation a few times to Mary Margaret and Killian, and probably Regina out of spite, but he was always careful to call her Emma when they were together. She was fine with that, and hadn’t really even considered the prospect that he would want to call her anything but Emma. They’d known each other, what, six days? He couldn’t possibly think of her as a real mother, right?

“Oh! Um, well.” She wondered what it would feel like to have him call her mom; a thought that had her mind screaming that it was too soon. “You can just call me Emma for now.”

“Oh, well, then I’ll see you later, Emma.”

It wasn’t disappointment exactly, the tone that Henry used as he said those parting words to her, but it definitely carried a similar weight. As soon as she had heard her name roll off his tongue, she knew she had made the wrong decision. She should have told him that it was okay if he wanted to call her mom, but once again, fear had gotten the better of her. Because Emma knew herself, she couldn’t do that to Henry, couldn’t let him call her mom, when she might bail. She didn’t want to bail, but… just because she had decided to stay for now, didn’t mean she wouldn’t run at some point. Hence the reason she was seriously considering Jones’ offer, it would give her some roots.

Why is the Sheriff stopping me with lights and sirens?

Emma watched as Graham pulled the cruiser into the drive in front of her and parked it, blocking her path. Amused by the theatrics the Sheriff was displaying, she called out, “What’s with the siren?”

“It’s so hard to get your attention,” Graham teased as he made his way around the back of the cruiser to approach her.

“All right, well, you got it. Are you arresting me again?”

There’s no way that’s what he’s here for, Emma thought, but so far she hadn’t equated Graham’s appearances with anything good, so she was cautious at best at his intrusion on her day.

“I’m thanking you. For your help with finding that coma patient. We all owe you a debt of gratitude.”

Well, that was unexpected.

“Well, what do I get?” she inquired with a smirk. “A commendation? Key to the city?”

“How about a job offer?”

And the surprises just keep comin’.

“Thank you, but I’ve already received a job offer, remember?”

“Yes,” he clipped in a tight tone before he replied, “and now you have another one.”

Emma narrowed her gaze as she began to speculate where his offer was really coming from.

“Is this about me not getting into bed with Killian Jones?”

“No,” he answered quickly, maybe too quickly.
Emma tilted her head, brows up at her hairline, as she pierced him with a look that spoke to her disbelief in his response.

“This is about me needing a deputy, and knowing a qualified person when I see one.”

“Hmm.” Emma could tell he was being honest about the need for a deputy, and that he thought her qualified for the position, but she didn’t believe for one moment that the offer didn’t have more to do with Jones than he’d have her believe.

“There’s dental,” he added. “Is Jones offering you dental?”

“Actually, he’s offering me a house.” She hadn’t meant to blurt it out like that. Probably would have been prudent to keep that little detail to herself, if the rise of reddish tint creeping up Graham’s neck was any indication.

“Well, I’m afraid I can’t match that offer,” he muttered before fixing her with a sincere stare as he said, “but I can at least give you another option for employment. I just didn’t want you to accept Jones’ offer because you thought it was your only option. Now you’ve got options.”

“Well, um. Thanks?” Emma didn’t know what else to say, so they just stood there awkwardly for another moment before he gave her a final plea.

“Just, think about it?”

Emma nodded and watched him climb into his cruiser and take off down the alleyway. It might be early, but Emma kinda hoped Granny would be willing to put something stronger than milk in her hot cocoa when she got to the diner.

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Emma sat at the table in front of the window at Granny’s looking for answers in the whipped cream swirled at the top of her cocoa. Granny had, unfortunately, not been accommodating about the addition of something stronger. Contemplating the weirdness of her life this past week, she thought about Graham, Killian, and Henry’s offers. Offers that would provide her with the opportunity to create some permanency in Storybrooke, a chance to be a part of something. A job, maybe a house, family, some purpose, all things she desperately wanted, but still wasn’t sure she was ready for - or deserved, if she was being honest with herself.

Swiping at the whipped cream with her finger, Emma had just stuck said finger into her mouth when she noticed a certain blue eyed specimen making himself comfortable at her table. Slowly removing her finger from her mouth, she saw the corners of his mouth tick up in perfect timing with his brow as he purred, “Oh, no. Don’t stop on my account.” His tongue was pressed into the side of his mouth as he eyed her salaciously. This man should be illegal.

“What do you want, Jones.” Her reply was a tad more breathless than she’d intended it to be. She didn’t need him knowing the effect he could have on her, so she followed her response with a glare she hoped would convey her displeasure at being caught off guard.

Killian’s only visible reaction to her attempt at composure was his left eyebrow climbing up towards his hairline as he seemed to reign himself back in as well. “I only wished to see how the accommodations were at Ms. Blanchard’s last night, and whether or not you’d thought anymore about my offer.”

“The loft was fine, and actually, I have given your offer some thought,” she replied honestly.
“And?”

Fairly certain she was going to take him up on his proposal, but unable to pass up the opportunity to tease and rile him up with the… whatever it was going on between he and Graham, she said, “I’m weighing it against the other offer I’ve received.”

That left brow of his soared ever higher, almost disappearing into his hairline as he responded, “You’ve received another job offer?”

“Mmm, hmm. Just this morning. Graham asked me to be his deputy.” She thought it was kinda cute how he clenched his jaw when he was frustrated and tried to hide it.

“Really?”

“Does that surprise you?”

“Not at all, Swan.”

Emma noticed that he had started fiddling with the ring on his thumb, is that his way of channelling his annoyance? she wondered.

Still feigning nonchalance, he asked, “Does a house come with Graham’s offer?”

“No, but I’d get dental.”

“Well, I can see why this would be a difficult choice for you then.” Hearing a hint of contempt in his response, Emma’s eyebrow made a run for her hairline as the pieces clicked into place.

Trying to keep the accusation out of her tone, she retorted, “If I didn’t know any better, I’d say you were jealous.”

“Well, you do seem to be a rather hot commodity right now.”

“Commodity? Not sure I like the sound of that.”

“An asset, then. You have many fine assets, Swan.” His smirk was firmly back in place, at his innuendo laden comment.

She tried to fight the blush that started to work it’s way up her cheeks at the thoughts his words had playing out in her mind. Instead she gave him a good natured roll of her eyes. “Are we still talking about the job offer, or something else?” she challenged.

“Whichever you’d prefer, love.”

Seeing that mischievous glint in his eyes, Emma decided she needed room to breathe. Room away from this man, so she could come back to her senses, because this conversation was treading into dangerous territory.

“I think I’d like to keep thinking on it while I drink my cocoa. Alone.”

“As you wish.” Killian got up to leave, granting her request for solitude, and accidentally bumped the table as she reached to lift her cup, causing cocoa to spill down her front.

“Bloody hell! Swan, are you alright?”

“Really?” Can I not catch a break today? She saw Ruby scurry over with a rag in her outstretched
hand, and Emma reached out to take it from her with a strained smile.

“What happened?”

“It was my fault, I’m afraid. I bumped the table.” Killian turned to Emma with remorseful eyes. “Apologies, love.”

Dabbing at the stain on her shirt, she responded with a small, reassuring smile, “Jones, it’s fine.” Not wishing to lose her good mood from moments earlier Emma looked at Ruby, and asked, “Do you have a laundry room I could use?”

“Sure thing. It’s in the back.” She pointed over her shoulder toward the hall that lead to the B&B.

“Do you need a hand, love? I’d be only too happy to assist you in removing that shirt.”

Apparently the man is incapable of resisting the urge to flirt with me, even when I’m covered in chocolate… or perhaps because of it? Down girl, not now.

“No. Thank you. You’ve done quite enough, Jones.” Her response was a bit more terse than necessary due to the frustration with her traitorous mind.

Emma left Killian, his apologies, and his too tempting innuendo behind as she headed toward the back hall only to realize her day was about to get much worse before it got better. Just as she rounded the corner, headed for the laundry room, she came face-to-face with Regina. Great, just great.

“How was your walk with Henry?” Regina paused just long enough to flash Emma a pompous smirk, before she continued, “That’s right, I know, but don’t worry, I don't mind.”

“You don’t?” Emma was unable to keep the note of incredulity out of her voice, not believing Regina’s “olive branch” for a moment.

“No, because you no longer worry me, Ms. Swan. You see, I did a little digging into who you are, and what I found out was quite soothing. It all comes down to the number seven.”

“Seven?” Emma was absolutely flabbergasted by this woman, is she even human?

“It's the number of addresses you've had in the last decade. Your longest stint anywhere was two years. Really, what did you enjoy so much about Tallahassee?”

Wanting to get back on even footing with Regina, Emma saucily quipped, “If you were wondering, I did find some options for a place to stay here in town.”

“I know. One of those is with Ms. Blanchard. How long is your lease? Oh, wait. You don't have one. You see my point? In order for something to grow, Ms. Swan, it needs roots, and you don't have any. People don't change. They only fool themselves into believing they can.”

Anger thoroughly stoked by this infuriating woman, Emma found it difficult not to strike out at the smug woman standing in front of her. “You don't know me.”

“No, I think I do. All I ask is, as you carry on your transient life, you think of Henry and what’s best for him, perhaps consider a clean break. It’s gonna happen anyway.” With a sneer, Regina looked her up and down before making the scathing quip, “Enjoy your cocoa.” She walked away, leaving Emma to stew in her seething anger.

Bitch! The nerve on her. She has no idea who I am! Emma stormed off down the hall toward the
laundry room. Tearing off her stained shirt as she entered and tossing it into an available machine she heard the hysterical cries of oh, no no, no, no, no from behind her. A young woman she hadn’t noticed was staring despondently at a set of very pink sheets, close to tears.

“You okay?”

“The sheets... they’re, uh, they're pink.”

“You tried bleach?” Emma offered gruffly before the woman lowered the sheet exposing her very pregnant form. “Oh.”

“Last night I felt contractions,” the young woman continued, “and the doctor said that the baby can come any day now.”

“That's great,” Emma replied, unsure as to why this perfect stranger saw fit to open up to her of all people.

“It's just that, um, when the baby comes no one thinks that I can do this. No one thinks I can do anything. Maybe they're right.”

Something snapped inside Emma as she listened to the poor girl’s story, one that hit just a little too close to home. Especially in light of the infuriating confrontation she’d just had with Regina in the hallway.

“Screw them.” Emma’s vehemence was palpable.

“What?” The young girl had a look of utter shock on her face as she looked at Emma.

“Screw them ,” she said again with greater emphasis, resisting the urge to shout out screw you Regina , which is what she really wanted to scream, but that wouldn’t do her or the poor girl in front of her any good. “How old are you?”

“Nineteen”

“I was eighteen.” Her anger propelled her to confide in the poor frightened girl.

“When you- when you had a kid?”

“Yeah. I know what it's like,” she commiserated. “Everyone loves to tell you what you can and can't do, especially with a kid, but ultimately, whatever you're considering doing,” Emma choked back fresh emotion as she added, “or giving up, the choice is yours.”

“It's not exactly what you might think it is.”

“It never is. People are gonna tell you who you are your whole life. You just gotta punch back and say, no, this is who I am . You want people to look at you differently? Make them.

You want to change things, you're gonna have to go out there and change them yourself, because there are no fairy godmothers in this world.”

Killian woke at the sound of glass breaking. Casting his senses out into the quiet darkness, he listened intently for any further sounds of disruption within his home. A door down the hall creaked open prompting Killian to go and find out who would be so reckless as to break into the home of Killian Jones.
He crept along the hallway on silent feet, and could hear shuffling sounds coming from his private office. Someone was obviously searching for something, and he wondered if Regina had been so bold as to hire someone to steal his dagger. A smirk pulled at his lips over the fact that the blade was safely tucked away on the Jolly Roger, and this clumsy thief would not only have to return to Regina empty handed, but would also have to answer to him for the audacity to enter his home.

Softly pushing the door open, he expected to see some manner of goon or ruffian tearing through the drawers and cabinets of his desk. The last thing he expected to see was a very young, very pregnant woman. Who the blazes is she?

Determining that she wasn’t much of a threat, Killian switched on the lights catching the woman off guard. She stared at him, like a frightened deer, and clutched the flashlight she’d been using to illuminate her search tightly in her hand, making her knuckles go white. Killian approached her with his hands raised in front him, hoping to demonstrate that he meant her no harm.

Coming to a stop about several feet in front of her, Killian gently inquired, “Are you alright, lass?” When she didn’t respond, he took another step toward her and asked, “What are you doing here?”

Snapping out of her fear, the lass’ features turned to flint as she boldly stated, “Changing my life,” before bringing an object up to Killian’s face.

Something akin to liquid fire burned Killian’s eyes, and he had only a moment’s realization that the lass had maced him before his head made contact with a solid enough surface to plunge him into total darkness.
Killian groaned as he rolled onto his back, his pulse pounding at a spot along his forehead above his left eye. Only vaguely aware that he was lying on the floor, he cursed himself for imbibing in too much rum before he remembered that he hadn’t had a drop. *Then why the devil am I… the young woman!*

Opening his eyes, grimacing against the brightness of the lights, he tentatively sat up and began assessing the room around him. The lass was long gone, and his office had been thoroughly ransacked. *What had she been looking for? Did she locate whatever it was that was so important she’d break into my home and accost me?* Killian wasn’t even sure he’d know if anything was missing. He hadn’t really considered any of the items within the office as his actual possessions since he’d been woken from the curse.

There must have been something of great importance hidden away in there, though. Why else would the woman take such a risk?

*‘Changing my life.’*

What could he possibly possess that would have any bearing on the life of a woman he didn’t even know?

One thing was for certain, the lass was scared, and in some sort of trouble. She needed help. Help she clearly wouldn’t accept from him, and Killian wasn’t about to involve the Sheriff. For one, he didn’t need the man snooping among his things as he investigated a home invasion, and two, Killian had a better option. Emma. If anyone could find and help the lass, he knew Swan could, she was The Saviour after all, and bloody brilliant to boot.

After taking a few moments to look around the office, just in case anything sparked a memory or idea of what the woman had been looking for, nothing did, Killian got cleaned up and headed out towards Ms. Blanchard’s loft. Still a tad unsure as to what he was going to say, Killian rapped at the door and waited for either Emma or Mary Margaret to open it.
“Thanks again for letting me have my stuff sent here, I’m so glad to finally have it.” Emma knelt before her meager possessions and basked in the small comfort she felt at being surrounded by something familiar.

“It’s no problem,” Mary Margaret replied as she brought over a plate and handed it off to a thankful Emma before she asked. “Is that all of your stuff?”

“What do you mean?”

“Is the rest in storage until you decide whether or not you’re going to accept Mr. Jones’ offer?”

“No. This is all of it.” The sad look on her new friend’s face had Emma feeling self-conscious, and she tried to tamp down the haunting thoughts and emotions that had plagued her for so much of her life. “I’m not sentimental.”

Perhaps sensing that she’d struck some kind of a nerve, Mary Margaret encouragingly added, “Well, it must make things easier when you have to move.” Small, understanding smiles passed between them as Mary Margaret sat herself down at the table to eat her breakfast, prompting Emma to do the same.

“So have you made a decision about which job offer to accept?”

“Maybe,” she shrugged nonchalantly as she took a bite of her breakfast.

“You know you can stay here, right?” Mary Margaret affirmed. “No matter which option you choose. I know it isn’t a house overlooking the ocean with an attractive man, who all but devours you with his eyes every time he sees you, living next door, but—”

Emma started to choke on her eggs as heat rushed to her cheeks. “He does not—”

“Oh, yes. He does.” Mary Margaret smirked behind the rim of her mug as Emma stared slack jawed.

A knock at the door provided a much needed interruption, and Emma was able to compose herself as Mary Margaret answered it. Composure she struggled to maintain as she heard the lilting tones of the very man her friend had just teased her about.

“Morning, Ms. Blanchard. Is Ms. Swan available?”

Emma stood and straightened her shoulders as she made her way to the door. Calling upon her defenses of sarcasm and wit, Emma rounded the door and teased, “Quick, Mary Margaret. Hide all the hot beverages.”

Killian attempted to give her an unamused smirk but hissed when his brow began to lift. Emma noticed a cut just above his brow and the bruising that had started to bloom around it.

“Jones! What happened?” she questioned as she gently swiped his hair aside to get a better look at the wound before she could think better of it.

Killian gave her a brief wide-eyed stare at the contact before he schooled his features and replied, “That’s why I’ve come, Swan. I need your help with something.”

Emma led him into the loft and offered him a seat. She saw him give Mary Margaret a pointed look that had the woman declaring that she’d be in the bath, though Emma knew that didn’t mean their conversation would actually be a private one.
“Someone broke into my house last night,” he began as he rubbed his hand along his jaw, and over his mouth. Discomfort over the invasion, or maybe at having been caught off guard in his own home, radiating off him in waves.

“Did you get a look at them?”

“Aye, it was a young woman. Very pregnant, and very insistent on finding something in my office. Something that she hoped would, and I quote, ‘change her life’.”

Astonished and overcome with a mixture of guilt, dread, and utter confusion as she realized that he could only be describing Ashley, the maid at the B&B she’d met the day before, Emma inquired, “Why didn’t you report this to the police?”

“I think you know the answer to that question quite well, love,” he clipped. “The Sheriff would spend more time investigating me, seeing as he’d finally have legal reason to search my premises, and less time finding the girl.”

Emma’s brows raised at the admission of not wishing to have his home searched, and started to wonder just how shady Jones’ business was. Something she probably should have questioned before now, but had allowed Henry’s fondness for him, and probably her own reactions, to blind her to the more nefarious side of Mr. Killian Jones.

“She’s a scared young woman, Swan. She’s pregnant, and going about searching for something that she’s willing to attack people over. I don’t want to make things harder on her by involving the police, not when I have every hope that you can find and help her.”

Emma could hardly keep up with the puzzle of a man that sat before her. Shady and potentially dangerous, as well as concerned and caring for others he saw as vulnerable and hurting. People like Ashley. People like Henry. She knew he was being honest in his motives, even if she did suspect that there was more he wasn’t telling her. She’d let that go for now, though. He was right. Ashley needed help, and Emma couldn’t help but feel guilty that the mess was partly her fault.

“Will you help me, love?” Killian’s question snapped Emma from her guilt induced musings.

Still a bit confused with why he seemed so eager to find and help some woman he didn’t know, a woman who had attacked him in his own home, she replied, “I’ll help her.”

Killian gave her an expression of being taken aback by her change in mood and demeanor, but before he could ask her about it the loft door swung open to reveal Henry.

“Hey, Emma. I thought we could… Killian!”

“Hello, Henry, my boy,” Killian beamed at the kid’s presence, spinning Emma’s perceptions of him once again.

“What are you doing here?” Henry asked.

“Oh, I was just enlisting Emma’s aid in a matter I needed help with.”

“Henry, what are you doing here?” Emma asked.

“My mom’s gone ‘til five, so I thought we could hang out. Wanna join us Killian?”

Emma was about to voice a protest when Killian responded, “Would that I could, lad. Unfortunately, I’ve other business to see to today.”
He stood and made his way to the door, ruffling Henry’s hair as he passed, which did absolutely nothing to Emma’s heart and stomach. Before leaving he turned back and said, “Good luck, Swan. Let me know when you’ve got everything sorted, yeah?”

“Yeah. Later, Jones.” A rigid tone clipped her words causing him to shoot a look of confusion and concern her way before he nodded and exited the loft.

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Emma was left reeling as she departed from the Herman house. He’d played her. Sat right across from her in the loft and lied straight to her face. How did she not pick up on that? He’d made it seem as if he’d had no idea who the woman was, or why she attacked him, but now she knew the truth. Killian Jones had played her for a fool, and she wasn’t going to let him get away with it.

“I don’t get it,” Henry said as they made their way back to the diner to question Ruby once more. “Killian wouldn’t do something like this. It doesn’t make any sense. It has to be something to do with the curse.”

Emma could feel her anger rising to new levels at the mention of the curse, but she maintained some semblance of control before she could lash out at Henry. This wasn’t his fault. Jones had fooled them all, and he’d be lucky to get away with just a punch in the face from her, for what the truth about him would do to poor Henry.

“Curse or no curse, we are not going to allow Jones to take Ashley’s baby,” Emma stated emphatically. “Anyone who wants to be a mother should damn well be allowed to be one.” Her growing agitation made her miss the appreciative look Henry had cast her way.

Parking out front of Granny’s, Emma stormed up the walk toward the diner. Finding Ruby behind the counter Emma questioned, “Why didn't you tell me she sold the baby?”

“Because I didn't think it was important,” the brunette murmured as she skirted along the counter away from her and Henry.

“So, considering that's why she's running away?”

Ruby continued to project an aloof air of indifference towards Emma’s pursuits, but begrudgingly replied, “Look, Ashley’s my friend. I don’t like the idea of people judging her.”

A retort got caught in the back of Emma’s throat as she spied the red, glass wolf she’d seen hanging from the rearview mirror of Ruby’s car earlier now sitting on the ledge of the pass through window. Lifting it from it’s new resting place Emma shot a look out the front window and realized the vehicle was no longer there.

“Ruby, where's your car?” The guilty looked that passed over the woman’s face made everything fall into place. “You didn't send me to Sean to find her. You sent me there to give her a head start.”

“Look, I'm only trying to help her,” Ruby answered defensively.

“Yeah, so am I. Ashley's in more trouble than you know, Ruby. Where is she? Don't make her deal with Jones without me,” Emma pleaded.

Despite the lies and disgraceful business dealings, Emma didn’t think Killian would actually hurt Ashley, but she could admit that she’d been wrong about him before and couldn’t take the chance
that she was wrong about him now. Not with a child at stake.

“I can't talk in front of him,” Ruby said as she glanced towards Henry. “He's the mayor's kid.”

“Hey, I'm on your side,” Henry argued as Emma could see Ruby’s resolve crumble in the face of her friend going up against Killian Jones alone.

“Henry,” Emma began as she turned to him and lowered her voice in a serious tone, “I need to find this woman, and in order to do that, I need you to go home, okay? So please listen to me, seriously. She's not gonna tell me anything if you're around.”

“Okay,” Henry agreed, surprising Emma with his quick compliance.

“Thank you.” She smiled after him as he headed out the door before she turned back to Ruby.

_time to get some answers and find Ashley, then I'll deal with Killian Jones._

After leaving the matter of the young, pregnant woman in Swan’s capable hands, Killian made his way back to his home and began collecting all the paperwork he’d come across since waking from the curse. He boxed up a number of documents and transported them to the _Jolly Roger_ where he could look them over in the familiar comfort of his cabin.

He knew from his cursed memories that he owned a substantial amount of land and properties within the town. A number of deeds and leases were in his name and he’d exerted his authority as landlord over the wretched souls under his thumb for the entirety of his cursed state. These documents seemed to be different, however, and Killian was eager to try and uncover what possible treasures might be buried within their contents.

As he began sorting the stack he heard Henry calling out for him from above deck. _Had he come with news? Did Emma send him to relay a message about the young woman?_

“Down here, lad,” he responded, and carefully placed the papers back into the box for later inspection.

Henry’s usual bright and exuberant expression was clouded with a shroud of confusion and hurt.

“Henry, lad. What’s the matter?”

“Are you really going to take away Ashley’s baby?” Henry asked mournfully, making Killian’s brows knit together in utter confusion.

“Come again?”

“Ashley,” Henry stated as if the name should mean something to him. “You’re trying to take her baby.”

_Who the blazes is Ashley? Was she the pregnant lass? Her baby?_

“What in the bloody hell would I want with a baby?”

 Completely confounded by the entire exchange, and doing a piss poor job of disguising it, Killian noticed a questioning glimmer flash behind the lad’s eyes as a look of suspicion overtook his
features. Suspicion that seeped into his next words and made Killian wary that the lad was suspecting something amiss in his behavior.

“But Mr. Herman said he made a deal with you. That there’s a contract saying Ashley has to give her baby to you once its born.”

Concerns of Henry’s speculations aside, this news further added to Killian’s bewilderment. A contract? For a baby? That didn’t sound like one of his tactics pre or post curse. He was a pirate. He swindled, and cheated, and threatened in order to get what he wanted, and he most certainly did not want a baby. Not like this, anyway.

Contracts were too legal, too binding, too… too much like something The Dark One would do.

*Bloody Crocodile.*

This had to be his doing. A deal made long before the curse which left Ashley, or whoever she truly was, beholden to the imp, and now him. The curse using it’s dark magic to manipulate those things that had once been in Rumplestiltskin’s name and replaced it with the name of the new Dark One. Him.

Before Killian’s thoughts could become too befuddled with the mind-fuck that was Regina’s curse - *Had the poor lass been nine months pregnant for the past twenty-eight years?* - his phone rang, causing both he and Henry to jump at the noise.

“Jones,” he snapped as way of greeting as he answered.

“*Mr. Jones, this is Nurse Gladys at Storybrooke Hospital. I’m calling to let you know that we’ve received word from a Ms. Emma Swan that Ashley Boyd is in labor, and on her way in. As Ms. Boyd’s listed emergency contact, we wanted you to be aware.*”

Killian pinched the bridge of his nose as he replied, “Aye. Of course. Thank you for the notification.”

Very aware of Henry’s look of suspicion, and resigned to the fact that Emma must think him the worst kind of monster for his perceived involvement in such a dishonorable scheme, Killian ran his hand along his jaw as he determined how to proceed. He in no way intended to take a babe from its mother’s arms, but everyone believed that he had a deal in place, and no one gets out of a deal with Killian Jones. His reputation in town was built upon that fact. A plan started to form in his mind as he made his way above deck, Henry following closely at his heels.

“Was that about Ashley?”

“Aye. She’s in labor. Your mother is taking her to the hospital as we speak.”

“I’m coming with you,” Henry declared, and Killian had not the time nor the energy to argue with the lad. Killian grabbed the helmet from his bike, and thrust it in Henry’s direction, “If you ride, you wear a helmet. Your mother is liable to kill me regardless, but I’ll not risk your safety.”

Killian and Henry made it to the hospital in record time and were approaching the entrance as they caught sight of Ashley being wheeled in by an orderly with Emma following behind. Ashley turned back, presumably to say something to Emma, when she caught sight of Killian and visibly paled. Seeing the woman’s distress, Emma looked over her shoulder and stiffened as Ashley gave voice to her fear.

“He’s gonna take my baby.”
Killian halted, shame washing over him that he should inspire such trepidation in an innocent, young woman. He looked over at Henry who shared his downcast gaze and felt sure this was the beginning of the end. Emma would never allow her son to associate with someone like him, not this version of him. The pirate. The villain.

Emma stopped the orderly and crouched down next to Ashley as she assured, “I won’t let that happen, but do you know what you’re asking for? If you keep this child, are you really ready?”

“Yeah.”

“Are you sure? Because I wasn’t.”

Killian saw Henry’s head snap up at her words and he couldn’t imagine how Henry was feeling. The weight of the entire ordeal fully settled upon him as Killian continued to listen to Emma’s confession.

“If you want to give this kid its best chance, it’s gonna be with someone who’s ready, so know what that means. Your whole life is gonna change, and once you decide that it’s yours, running away can’t happen. You have to grow up, and you can’t ever leave. Understand?”

“Yes. I want my baby.”

Emma gave the orderly a nod to continue on before she rounded on Killian.

“Henry, go and wait for me in the lobby,” she commanded.

Henry gave Killian one last look before he departed. A look that still held an edge of speculation amid the concern and melancholy. After the lad was well inside, and unable to overhear the imminent confrontation Killian broke the silent standoff.

“You found her, I see.” He continued in his approach though she barred him from the hospital entrance, placing a hand against his chest to stop him from entering.

Just as they had in the pawn shop, visions began to overtake him. Memories of the girl, Ashley... no, that wasn’t her name, her true name was Ella. She was Cinderella, and she had made a deal. A deal she had not fully understood. A deal she had gone back on with dire consequences.

“Why didn’t you tell me? Why did you pretend to not know who she was?” Emma’s question pulled him from the memory and he could tell that she was doing her best to keep the hurt from his perceived lies to her out her voice. Projecting her abject anger at the repulsive nature of the situation, and his role in it.

“I was honest with you about not knowing who she was, Swan, truly.” Using the newly acquired information the memory provided him, Killian began to craft a plausible, half-truth explanation. “The deal was brokered by a third party. I wasn’t given the woman’s name. The deal was that she would receive compensation in exchange for the child. Once the child was in my possession I’d be charged with finding it a suitable home.”

“You’re not getting that kid.” Killian had no intention of leaving the hospital with the child, but it seemed Swan already had him pegged as a villain.

“Actually, we have an agreement.” Killian decided that in order to maintain his cover as his cursed self he’d have to play his part. If it’s a villain she wants, then so be it, “And there’s a contract that must be honored.”

“Tear it up.”
“That's not what I do, love.” Unable to resist some theatrics, Killian flourished a bit as he added, “But, I’m not a heartless man. How about I let Ms. Boyd keep her baby, and you'll simply owe me a favor.”

“I’m not going to work for you, Jones. I’ve already accepted the Deputy position.”

“Have you now?” Flippant in his response, he tried to mask how much the news hurt him.

“Oh.”

“Well then it seems the better man has won,” he declared, a softer tone lacing his words as he became tired of the facade. “For what it’s worth, Swan, I think you’ll make a brilliant Deputy.” Hope stirred in the back of his chest as she seemed to lose a bit of her bite at his words. A slight blush tincted her cheeks and she gave him a mixed look of disbelief and gratitude at the compliment. It lasted only a moment before she fixed him again with a hard stare.

“I’ll just owe you a favor?” she clarified with lifted brow.

“Aye, love.”

“Deal.” Killian’s skin crawled, but he was heartened at their accord and the chance it might give him to redeem himself in her eyes.

The nurse picked that moment to walk outside to notify them of the successful birth of Ashley’s baby. “I guess I’ll take my leave. Please do pass along my congratulations to Ms. Boyd.” Killian turned, and headed back to his bike before Emma even had the chance to respond.

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“You know, Emma, you're different.” The comment sounded odd coming from Henry, as they made their way to drop him off at Regina’s before she could get home and notice he had been gone.

“What's that?”

“You're the only one who can do it.”

She tried to not get frustrated with Henry and his love of being cryptic. An unintended touch of agitation seeped into her voice as she retorted, “Break the curse? Yes, I know. You keep telling me that.”

“No,” Henry paused to roll his eyes at her, before continuing, “leave. You're the only one who can leave Storybrooke.”

Unsure of where he was headed with this conversation Emma replied, “You left, and found me in Boston.”

“But I came back. I'm 10. I had no choice, but if anyone else tried to go, bad things would happen.” Henry sounded as though that was the most obvious thing in the world, the verbal equivalent of rolling his eyes. Cheeky little kid.

“Nobody? Except Me?”

“You're The Saviour. You can do whatever you want. You can leave.”
Why is he telling me this? Is he testing me? Trying to tell me to leave? She stopped that train of thought there, she was getting way ahead of herself. Henry wouldn’t have tracked her down in Boston if he didn’t want her to be there. Unless he’s tired of me already, realized how much of a mistake it was to find me, how broken I am. No! No, that can’t be, just this morning he came to me, wanting to spend the day together. She knew she was working herself up into a frenzy and needed a new topic to fixate on, so she decided to ask Henry about the other thing she’d been stewing over all day.

“By the way, I meant to ask you earlier. What were you doing with Killian Jones at the hospital?” Genuinely curious about his response, Emma looked at Henry as much as she could manage as she drove.

“I was with him when he got the call about Ashley.”

Emma tried to not sound as confused as she felt, and quickly questioned, “Why? Why do you spend so much time with the guy and invite him along everywhere?”

“He’s my friend.”

“Yes.”

“Your friend?”

“Yes, my best friend… my only friend, actually.”

Emma’s heart broke at his response, and the melancholic tone he couldn’t disguise in his voice. After Henry’s statement about his friendship with Killian, they both turned within themselves. Emma was still trying to figure Killian out, she knew now that he didn’t exactly lie to her. But she couldn’t reconcile the man who would buy and sell a child with the man who had befriended her son and shown such care and consideration in other matters. She may not be able to get a handle on her thoughts and feelings for Jones, but she was willing to try and accept him for Henry’s sake.

“Pumpkin,” Emma offered, wanting to break the introspective tension in the car. “My code name,” she clarified at Henry’s confused look. “I was thinking, in honor of Cinderella, Pumpkin.” Henry shook his head. “You got a better one in mind?”

“Yes.”

Yeah, this kid loves to be cryptic, she thought sardonically. “Well?”

“I’m not sure you’re ready yet.” After the words were spoken, Henry got out of the car and headed for the gate, but before he could run up the walk Emma called out to him.

“Henry! About what you said… about me being able to leave.”

“Yeah?”

“See you tomorrow.” Henry’s face split into the biggest grin she’d seen on him yet at her promise of tomorrow.

She pulled the bug a few blocks away, wanting to make sure that Regina wouldn’t be able to see her once she got home. Emma turned off the bug and called Graham to accept the job offer, figuring she ought to, seeing as how she’d already told Killian that she had.

“Hello? Graham, it’s Emma. That deputy job still open?”

“Absolutely.” Graham’s response came through the phone not even a second after she finished her
question. *Has he been dreading me working with Jones that much?*

“Then I'm in.” Feeling the need to ask, but not overly concerned with the answer, since this was her life to do as she pleases, Emma continued, “Regina gonna be okay with this?”

“I don't care. It's my department. I'll see you Monday morning.”

*Oh yeah, this is gonna be interesting.* “I'll see ya.”

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Killian stopped at Granny’s before heading back to the *Jolly Roger* and placed an order to-go before making use of the facilities. As he turned the corner towards the restroom he practically ran into Regina as she exited the back stairs. Obviously startled by his presence it took her a moment to regain her cool facade before issuing him an overly civil, “Mr. Jones,” before she swept past him and out the back door.

*Strange. Henry said she’d be gone all day, what on earth was she doing up there?*

The answer to that question came as he exited the restroom moments later only to run into Sheriff Humbert. Sheriff Humbert and traces of the Mayor’s shade of lipstick along his neck and jaw.

“Not really your shade, mate,” Killian smirked as he pointedly glanced at the smudge of lipstick on the man’s neck.

Eyes wide, Graham rubbed at the traitorous mark as Killian quipped, “I hear congratulations are in order.”

“For what?” Graham eyed him warily.

“Your new deputy.”

“How could you possibly know that already?” Graham questioned scathingly. “She just called me.”

Graham’s confirmation that Emma had not been altogether truthful at the hospital earlier, but had decided to accept the position anyway, added to Killian’s growing agitation with the entire blasted day. A day that had cost him precious ground with Emma, and left him on a precarious perch with Henry. It hadn’t been a total loss, however, not in light of the new morsel of information he’d just stumbled across. *The Mayor and the Sheriff. What would Emma and Henry have to say about their illicit rendezvous?*

“That’s not all I know, mate.” Killian winked as he smirked at the red faced Sheriff, before brushing past him to collect his take out.

No, indeed. The day hadn’t been a complete loss. Emma owed him a favor, Regina and Graham were going to have to pay up if they wanted Killian’s discretion, and, as Killian was about to learn, the stack of documents awaiting him on the *Jolly Roger* provided him even greater leverage and property within Storybrooke. Property that included the pawn shop, and all that it held.
“A tie? You know you don’t have to dress a woman as a man to give her authority.”

Emma had spent the vast majority of the day filling out an absurd amount of paperwork for her new position as Deputy, a position that Graham was only now telling her came with a uniform. Yeah, I’m not wearing this.

“So you think you can get people to do what you want in that red coat?” Graham disputed half-heartedly.

“I’m getting you to do what I want right now,” she said victoriously, knowing that Graham wouldn’t actually make her wear the hideous thing.

“Well, at least wear the badge,” Graham insisted as he handed it to her. “Go on. Take it. If you really want to be a part of this community, you have to make it official.”

Make it official. That’s what she wanted, right? To be a part of something officially? She had officially decided to stay, had officially moved in with Mary Margaret, had officially accepted this job, and had officially decided to not get into bed with Killian Jones. Metaphorically or otherwise. Maybe.

Emma had spent much of the day before further questioning Henry about his relationship with Killian Jones, and his answers had left her all the more perplexed. She’d also made inquiries with a few people around town; Ruby, Granny, Archie. From what she’d gathered, Killian Jones was not a man many wanted to cross. Ruthless in his business practices and somewhat shady in the ethics department, he had a reputation that Emma could only describe as some sort of modern day pirate. A term that had amused Henry to no end when she’d let it slip at the diner over cocoa the night before - Granny, too.

In fact, other than Henry, Granny seemed to be the only other person with a kind word to say about Jones. Oh, she confirmed everyone’s stories and admitted that he could be a right pain in the ass when it came to negotiating her rent, but the old broad seemed to have a soft spot, if not a saucy appreciation for the man. She firmly defended his relationship with Henry, and made it known to Emma that were it not for Killian Jones, Henry would likely be a little lost boy without hope. Mary
Margaret may have given him the storybook, but it was Killian, Granny had said, that had given Henry the ability to believe in something more.

Granny had seen first hand the fruit of the hours they spent working on Jones’ ship together. Henry had gone from a withdrawn, shy child to an exuberant little spitfire practically overnight after he’d snuck aboard the Jewel and first met Jones. Though Jones remained just as cunning and cutthroat as ever, he’d had moments of compassion since spending time with Henry, and no one could argue his genuine affection for the boy.

Even with Granny’s endorsement, and Henry’s insistence that Killian was truly his friend, Emma couldn’t shake the feeling that Jones was hiding something. Something more than just questionable business practices. Something that made Emma want to peel back the layers, and maybe a few of his garments, in order to see the true man that lay beneath.

The man that Henry knew.

*Henry*

He’d be finished with Dr. Hopper soon, and she had promised to walk him home so they could spend some time together. Because this was official. She was officially staying. She was officially Deputy Emma Swan of Storybrooke.

Emma took the badge from Graham’s hand, and immediately after placing it on her belt the entire room shook as a loud rumble echoed through town. Every phone in the sheriff’s station erupted in a chorus of shrill rings around her and Graham, and for one fleeting moment, Emma felt sure that it was some sort of sign. A sign? Of What? Emma, don’t be ridiculous.

There had been a collapse at the old Storybrooke mines, and she and Graham wasted no time making their way to the scene. When they arrived a crowd had already started to gather.

Exiting the police cruiser Emma saw Regina taking charge as she barked out orders for everyone to stand back. Assessing the destruction, Emma listened as the Mayor gave out orders to Graham and Marco, while dismissing her with snark about it being a town matter.

“Well, actually, I work for the town now,” Emma provided matter of factly, enjoying Regina’s slightly stunned and agitated expression.

“She's my new deputy,” Graham explained.

“They say the mayor's always last to know.”

“It's in my budget.”

“Indeed,” Regina clipped, and Emma couldn’t help but think there was something else going on between the two of them that she was missing.

“Deputy, why don't you make yourself useful and help with crowd control,” Regina dismissed before she turned to address the crowd that was starting to grow restless awaiting news.

“People of Storybrooke, don't be alarmed,” Regina began as she addressed the crowd. “We've always known this area was honeycombed with old mining tunnels, but fear not. I'm going to undertake a project to make this area safe, to rehabilitate it into city use. We will bulldoze it, collapse it, and pave it.”

“Pave it?” Henry exclaimed as he made his way through the crowd - *when did he get here?* “What if
there's something down there?"

“Henry, what are you doing here?” Regina questioned, pulling forward from the assembled crowd.

“What's down there?”

“Nothing. Now step back,” Regina stated firmly as she pushed Henry back toward the crowd. “In fact, everyone, please, please step back.”

At the Mayor’s insistence the crowd began to fall back to safer vantage points. Emma began to unwind the caution tape when she felt Henry tug at the cuff of her jacket. Looking over to where he was silently indicating with the nod of his head, Emma saw Regina pick something up off the ground and visibly stiffen before she placed it into her pocket.

“What was that?” Henry whispered to her before Regina came forward and snatched him from Emma’s side.

“Henry, enough. This is a safety issue. Wait in the car,” she instructed and watched to make sure her order was obeyed before turning back to Emma and Graham. “Deputy Swan, Sheriff, cordon off the area.”

While Emma secured the site she saw Killian Jones pull up on his motorcycle and park it next to the Mayor’s car. Henry’s face lit up at his presence, and Emma couldn’t deny the flutter such a sight sent through her heart. Jones chatted briefly with Henry before approaching the scene… with Henry not far behind.

“Evening, Swan,” Killian greeted, a bit more tentatively than she was used to from him, but given the recent incident with Ashley she couldn’t really blame him.

“Actually, its Deputy Swan,” she corrected as she tapped the new badge at her hip.

“Aye, of course.” Killian scratched behind his ear as he glanced at her hip, and Emma could see the muscle tick in his jaw.

“Emma. Killian. Over here.” Henry beckoned, drawing them from the fresh tension that had risen around them.

They joined Henry and Archie, crouched down next to the patrol car as to not be seen by Regina, and listened as Henry insisted, “This requires all of operation Cobra.”

“I didn't realize I was in operation Cobra,” Archie commented at nearly the exact moment that Killian posed the question.

“What’s Operation Cobra, mate?”

As Henry explained Operation Cobra, Emma was struck with the memory of a week ago when Graham had asked about Operation Cobra only to have Henry tell him it was need to know, yet he was willing to bring someone like Killian Jones, of all people, into his scheme. Emma knew that Jones was aware of Henry’s belief in the curse, but wondered what his reaction would be at the idea of an actual mission with the purpose of breaking it. Would he play along, as Dr. Hopper suggested they should, or would he scoff at the idea?

Inscrutable. The man was utterly inscrutable. Killian’s expression gave absolutely nothing away as to his thoughts of Henry’s plan, and when the moment came for Henry to bring everyone up to speed on the latest pressing issue of the mission it was Emma who scoffed.
“We can't let her do this,” Henry pleaded. “What if there's something down there?”

“They're just some old tunnels,” she brushed off - not everything is a conspiracy, kid.

“That just happened to collapse right after you get here?” he fired back with every bit of sass she’d come to expect from him. “You're changing things. You're weakening the curse.”

“That's not what's happening,” she argued, very aware of Archie and Killian’s assessing looks.

“Yes, it is,” the kid insisted. “Did you do anything different today? 'Cause something made this happen.”

Emma considered his words, stunned by the coincidence. She was reminded of the sense she’d felt when she’d first put on her badge, and the action was immediately followed by the ground shaking. The sense that it was some sort of sign. She shook it off at the time, but now with Henry’s words echoing the same sentiment Emma couldn’t help brush her fingers against the cold metal at her hip, nor did she miss the speculative look Killian Jones gave her as he took in the action.

“Henry, I told you to wait in the car.”

Regina’s scathing admonishment startled Emma out of her preoccupation with Henry’s words and the coincidence in the timing of the day’s events. The Mayor turned her scornful attentions back to Emma as she ordered, “Deputy, do your job.”

The moment of intrigue interrupted, Emma shook off the ridiculousness of actually considering that Henry might be right, shared a brief look with Killian and Archie, and went back to her duties.

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Killian had been heartened by Henry’s greeting from the Mayor’s car when he’d first arrived on the scene. The feeling was further bolstered by the lad’s inclusion of him into the operation he’d concocted in response to his mother’s curse. Of course he’d created a mission.

Relieved that the past weekend hadn’t diminished his standing in Henry’s eyes, Killian could only hope that he might find a way to mend things between he and Emma. Perhaps, working together with her, the lad, and the Cricket on Operation Cobra would be a step in the right direction? Though, he had no idea what to do to try and amend the damage the crocodile and Regina had inflicted with the curse, or whether or not it was truly in their - his - best interests for it to be broken.

Killian’s thoughts were interrupted by Henry’s question as to whether or not Emma had done anything of significance that might have caused the mine collapse. He caught her movement as she gently, almost reverently, brushed the face of her deputy’s badge with her fingertips, and her expression nearly made him blanch at the realization - Bloody hell! Emma did do this.

Henry was right. She was changing things - quickly. Far quicker than he had imagined she could, and once again Killian found himself wrestling with his desire to be in Emma and Henry’s good graces and breaking the curse, knowing it would reveal his villainous past - or worse, the threat of The Dark One.

Before he could ponder Emma’s effect on the curse any further, Regina’s shrewd voice cut through the air, chastising Henry and Emma alike. Killian had to restrain himself from physically reacting to her condescension of Emma, and manhandling of Henry.

As Regina’s attention was otherwise occupied in steering Henry towards her car, Killian shared a sympathetic look with Emma before she turned back to her official duties. Deciding it might be a
good idea to make himself as inconspicuous as possible, he got out of the war path that he knew Regina was sure to pave, and therefore went unnoticed as *Her Majesty* turned her ire onto Dr. Hopper. Curiosity piqued at what had Regina so vexed with the Cricket, Killian listened in.

“Okay, we're done with this.” Regina got in Dr. Hopper’s face as she seethed.

The man looked utterly baffled by *Her Majesty’s* ire, as he questioned, “Uh, excuse me?”

“My son. We need a new treatment plan. Everything I do he thinks is part of some horrible plot. I can't cover up a safety hazard without him thinking I'm hiding something. How am I hiding something terrible in an old mine? How is any of this logical to him?”

Killian could tell the poor man was still confused, but saw a smile bloom across his face all the same, before he responded, “He's got an amazing imagination.”

“Yes, that you let run rampant.”

“Well, I think it would be wrong to rip away the world he's constructed. I'd rather use it to try and get-”

Regina’s ire was ramping up by the minute, and she was apparently about to let the poor man have it as she cut him off. Regina raised her voice to talk over Dr. Hopper, “Sometimes I think you've forgotten. You work for me. You're an employee, and I can fire you. This is my town. You will lose your office, lose your house. I can cut you down to size until you're a tiny, shrunken little creature, and this,” Regina ripped Archie’s umbrella from his hand, and waved it in his face, almost hitting him with it, as she continued, “will be the only roof over your damn head.”

“What would you have me do?” Archie looked thoroughly defeated by this point, and if Killian wasn’t mistaken, the man was shaking, even if minutely.

Apparently smelling victory, Regina pasted on a simpering smile, as she viciously demanded, “You take that delusion out of my son's head, and you crush it.”

Killian’s outrage with Regina bubbled up to the surface, and it took every ounce of restraint in him not to storm over and confront her about the atrocious display he’d just witnessed. *This woman’s depravity seems to know no bounds if she is willing to subject Henry to this torment… the boy she claims to love. The audacity! The outrage! To tell Dr. Hopper to squash his belief, just because it threatens her standing with the boy, despite him being correct.* Depraved indifference was the only way he could think to describe her, and her behavior, but the heat of his wrath turned cold as he considered his own agenda. The exposure of the truth of the curse threatened him as well and the bile of his own hypocrisy churned in his gut. He really was no better than Regina.

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Killian’s nerves were more frayed than he could ever remember them being. Never in his whole, long life had he ever felt so divided within himself. Indentured service did not allow for one to be master over their own thoughts or decisions, you did as you were commanded, or you met the end of a lash. The Royal Navy had not been much different. Orders were given and swift obedience was expected, the only distinguishing factor separating the two circumstances was that Killian had chosen the Navy. He’d chosen piracy, too. A course set, to mete out justice for his brother on a corrupt king, that had kept his path clear, and that path remained clear as he sought vengeance for his love, his Milah.

His purposes had always been clear, the path set before him; servitude, service, justice, vengeance.
Circumstances and causes that had always made his decisions precise and his motives true, even if
they weren’t always honorable. Now, though… now he found himself at war between two purposes.

Self-preservation or selflessness. Part of a mission to break a curse, or part of the conspiracy to keep
it secret. Friend or foe? Valor or villain? Killian or Hook?

Or Dark One.

It wasn’t just his relationship with Henry or Emma that had Killian burdened about the truth of the
curse being revealed or broken. It was the fear of himself - his Dark One self. Would breaking the
curse return them all to the Enchanted Forest where magic remained? Would it bring magic to this
realm? For all the crocodile’s memories that had been supplied to him from his time with Emma,
these questions were still a mystery to Killian, and ones that caused him no end of concern. What
would breaking the curse mean in regards to the Darkness, and could he risk exposing those he cared
for to it? To him?

Guilt over keeping such a secret from Henry, mixed with his rage at Regina’s own insistence that the
lad be kept in the dark, and the hypocrisy of his own inaction had Killian in an even more foul mood
than usual the next day as he toiled on the deck of the Jolly Roger.

A mood that lifted only slightly as
he heard Henry calling out to him as he rushed up the gangplank and onto the deck; a beaming smile
and eager glint sparkling in his eyes.

“Watch your step, lad,” Killian warned as he gestured to the area Henry was about to tread upon.
“That board’s loose again. You’re liable to fall through.”

“I thought you were gonna fix that?” Henry pestered as he expertly maneuvered around the
treacherous board.

“I’ve been meaning to,” Killian grumbled. “Now, what’s got you all excited?”


Killian let out a long suffering sigh at the mention of Henry’s mission. Oh, how he longed for the
days prior to his awakening when the boy came and simply worked by his side on the ship, or
questioned him endlessly about sailing. When the only thing Killian had to hide was how much of a
scoundrel he was, or how he might skirt a few laws in order to make a quick profit, and not that he
was among one of the most notable of this realm’s literary villains, or knew the truth of a curse the
lad’s mother had cast in order to enact her vengeance upon an entire realm.

A simpler time.

“Henry,” Killian began as he made his way into his cabin behind the lad. “About Operation Cobra—”

“I know you're not convinced, but I know where I can get proof.” Henry dropped his backpack onto
Killian’s bunk and unzipped it, revealing a whole host of supplies.

“What is this?” Killian asked as he surveyed the pack’s contents. “A flashlight and candy bars?”
Sudden understanding dawned on him. “The mine. Henry, you can’t go down there.”

“Emma’s here and stuff’s happening. We have to take a look down there. For proof.”

“Henry. Stop.” Killian commanded, his worry that Henry was planning to do something reckless
made his words erratic as he rushed on. “There is no proof down there. Just stay here with me, lad.
We can work on the Jolly and worry about Operation Cobra later.”
“The Jolly?” Henry’s confused exclamation caused Killian’s heart to pound. Had he really been so careless?

“What?”

“You said the Jolly.”

“No I didn’t.”

Killian’s denial and best poker face were useless against the hope and elation of a boy with true belief in his heart. Henry would not be deterred, would not be distracted from the evidence Killian had just unwillingly handed to him. Panic continued to course through him, making his palms slick with dread and his breath tense in its shallow ebb and flow.

“Yes. You did,” Henry pressed, unmitigated joy vibrating through him as he bounded off the bunk to stand before the paralyzed pirate who was frantically trying to think of a way to wrestle back control of the conversation. “You remember, don’t you?”

“Henry, I—” Killian began, his attempt to gently give some sort of plausible explanation for his words interrupted as the persona he had been so desperately trying to hide rang out from the very person he had hoped would never know the truth.

“I knew it! You are Captain Hook! Why do you have two hands?”

“Henry enough!” Killian snapped, his panic applying a harsh tone to words his fear spoke in a final desperate attempt to hide the truth. “Look all of this is a delusion. Do you know what a delusion is?”

“I-I think so.”

“It's something that's not real and not healthy.”

Killian hated himself with every word he spoke. Each syllable like ash upon his tongue as his hypocrisy took over, declaring the very words he had silently seethed over at the thought of the Cricket doing the Queen’s bidding. A bidding he was now fulfilling, compelled by his own selfishness and desire to keep Henry from the truth. The truth of who he truly was - a villain.

“But you said—”

“Henry, this nonsense must end,” Killian demanded, his anger and hatred at himself spilling over as his temper flared at the whole bloody universe that was crashing down around him. “A curse, Captain Hook, The Saviour? Do you know what you sound like, Henry? Like a madman!”

The words hung in the air between them, and Killian immediately wished he could take them back. Wished he could go back to when Henry had first arrived, or maybe even back days before when he saw the suspicious glint first appear in Henry’s eyes. Wished he had made a different choice from the moment he’d first acquired his memories. Wished he’d just told Henry the truth.

“I thought you believed,” Henry said softly, tears pooling in his eyes before spilling over, down his cheeks, and tearing Killian’s heart with each streak. “In the curse. In me.” Anguish transformed into anger, and Killian flinched as Henry shouted his last words at him, “I thought you were my friend!”

Henry pushed past the pirate after grabbing his bag and rushed out the cabin door.

“Henry! Wait!” Killian called out after him, chasing him up onto the deck as he shouted, “Henry, I’m sorry! Come back, lad. You were ri—”
His confession was cut off as he fell hard upon the deck. *That damn board!* By the time Killian picked himself up Henry was long gone, a light drizzle falling over him as he sat simmering in his shame.

*Way to go, Hook,* he chastised. If ever there was a moment he deserved the address of his villainous moniker, surely this was it.

He’d wanted to protect Henry from his villainy, wanted to protect the relationship he had cultivated with the lad over the years. A relationship that Killian had come to cherish in his cursed state and treasured now that he was awake. Treasured it because Killian knew fate had afforded him a second chance; a second chance to care for a boy who simply needed something, *someone,* to anchor themselves to, in order to find hope.

He’d failed the first time, with Bae. A boy whose life had been shattered by darkness and deceit. Ripped asunder, in part, by Killian’s own hand when he had taken the boy’s mother from him, and could not be mended later when he’d chosen revenge over the effort to win back the boy’s trust when he’d learned the truth. A regret that had gnawed at Killian for centuries. He wasn’t going to do it again. He wasn’t going to abandon another boy to hopelessness because of his shortcomings, his lies, and his selfishness.

He wouldn’t do that to Henry.

Killian made his way to his cabin and opened the sea chest that sat atop his desk. The cool metal of his hook calmed the remaining vestiges of his anger and self contempt. Slipping it into his back pocket, Killian took one final breath of deep resolve before making his way off the ship in search of Henry…

And, perhaps, some measure of atonement that only the truth could provide.
“Oh, I am the worst person in the world,” Mary Margaret bemoaned over her after school cocoa.

“Really? In the whole world? I find that hard to believe.”

“If Katherine was horrible, it'd be easier, but she's so nice.”

Oh Mary Margaret. Hoping that it wasn’t the answer she was thinking of, Emma couldn’t help but ask, “And what exactly would be easier?”

“Nothing,” Mary Margaret replied quickly, probably too quickly to be honest.

“Nothing's a good idea. You're smart. You know not to get involved with a married guy. It's not worth the heartache. Trust me.” Hearing a knock at the door, Emma looked over her shoulder, wondering who could be calling. Since she was closer to the door, she looked back at Mary Margaret, and said, “I'll get it.”

Opening the door to a thoroughly flustered looking Killian Jones, he started talking before she could even greet him. “Swan, you haven’t seen Henry, by chance, have you?”

Concerned by the fact that Killian was asking her about Henry, with a slightly frantic look on his face. She felt compelled to ask, “No. Why?”

“We had a bit of a row, and I need to-” She could hear the raw emotion in his voice, but before she could analyze it further, his words were cut off by the sound of her phone ringing.

“Madam Mayor,” Emma clipped out in a curt tone.

“Is Henry with you?”

“No. Why?” Emma started to seriously worry now that she had been approached by an upset Killian confessing to having been in an argument with Henry, and Regina calling her, expecting him to be there.

“He didn’t show up for his appointment with Dr. Hopper, and I have no idea where he is. If you hear from him, call me.” Emma’s heart simultaneously plummeted to her feet and jumped into her
throat as Regina hung up.

Rounding on an anxious Killian, Emma tried to keep her panic at bay, and clipped out, almost accusingly, “Henry’s missing. What exactly did the two of you fight about?”

Killian shrank back at her accusation and she could see the weight of guilt settle over him as he tried to explain, “He wanted to go and explore the mines. He wanted to go find proof of the curse, and I… bloody hell!”

Their eyes locked, a look of understanding and trepidation passing between them, as they both declared, “He’s at the mines.” Without a second thought they both rushed out the door.

Arriving at the mines, Emma and Killian hopped out of her bug, calling out for Henry before the doors had shut behind them. Hearing no response, Emma tried to keep the panic at bay, attempting to take a leaf out of Mary Margaret’s book, she hoped they were wrong about their guess.

She called out across the expanse to where Killian was crouched down closer to the mine entrance, “I don't think he's here.”

As Killian stood back up, turning to look at her, he called back, “He’s here somewhere all right. Look.” In his hand she saw what looked like a candy wrapper.

Once she was close enough to see, she questioned, “A candy bar?”

“Aye. He had these with him.” The ground began to shake once again as the mine started to collapse beneath them, Killian called out again, “Henry!” Emma could hear the genuine concern for her son in his voice.

The ground shook more violently, as the mine caved further. Emma could see Killian trying to make his way into the mine, calling out Henry’s name in a frantic tone that matched her own. Relief swept through her as she finally heard Henry’s voice sound from just inside the mine. As she made her way down the embankment towards where Killian was making his way to Henry, she heard Killian trying to coax Henry from the danger.

“Henry, lad, it isn’t safe!”

“Killian! You're here to help me? You do remember!”

“No, Henry, listen. You’ve got to get out of there, okay?” Emma could tell Killian was trying to keep the frustration fueled by worry out his voice.

“So you're still against me.”

Emma’s ear perked up, now very curious about the fight they’d had, something she fully intended to ask about once they were all safe.

“Henry, there's no time for that.”

The shaking increased again, as she finally made it to the mine entrance with Killian. “Come on, Henry! Come on. We need to get you out of here, it isn’t safe,” Emma called out in a panic.

“You don't believe me about the curse, but you’ll see. You'll see, I'll find the proof.” Henry turned and ran further into the mine.

She and Killian tried to race after him, but after a few steps inside the roof began to collapse above
“Emma! Look out!” Killian cried as he pushed her back toward the entrance and out of harm’s way from the cascading rocks.

Over the cacophony overwhelming her senses, Emma heard Killian shout, a promise to find her boy and keep him safe for her. “Henry! Killian!” she yelled out, her panic full blown now. When she got no response back, she called for backup. She was gonna need it to get them out.

It took Killian several long moments of chasing after the lad before Henry finally stopped and took heed of Killian’s insistence that they find a way out of the mine. With the cavern continuing to collapse around them they managed to find shelter in an old elevator. Fortune seemed to be on their side, as the elevator began to ascend after several trial and error attempts to get it working. Suddenly the shaft around them shook violently as something that sounded like an explosion reverberated around them. Henry clung to Killian as the elevator plummeted several feet before the emergency brakes engaged, leaving them suspended halfway up the elevator shaft. The blast had rendered the elevator inoperable.

Killian ran a hand down his face, considering their options and praying to all the gods that Emma, and whatever rescue effort she had underway would reach them in time. He had little faith in the integrity of the elevator’s brakes, and couldn’t allow himself to linger over thoughts of what their failure would mean. He glanced down at Henry, who had finally extracted himself from Killian’s person, and could see the reality and seriousness of their situation finally settle over the boy. Henry carefully lowered himself to the floor of the elevator and dropped his head into his hands.

Knowing there was little Killian could do, other than hope and wait for their rescue, he settled himself next to Henry. Killian struggled to find the words that might offer the lad some bit of comfort, and was saved from having to do so by Henry’s soft apology.

“I’m so sorry.

“It’s alright,” Killian comforted as he wrapped an arm around Henry’s shoulder. “I’m sorry, too.”

“No, I’m really, really sorry,” Henry offered earnestly, turning slightly under the weight of Killian’s arm to better face him.

Eyes full of fear, guilt, and pleading, Killian knew what comfort he could provide Henry in that moment. Something that would distract the lad from the terror he was feeling. Something Killian knew he should have offered him long ago. The very thing that would have prevented their current predicament.

The truth.

“You’re also right, Henry.”

“About what?”

“The curse, lad. You’re right about the curse.” Killian pulled his hook from his back pocket, and turned it over in his hand before extending it to Henry.

Henry accepted it with wide eyes that snapped back and forth between Killian’s face and the metal appendage, the proof he’d sought. Removing his arm from around the lad’s shoulder Killian waited for the recoil. Waited for the inevitable shift from friendly regard and trust to wariness and
apprehension.

“Why didn’t you just tell me?” Henry questioned his puzzled look reflecting none of the trepidation Killian had expected.

“You’re the only person in this whole bloody town who isn’t afraid of me Henry, and I didn’t want that to change.”

“Why would the curse breaking, or you remembering who you are change that?”

“Because I’m a villain, Henry,” Killian asserted with a terse hint of self-loathing punctuating the designation. “A pirate, and a villain, and…” He stopped short of telling Henry that he was also The Dark One. He just couldn’t bring himself to say it.

“Oof.” Killian’s breath was momentarily knocked from him by the force of Henry launching himself into his arms for a reassuring hug.

“And my friend,” Henry affirmed quietly into Killian’s shoulder, causing the pirate to fight back the prickling sensation at the corner of his eyes.

The force of Henry’s action caused the brakes to slip slightly and the entire elevator shifted underneath them. Henry grasped tighter against Killian’s neck and confessed a muffled, “I’m scared, Killian.”

“Hey. It’s alright,” Killian tried to soothe. “Henry look at me.” Henry lifted his head to meet the pirate’s eyes and Killian fixed him with a sincere stare as he professed, “Your mother is coming for us, lad. You and me. We’re survivors. We just have to hold out until Emma gets here, yeah?”

Henry didn’t look terribly convinced at Killian’s declaration.

“Here,” Killian offered as he pulled a chain out from under his shirt and up over his head. “I want you to hold onto this for me.”

Killian took back his hook from the boy and placed the chain into Henry’s hand. He’d been so relieved to come across it in the pawn shop during one of his investigative trips. He’d been afraid that it may have been lost forever.

“What is it?” Henry questioned as he turned the ring that the chain held over in his hand. “I want you to hold onto this for me.”

“It’s the reason I’m still alive,” Killian began to explain, “or it could be. My brother Liam gave me this ring when I was scared we might perish in a storm. He said it always got him home safe.”

Though the fear remained behind his eyes, Henry offered him a grateful smile as he slipped the chain over his head, keeping the ring clasped in his palm as a tether. Killian turned his attention to the hook resting within his own hand and once again wished he knew what else to say that might assuage Henry of his worry.

“How did you get your hand back?” Henry blurted before a look of chagrin passed over his features. Tactful just like his mother... Perhaps I’m not the only one wishing to distract a friend?

“Regina believes it’s because of the curse. A way to disguise the truth by changing physical features that may cause one to question or remember their true selves.”

“My mom knows you’re awake?!!”
“Aye,” Killian winced. “I’m afraid she stumbled upon the truth before I had a chance to conceal it.”

“How long have you remembered? How did you remember?

Killian hesitated briefly. Henry knew that Emma was the Saviour. It probably wouldn’t come as any sort of surprise, but how would he explain the why of it without revealing the full truth. Being Captain Hook was one thing, being The Dark One… that wasn’t something Killian was ready to admit to yet.

“It was Emma,” he confessed. “Somehow her name had the power to wake me.

“I can’t wait to tell her you remember!” Henry said excitedly, and although Killian was relieved that the lad’s curiosity had not prompted him to further inquire about the power of Emma’s name waking him, he balked at the idea that they would share the truth with her at this stage.

“Henry, I don’t think we should tell Emma about me just yet,” Killian replied, Henry’s face fell at his words.

“Why not?”

“Her trust in me is hanging by a very thin rope after the Ashley debacle. I don’t think her learning that I believe myself to be Captain Hook will earn me any points in gaining her assurances back,” he explained.

“But you remember,” Henry argued, and then gestured to the hook still in his hand, “and we have proof.”

“My word and this hook are hardly proof, Henry. We need Emma to come to her own conclusions that the curse is real.”

“So, you’ll… you’ll help me?” Henry questioned. “With Operation Cobra? With breaking the curse?”

“Aye, Henry,” Killian affirmed with full sincerity and conviction. “I’ll help you and Emma find a way to break the curse.”

“And will you teach me to sword fight?” Henry added cheekily, a big grin covering his face.

Killian chuckled as he ruffled Henry’s hair. “We’ll see, lad. We’ll see.”

A blinding light descended upon them in that moment, turning their attentions upward.

“What’s that?” Henry asked.

“That, my boy, is a rescue,” Killian beamed as Emma came into view, suspended from rigging.

“Are you guys okay?” Emma called out.

“Bloody fantastic now that you’re here, love.”

Emma radioed for the team above to halt her descent as she landed on the top of the elevator. She pulled away the top hatch and Killian quickly lifted Henry up through the opening. As Emma secured Henry to her hip, Killian pulled himself onto the top of the elevator.

Emma signaled to those above, to start pulling her and Henry back to the surface, before she looked back at Killian. “Let me take Henry up and I’ll be back down for you. Just be patient.”
“Aye, love. I’ve all the time in the world.”

As the words left his mouth the elevator indicated otherwise as it began to shift and slip beneath his feet. Killian looked up into the wide, terror filled eyes of Henry and Emma and knew there wouldn’t be time to retrieve him before the elevator plummeted.

“It’s okay,” he whispered up to a teary eyed Emma, who saw the reality of his situation.

“I’m so sorry,” she answered back, choking back a sob.

Resigned as he was to the fall, centuries of survival instincts kicked in as he felt the elevator give way beneath his feet. On instinct he launched himself upward grasping for anything that might stay his fall only to latch onto the side of Emma’s harness with his left hand. With his hook still grasped in his right, he pulled it through one of the metal loops at its front and tried to keep hold even as his slick hands began to lose purchase.

He felt his weight being lifted as he registered Emma’s legs wrapping around him, bracing him under his arms with her thighs. He caught her gaze with a slightly stunned look and was further astonished to see the unfiltered expression of relief and joy on her face. Henry continued to beam a wide smile down at him as Emma’s expression shifted, having become aware of her moment of vulnerability. Killian affixed his most flirtatious and mischievous smirk to his lips, and attempted to distract her from her discomfort with outrageous innuendo.

“‘Bout bloody time.” Killian knew that Henry would think he meant the rescue, but Killian knew that Emma had caught his real meaning. Her eye roll was testimony enough that she’d seen the salacious glint that accompanied his smirk filled words, and she gave him an amused smile as they continued to be hoisted to the top of the shaft.

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After they made it up to the surface, Killian distanced himself from everyone else, still feeling a touch raw from his confession to Henry, and realizing that none but Henry probably even wanted him there. Though a small part of him hoped Emma wouldn’t be averse to his presence, after their moment in the elevator shaft.

He also wanted to give Emma time to be with her boy after the traumatizing experience, just as he was turning back to watch Emma and Henry from a secluded perch a little ways away, he was incensed by Regina’s treatment of Emma, all but pushing her away from Henry. In an effort to keep himself from making a scene by confronting Regina, Killian pulled out his flask, thankful that he’d been able to retrieve it from the pawn shop. Thankful, yes, but also disappointed in the fact that the enchantment that caused it to never run dry did not work in the land without magic, as he drained the last of the rum from it.

His curiosity was piqued as he noticed Regina and Dr. Hopper walking closer to his perch, unbeknownst to them, he decided once again to listen in for any potentially useful information.

“What is it, Dr. Hopper.” Regina questioned, her tone dripping condescension.

“I, uh, I have something to say. I’m gonna continue to treat Henry, and I’m gonna do it my own way.”

“Dr. Hopper. You will do as I say, or you-”

“Or what?” The Cricket’s firm tone caused Killian’s brows to shoot up. “You’ll ruin my life? You’ll do your worst? Because I will always do my best.”
“Don't test me,” Regina warned.

“Oh, I don't need to, because you're gonna leave me alone and let me do my work in peace.”

“Really?” Regina scoffed incredulously. “Why is that?”

“Because someday, Madam Mayor, you may find yourself in a custody battle, and do you know how the court determines who is a fit parent? They consult an expert, particularly one who has treated the child. So I suggest that you think about that and you allow me to do my work and let me look out for Henry’s best interest the way my conscience tells me to.”

Shocked as Killian was by the man’s sudden bravery, it was nothing compared to the shock at his next words.

“Because if a man like Killian Jones is willing to risk his life for Henry’s best interest, then so am I.”

Dr. Hopper walked away leaving a dumbstruck Regina, and Killian, in his wake. It took her only a moment to compose herself before she stomped away, leaving Killian to continue reeling from the Cricket’s words, and wondering, why is the bloody rum gone?

Killian had only just allowed the man’s words to sink in when he heard someone approaching. He turned to find himself face-to-face with a tentative looking Emma.

“Hey, about what happened back there—”

“No need to explain, love,” Killian interrupted, he knew her moment of vulnerability would be gnawing away at her. Knew she would be worried that it might mean a conversation she wasn’t prepared to have. A worry he didn’t want her to linger over, so he once again put on his dashing rapscallion persona and quipped, “Though, if you wanted to wrap your legs around me all you had to do was ask. No need to use a life and death situation as an excuse.”

“Why am I not surprised you’re making this about you?” she exasperated with an eyeroll.

“I’m not trying to make it about me, love,” he replied in a more sincere manner. “I’m trying not to think about what could have happened if you hadn’t shown up when you did. Thank you.”

“I should be the one thanking you,” she countered. “For going after Henry. For making sure he’d stay safe.”

“No need to thank me, love.”

He endured her watchful gaze as she assessed him. Eyes flickering back and forth between his as she tried to come to some sort of understanding.

“Why?” she asked.

“Why what?”

“Why risk your life when there was nothing in it for you?”

“Who says there was nothing in it for me?” he teased as he took a step further into her space. “I’d be more than happy to provide you with a list of ways you could thank me, love.” His innuendo earned him another eyeroll and he gave her a small chuckle and smile before turning serious once more. “Henry’s my friend. My only friend, actually,” he admitted uncomfortably. “A man like me doesn’t take that for granted. Besides,” he added with a renewed smirk, “I’m good at surviving.”
“I’m glad,” she replied, causing them both to grin shyly at one another.

“Emma,” Sheriff Humbert called out as he approached, causing Emma to take a step back from Killian. “Good work today. I can handle things from here. You should go home and get some rest.”

“Thanks,” Emma answered. “Henry’s about to leave with Regina, so I wouldn’t mind making it an early night.” Graham’s complete lack of acknowledgment had not escaped Killian’s attention, and he wondered how much of the sheriff’s offer had to do with his desire to get he and Emma away from one another.

“You ready, Jones?” Emma asked, reminding him that she was in fact his ride back into town.

Graham’s clenched jaw and tense response was all the answer Killian needed to his earlier musing. As they made their way back toward the crowd, Killian couldn’t help but hope that Emma’s returned use of Jones was only because of the sheriff’s presence. He still remembered her cry of his given name after the mine entrance had collapsed. He’d hoped it meant something. Meant that perhaps some of the walls she’d put up between them were starting to crumble, just as the mine had.

Still contemplating where things stood between he and Emma, he was caught off guard when she stopped and grasped his arm as they made their way over to her car. Following her gaze he watched as Regina tried to inconspicuously drop something down the elevator shaft before she looked around to make sure no one had seen.

“I’ll be damned,” Emma muttered in disbelief. “The kid was right. She is hiding something down there.”

“Looks like a job for Operation Cobra,” Killian quipped, earning him a side eye from Emma.

“Maybe,” she mused. “Curse or no curse, there is definitely something off about this town,” she declared as they climbed into the bug.

_You’ve no idea, love. You’ve no idea..._
Emma sat uncomfortably in the Nolan foyer feeling every bit as awkward as poor David had appeared when he’d come through the door. Fortunately she had Henry to keep her company, and she was glad to see him in such good spirits after the scare at the mine the day before. Surprised that Regina hadn’t locked him in the house after he’d run off in the first place, he and Emma tried to keep a low profile by the front door as they watched the party goers mingle. Emma also kept a firm watch on the front door.

It wasn’t that she was expecting Killian to show, or hoping for it either, but she couldn’t help the flutter of excitement that hovered in her chest as he sauntered into the Nolan home.

“Killian!” Henry exclaimed.

“Evening, Henry. Swan.”

A feeling of disappointment that Emma was unaccustomed to washed over her; he’d called her Swan. Her mind traitorously jumped into overdrive, he had finally called me Emma… I thought it meant something, that I meant something. This is SO not the time… She was pulled from her thoughts as she noticed both Henry and Killian were looking at her expectantly.

Unable to come up with a better response, Emma blurted out, “What the hell are you doing here?”

“I’m wondering that myself, love,” he confessed as he scratched behind his ear. “The fair Mrs. Nolan requested that I attend.”

“How is he, by the way?”

“Recovering,” Emma answered as she sat back down on the bench she and Henry had occupied, inviting him to do the same. Killian gave her a grateful smile and settled himself next to Henry, relaxing a bit now that he wouldn’t be forced to mingle, and Emma pressed on with her answer. “He
still doesn’t remember who he is, but Dr. Whale seems to thi-”

“You know why he doesn't remember?” Henry interjected in a whisper, well, as much of a whisper as an exuberant ten-year-old boy was capable of. “The curse isn't working on him yet.”

“Henry, David has amnesia,” Emma replied.

“Which is preventing the curse from replacing his Fairy Tale story with fake memories.”

“Right, because everyone here has fake stories that prevent them from remembering who they really are.” She looked over at Jones, hoping for some assistance before Henry’s imagination ran away with him again, but found that the leather clad man had gone stiff and tense once again.

“Right, and now is our chance to help him,” Henry responded enthusiastically. “We just have to get him to remember that he's-”

Emma cut Henry off, finishing his thought for him, “he's Prince Charming.”

“We just have to jog his memory by getting him and Ms. Blanchard together.”

“Didn't we just try that?”

“And it woke him up,” Henry practically sang with ten-year-old smugness.

“Hey,” a voice called out.

Speak of the devil... er, prince.

David approached them tentatively and asked, “You're the ones who saved me, right?”

“Oh. Yeah, I-I guess,” Emma stammered as the three of them stood to greet him.

“And, uh, you're also the only ones I know here,” he said in a lower tone, not wanting to be heard as a server approached with a tray.

“You can hide with us, mate,” Killian offered as he pulled a flask from his pocket and saluted the man before taking a long pull from it.

“Fantastic. Thank you,” David replied as he stabbed at a carrot from the proffered tray with a toothpick.

“So, you ever use a sword?” Henry asked, causing Killian to choke on his drink.

“I'm sorry?” David responded with an amused chuckle.

“Subtle, lad. Subtle,” Killian sputtered softly as he cleared his throat.

Emma offered David a soft, apologetic smile, hoping the man would excuse Henry’s strange question as simple childhood fantasy. Which he seemed to do given his change of topic.

“Emma, you live with Mary Margaret, right?” Emma nodded her response before he asked, “Do you know if she's coming tonight?”

“No, she couldn't make it.”

“Oh.” David’s disappointment was palpable, but they were all saved from responding further by an
overeager Dr. Whale who stole David away to go and introduce him to some more friends.

Moments later they were approached by Mrs. Nolan, inquiring as to whether or not they had seen where David had gone. After they’d explained that Dr. Whale had taken him into the living room, Katherine continued her search and Regina arrived.

“Henry, it’s time to go. Grab your coat.” Regina strided past their little gathering and waited expectantly by the door without so much as a glance or word for either Emma or Killian.

“Remember,” Henry whispered to them as he took his time getting his coat on, “We have to get David to remember who he truly is. Operation Cobra depends on Prince Charming and Snow White getting their happy ending.”

With that, he was out the door, leaving Emma and Killian on their own in a house full of people they neither knew, nor wished to mingle with. They shuffled awkwardly next to one another, casting furtive glances in each other’s direction as they assessed the party goers. Emma wondered if she should invite him to sit back down and talk, or ask if he wanted to leave.

Not that I want him to leave, or want him to think that I want to leave with him. Sure, I wouldn’t mind leaving with him, but what would we do? I mean, I know what I want to do, but that could get very complicated. Not the doing, but after. After the doing. We’d have to talk, and see each other around town, and he’s Henry’s best friend, and damn he smells good, and…

“Well, I should be getting back to the loft. I’ve got work in the morning,” Emma said as she made her way to the door, suddenly feeling overwhelmed by how hyper aware she was of the man she’d like nothing more than to leave with.

“Swan, wait,” Killian called out after her, catching her by the elbow before she made it to the door. “I noticed your charming yellow contraption isn’t parked out front. Might you allow me to walk you home?”

“Did you just disrespect my bug, Jones?” she accused, a smirk playing on her lips at the gesture he’d offered.

“Of course not, love. To do so would be bad form indeed. Just as allowing a woman to walk home alone at night would be.”

Why does he have to be so thoughtful?

“Did you forget I’m deputy? I carry a gun, Jones.”

“Noted. Perhaps you’d just like the company then?”

Emma considered him, and her racing pulse, for a brief moment before accepting, “Alright, Jones. Escort away.” Killian offered her his arm and she threaded hers through it with an eye roll as they made their way down the Nolan’s front steps and off towards Mary Margaret’s loft.

They approached the building and heard indistinct voices causing Emma to grip Killian’s arm in a silent entreaty to slow their pace. As they got closer to the courtyard they heard David talking to whom Killian could only assume was Mary Margaret. So this is where the prince disappeared to.

“Was it me?” he heard David question. “Because of what I told you, about how I felt, about you. Come on. Don’t tell me it’s one-sided.”

Emma pulled Killian into the alley next to the building, trying to avoid detection. Killian could see
the guilt on Emma’s face at the prospect of listening in on a clearly personal and private conversation. Emma pressed him further against the wall as they heard movement coming from the direction of the voices, clearly believing that being noticed and interrupting their moment would be worse than listening in. Killian was happy to go along with a bit of eavesdropping if it meant having Emma pressed into him as they hid.

“You're married. It should be no-sided.”

“What it should be doesn’t matter. Whoever married Katherine... it's not me. I didn't choose her. I'm choosing you. I know you feel it. I can tell.”

“I know you think that we have this connection, but maybe it's because I happened to be the person who saved your life? So why don't we leave it at that?”

Emma and Killian turned from the opening of the alley and pressed closer to one another in an attempt to disappear into the shadows as David made his way back towards his house. Their clandestine activities at an end, they had no reason to linger in the darkness of the alley, but Emma made no effort to move and Killian wasn’t about to let her go.

He could practically feel her thinking. Staring off at a fixed point on the wall next to him, she worried her lip as she contemplated whatever it was swirling around in that brilliant brain of hers. Killian didn’t think he had ever wanted to kiss her as much as he did in that moment. What he wouldn’t give to be the one biting on that lip just then, but it wasn’t the time. She clearly had something plaguing her, and it was enough of a burden that she wasn’t even aware of their continued close proximity.

“Swan?” he addressed softly, pulling her from that fixed point on the wall.

“Hmm?” she responded, lifting her eyes to his and causing his breath to hitch. She was absolutely stunning.

Her eyes widened as she realized she still had her hands pressed against his chest, their bodies practically flush with one another. She jumped back as if he’d burned her and he quickly tried to tamp down his disappointment over her response.

“S-sorry,” she stammered. “I just got… lost in thought.” She tucked her hands into her back pockets and looked anywhere but at him, a flush of red tinting her cheeks.

“It’s alright, love,” he soothed, and playfully added, “I’ve made many a lass’ head turn and lose all train of thought.” He gave her a raise of his brow and a wink for good measure to help lighten the tension between them.

“That’s not what I meant,” she replied, fixing him with a stern stare; one that didn’t bear the necessary weight to make him believe she was truly irritated with him. “I was thinking about David and Mary Margaret.”

Killian further quirked his brow at that statement. Was she starting to come around about the curse? Did she believe, as Henry did, that the prince and princess’ reunion was key to breaking the curse? It was their happy ending that Regina was fixated on ruining above all others. Perhaps getting the two back together was the key to breaking the curse.

“I can’t believe he would come here and pressure Mary Margaret like that.”

Okay… not exactly the response I was hoping for. “What do you mean?”
“He’s married!” she hissed. “You and I were both just at his welcome home party. A party held at his house. A house he shares with his wife. He has no business coming here and saying all that to Mary Margaret.”

“Perhaps. But it’s like he said, love, the man who chose Katherine is no longer here. Why shouldn’t he declare his feelings for Ms. Blanchard if it’s she he wants now?”

“Um… because that road is only going to lead to heartbreak?” It wasn’t really a question, more a statement that Emma vehemently believed as fact, if her expression was any indication. “We are talking about a marriage, Jones. David doesn’t remember who he is. Sure, maybe he wants Mary Margaret now, but what happens when he gets his memories back? Someone is going to end up getting hurt.”

“Why do you automatically assume it’ll be Mary Margaret? Perhaps his feelings for her are true, and he’d choose her even if his memories of Katherine did return. Just because he made a certain choice before doesn’t mean he can’t make a new one now.”

“And what? I’m suppose to let Mary Margaret’s feelings hang in the balance as we wait for that shoe to drop? I think I have a right to be concerned for my friend, Jones.”

“Of course you do. I’m just saying… a man can change, Swan,” he said earnestly. “He can make different choices for his life. Make new decisions about what he wants and who he wishes to be.”

Killian could feel her scrutiny wash over him. Eyes flickering between his own as she assessed the depth of his words and how much of them could be attributed to his own life. Feeling vulnerable at how much his words had exposed, Killian brought them back to the matter at hand.

“You’re right in wanting to protect your friend, Swan. Perhaps you should go in and see how Ms. Blanchard is fairing.”

“Yeah, okay,” she agreed as she turned to leave the alleyway, only to pause at its entrance and add, “it’s not that David doesn’t have a right to make new choices with his life, and I would like nothing more than for Mary Margaret to be that choice, but I just don’t see how, given the fact that David still doesn’t even know who he is, that this ends well for everyone. When the truth comes out, a lot of people will get hurt.” She took a deep breath, and bid, “Night, Jones,” before walking out of the alley towards the loft.

Killian remained in the dark alleyway for some time after Emma departed. Her final words now causing him to stare at a fixed point on the wall before him. ‘When the truth comes out, a lot of people will get hurt’. It was the first time he’d considered how the fall out of the curse breaking would impact others besides himself. Emma was right, people would be hurt once the realization of how they’d been forced to live the last twenty-eight years came to fullness. They were all making choices about their lives without complete knowledge of who they were.

True, Prince Charming and Snow White were meant to be together, but David Nolan and Mary Margaret Blanchard were living separate lives. Making choices as a married man and a single woman, respectively. What sort of impact would their cursed lives, their cursed decisions have on them once the curse breaks? The curse breaking would return their true memories, but it wouldn’t remove the cursed ones. They’d have to live with their choices.

And so would he.

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Killian’s thoughts over Emma’s words followed him into the next morning as he sat in Granny’s. He’d thought about her parents, and how they were going to cope with their actions. Everyone in town would have years of cursed choices to sort through, relationships to mend, and trust to earn back in the face of lives that had been filled with purposeful misery and bad choices. Regina would have much to atone for - not that she’d care to.

As he sipped his coffee at the far end of the counter, Killian began to overhear the beginnings of a conversation between the princess herself and none other than Dr. Whale. The man had a reputation of being quite the lothario around town, and Killian had a sudden urge to interrupt their conversation so as to get Emma’s mother away from the lecherous man.

“So I heard that you resigned from the hospital. I hope it wasn’t because of me,” Dr. Whale said.

“Why would it be because of you?” Mary Margaret questioned.

“Well, our date.” Killian’s ears perked at the mention of a social outing between the two. “I never called you after. Yeah, I know. I know. It’s not classy, and I’m sorry, but if you could find a way to get over it, you know where to find me.” He tipped his head in a gesture of farewell, as he said, “Have a good day.”

Killian took a page from Emma’s book and rolled his eyes. Dr. Whale had no idea how to go about courting a lady properly. He couldn’t see how he’d become such a ladies’ man with those horrible tactics. At least he wouldn’t have to worry about anything of an unsavory nature occurring between Emma’s mother and the good doctor.

“Ms. Blanchard, may I have a word?” Killian’s attentions were brought back into sharp focus as Regina now addressed the princess.

“Of course.”

“I wanted to talk to you about my friend Katherine, but more specifically, I wanted to talk to you about her husband David.” Killian stiffened and forced himself to remain seated at the counter. “You don’t belong together. He’s not yours. He’s taken. Find somebody else.”

“I haven’t done anything,” Mary Margaret protested.

“Really? So he just up and left his wife on a whim?”

Killian almost fell off his stool. He did what?

“Did what?”

“You don’t know?” Regina questioned. “Well, I suspect you soon will, so listen carefully, dear, because it’s in your best interest. Stay away. He’s in a fragile state. He doesn’t know who he is or what he’s doing, and you’re this close to wrecking multiple lives. So before you do something that can’t be undone, let him remember who he was.”

Killian remained at the counter as Regina, and then Mary Margaret made their way out of the diner. Trying to reconcile all the information and new perspectives he’d gained, Killian began to sort through the myriad of thoughts.

He was heartened to hear that the prince had made the choice to leave his fraudulent marriage, and felt sure that he would make his intentions to pursue Ms. Blanchard known soon enough. Henry would be ecstatic, and he hoped that Emma would be pleased as well. With the prince and princess’ reunion, it seemed they were one step closer to breaking the curse.
As delighted as he was over the prospect, Killian knew that it would take more to actually break the curse. For one, Emma had a role to play, and he knew not what that role was. It could still take some time before Operation Cobra would see success. Time that Killian had planned to use to gain Swan’s trust, friendship, and possibly… more. Something he hadn’t thought would ever be a part of his life again.

He wanted to woo the Lady Swan. Properly. But he was now starting to wonder if doing so while under the curse would actually be proper. ‘He doesn't know who he is or what he's doing.’ Killian remembered Regina’s words to Mary Margaret, and although he might know exactly who he was, Emma did not. Sure, he was awake and very much himself when he was with her, but he couldn’t fully share all of who he was, or who he had been, until she believed. She didn’t know who he truly was. What would her reaction be when the curse broke and she learned that he was really Captain Hook? A pirate and a villain. What would she say when she learned he was The Dark One?

If he allowed them to grow close to one another, to become more than friends, to become lovers, how would she feel when she learned that he’d been awake this whole time and had pursued her without her knowing the truth? Betrayed? Deceived? Taken advantage of?

He couldn’t do that.

He wanted Emma to be fully aware of what she was getting into with him. Wanted her fully cognizant of her choice. He wanted her to want him - the true him, and he was willing to wait for it. He’d pursue her trust and her friendship, but the rest? The rest would wait until after they broke the curse. He was a patient man. He could wait. After all, he was in this for the long haul.

~*~

Emma heard Graham coming down the hallway towards the bullpen, because of the distinctive squeak of his left shoe. Once she knew he was almost to her, she turned slightly in her chair to face him, as he extended a box, and said, “Sometimes the cliches are true.”

Immediately suspicious of why he was trying to bribe her, she asked, “Okay. What do you want?”

“Remember when I said no night shifts? I need you to work tonight. Just this once.”

She tried to not let her annoyance show as she continued to question Graham, “Why?”

“I volunteer at an animal shelter, and the supervisor is sick, and someone needs to feed the dogs.”

“You’re very lucky you brought a bear claw,” she snapped, looking in the box. She was still annoyed, but he was her boss, and so she would accept his olive branch. And it's just one night shift… Emma was brought from her thoughts at the sound of rushed footsteps coming towards them.

A slightly out of breath Mary Margaret panted out, “Emma, can I talk to you for a minute?”

Sensing the need for privacy, Graham lightheartedly quipped, “I'll just go patrol my office.”

“Thanks,” Emma called out over her shoulder, to Graham’s retreating form.

The moment the door was closed, giving them privacy, Mary Margaret rushed out, “He left his wife. David- he left her. He left Katherine.”

Having a bit of difficulty deciphering what it was her friend just blurted out, Emma said, “Okay. Slow down.”
“He- he did it for me. He wants me to be with him. He wants me to meet him tonight. I mean, I'm trying so hard to be strong, but he just keeps coming. I mean, how do I stop it? You know, how do I let him down? What would you do?”

“I'd go.”

“What?”

“Well, he left her. It's one thing to say that he wants you, but it's another to actually make a choice, and now he has. That's all you can ask for.”

An unexpected sense of longing, that she hoped hadn’t crept into her words, settled into Emma’s chest. She was happy for her friend, she was, but she also couldn’t help feeling just a tiny bit jealous at the woman’s happiness. David seemed like a good guy, and she hoped that things might work out for them. She realized, though, that his action had her hoping another certain gentleman would make a choice. A certain leather clad, innuendo ladened, good hearted, even if he tried to hide it man that she had found herself plastered to in a dark alleyway the night before. A choice that might take them from the flirty dance they were currently engaged in to something… more.

“Given her new friendship with Katherine, I don't think Regina would be happy.”

“All the more reason to do it.”

“Good lord. Is this really happening?”

“You tell me.”

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Killian recorded the latest box of inventory into his ledger before setting down his pen to pinch the bridge of his nose. Since discovering he was the rightful owner of the pawn shop, he’d been working to catalogue all the items within, for his own personal interests, and with the intention of opening its doors for business. Perhaps sooner than he had planned.

“Hello?” called a voice as the bell over the door sounded, prompting Killian to exit the back room only to find David Nolan standing in the showroom.

“We’re not quite open for business yet mate. Something I can help you with?” Killian greeted.

“Oh, hey there,” he responded amiably with a warm smile. “Actually, I’m looking for the toll bridge. The mayor said there was a fork in the road by this shop.”

Killian’s jaw clenched. What is that blasted woman up to now?

“It seems Ms. Mills has led you astray,” he stated, and then snarked. “You’d think the mayor would know her own town.”

“One would think,” David replied with a light chuckle.

“A little late to be out for a stroll,” Killian commented pointedly, brows raised with a note of inquiry.

“I’m actually meeting someone, and I’m already late.”

“Wouldn’t happen to be a certain school teacher that lives with the deputy would it?” He could see David blushing up to his hairline which was all the answer Killian needed.
“Ah! I see,” Killian crowed, shooting the prince a wide grin. “Well, we’ll get you there. Out the door, turn right. Two blocks, you’ll find the trail. Can’t miss it.”

“Thank you,” David said as he hastily turned to leave, only to stop in his tracks at the sight of something in the display window.

Noticing that David had stopped, Killian asked curiously, “See something you like?”

“Where did you get that?” David asked, pointing to a lawn ornament fashioned as an old windmill.

“Not sure, to be honest. I’m still sorting through the inventory.”

“I think this belonged to me.”

“Really?” Killian asked incredulously. How could he know that if he didn’t have his memories?

“Are you sure?”

A ripple of unease rolled through Killian as David reached out and spun the wooden sail. Something wasn’t right.

“Yes. I remember,” David said in an awed, hushed tone, before racing out the door.

Dread came over Killian as he tried to process what just happened. He remembered? Remember what exactly? Killian might have been inclined to hope that he remembered being Prince Charming, but given that it was Regina that had sent him down to the pawn shop in the first place, he found that highly unlikely.

Killian tried to tamp down the swirling uncertainties plaguing his gut as he locked up the pawn shop and headed to Granny’s. He’d stopped going to the Rabbit Hole some time ago, favoring Granny’s as it seemed Emma frequented the diner more than the bar, and because Granny knew how to put him in his place, she didn’t allow him to drink himself into oblivion. Tonight, however, she must have sensed that he required a bit more than his normal amount of libations, if the third tumbler of rum sat down before him was any indication.

Swirling the amber liquid, and hoping against hope that whatever Regina’s scheme had been might have failed, he caught a glimpse of Mary Margaret making her way into the diner as his glass tipped against his lips. Her dejected manner and despondent expression was all the answer he needed.

Damn you, Regina!

One step forward and three steps back. That’s how it had always been with her. He should have known better. Should have known when she’d confronted Mary Margaret that morning that she had some plan up her sleeve.

Killian knocked back the remaining rum and slammed his glass down on the table. Tossing a few bills to cover his tab onto the table, he donned his jacket and headed out of Granny’s. So enraged by the Evil Queen, he did not notice Dr. Whale sidling up to the bar next to a bereaved Mary Margaret.

Emma patrolled the Mayor’s neighborhood, really wishing the night was over already, so she could crawl into her comfy bed. She saw movement out of the corner of her eye, someone coming out of one of the windows of Regina’s house, so she quickly stopped the cruiser, and put it in park. Making sure to be as quiet as possible as she got out, she approached Regina’s tall hedges. She caught the intruder off guard, hitting them in the stomach with her nightstick. As the person groaned on the
ground he rolled over, and Emma saw that it was Graham.

“This is volunteering?” Her bewilderment at this situation just continued to grow.

“Plans changed. Regina needed me to-”

“Sleep with her?” Emma felt betrayed that he’d lied to her, and disgusted at the situation she had just stumbled upon.

“No.” Her boss looked panicked because she had called him out on his lies.

“Then why were you sneaking out the window?”

“Oh, because she didn't want Henry to know.”

Emma knew that her voice had taken on a new pitch as she nearly screeched, “You did this with Henry in the house?”

“You can finish my shift.” Emma threw the keys to the cruiser at Graham’s feet, and called out as she stormed away, “I’m done working nights, and I’m not working tomorrow.”

Emma was seething as she stormed across town to get her bug. In all actuality she would have made it home sooner walking, but she needed the extra time to try and burn off some of her anger, so as not to wake Mary Margaret. Having made it back to the loft, she tried to be as quiet as possible due to the late hour, and the fact that all of the lights were off.

Emma was just snuggling down in her bed under the comforter when she heard the front door burst open, and Mary Margaret giggling. Once the giggling subsided she heard a very audible, “SHHHH! We have to be quiet. We don’t want to wake Emma.” Oh hell! This night just has to get worse doesn’t it? Can I not just go to sleep and forget today even happened? Maybe she and David will actually be quiet, and I can get to sleep.
Chapter Eleven

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out!

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

Emma wasn’t sure there was enough coffee in town to help her cope with the awkward mess the morning had served up. A mess in the form of Dr. Whale sitting at the kitchen table in nothing more than Mary Margaret’s bathrobe and an expression of stunned surprise on his face that she could only imagine matched her own. Surprised that it was Whale her roommate had brought home and not David, and stunned that she would just leave with him still in the loft. After the awkward conversation and subsequent actions of actually getting Whale out the door, Emma had decided to walk off some her aggravation rather than drive her bug to Granny’s for coffee.

As she made her way toward Main Street, Emma continued to fume over the fact that Mary Margaret had just left Whale there for her to deal with. Irritation at the fact that she’d brought him home at all flared, though she realized that she hadn’t been terribly upset over the matter when she’d thought it was David she’d brought back.

What had happened with David? How had things gone from, ‘He wants me to be with him. He wants me to meet him tonight’ to knockin’ boots with the town lech? As frustrated as she was with Mary Margaret over her morning’s unexpected and unwelcome surprise, Emma was also worried. She knew something like this was bound to happen. She’d let herself get swept up in her roommate’s ever present hope, and actually allowed herself to believe that maybe happy endings really did happen.

All the concern in the world couldn’t stop another surge of frustration at her roommate to course through her. Emma knew it wasn’t Mary Margaret’s fault, but her unfailing optimism that only served to dish out false hope was yet another strike in her growing column of how to piss off your roommate.

Coffee. Emma needed coffee. Coffee, and maybe to take a page out of Mary Margaret’s new book. Maybe she’d just find someone to bring back to the loft for her own night of debauchery. Someone she could leave for Mary Margaret to deal with the next morning. Someone like…

“Oof!” Thoroughly engrossed in her thoughts, Emma didn’t notice the man she’d just collided with until she found herself practically splayed across his firm chest and held tight in his strong arms.
“Morning, love,” Killian greeted jovially. Humor danced behind his eyes and twitched at his lips over her flustered state. He cocked his head to one side as he assessed her and said, “You seem vexed.”

“Yeah, well,” she began to reply as she extricated herself from his hold. “It’s bad enough when you have to kick your own one night stand out the next morning, it’s ten times worse when you have to do it for your roommate.”

Killian’s eyes went wide as he took in the implication of her words. Emma saw a flash of concern behind his eyes before he concealed it with a smirk and a teasing lilt as he replied, “Your roommate who could also possibly be your mother?”


“Well, you know, Swan,” Killian said as he took a step towards her, encroaching on her personal space in a not completely unwelcome way. “That vacant property I mentioned before is still available.”

“I’m not working as your human lie detector, Jones,” she asserted as she crossed her arms over her chest. “I already have a job. Remember?”

“Aye, love,” he acknowledged as his eyes flicked down to the glint of metal at her hip. “You’re so fetching with your deputy badge, how could I forget. But I wasn’t suggesting that we revisit my original proposal. The place is yours for a fair rent, no strings,” he replied, his flirty tone shifting to one of sincerity as he made the offer.

“So, now you’re gonna be a gentleman?” she questioned. A hint of teasing laced her own words now as she considered his proposal.

“I’m always a gentleman,” he whispered as he leaned in and gave a wink, his rakish smirk affixed to his lips once more.

“Really?” she asked with a hint of challenge as she moved closer, invading his space for once.

“Aye. Really.”

“Even before the supposed curse?” she quipped cheekily.

Killian reached up to scratch behind his ear, a tell of his that Emma found extremely endearing.

“I’m not sure everyone would have termed me as such.”

Emma’s brows shot up. “So you know who Henry thinks you really are?”

“Aye.”

“Well?” she prompted. “So, who are you then?”

“Killian Jones,” he said with a bow, as if formally introducing himself for the first time. Then he straightened and added, “Though, Henry’s taken to calling me by my more colorful moniker… Hook.” Killian gestured upward, and for the first time since her run in with him, Emma noticed the new sign being hung over the long abandoned pawn shop that now seemed to be open for business. A sign that read, Captain Hook’s Treasure Chest.
“As in Captain Hook?” Emma groaned. *A buffoonish, cartoon pirate? Seriously?*

“Minus the perm and waxed mustache,” he professed, as if he could read her thoughts.

“And the actual hook,” she noted as she nodded toward his hand.

“The one benefit of the curse, love,” he replied as he flexed his left hand, almost subconsciously.

Well, *he certainly fit the part of a roguish pirate*, and if memory served, Emma could remember the description of the literary Captain Hook being somewhat different than the Disney portrayal. She could see how Henry would want to attribute a persona of someone brave, cunning, and charismatic to his friend, and given the fact that the man had his own ship and an air of scoundrel about him, she couldn’t blame Henry for the connection. But Henry was a kid, with an overactive imagination, and Killian was a grown man who should know better than to feed into the curse nonsense.

“Killian, you can’t be serious? I know Archie said we should indulge him, but this seems a bit overboard,” she declared, pointing at the sign.

Killian quirked his lips, obviously attempting to suppress a smile. “Hmm. Considering I’ve also rechristened my vessel the *Jolly Roger* that’s an interesting choice of words, Swan.”

“I’m serious!” she hissed, her anger sparking at his flippant attitude. “Do you think this is a joke? That Henry’s belief is something to be mocked?”

“Oh of course not!” he answered offendedly. The hurt that she would accuse him of such a thing was openly displayed on his face and deep within his eyes. “You know how much I care for your boy, Swan. This is my way of letting him know I believe in him, that I’m in his corner.” He ran his hand through his hair and then down over his face, calming himself before he huffed in amusement and caught her eye with his mischievous gaze. “Besides. Imagine how badly this will piss off Regina when she sees it.” His brows twitched as he pulled his lower lip between his teeth.

Despite her agitation, Emma couldn’t help the smile that slipped across her lips as she rolled her eyes at him. He had a good point. The sign would give Henry a boost, and maybe knowing that someone believed in him would keep him from any more hare-brained schemes to find proof. Plus, it would annoy Regina - *always a bonus*. Still, Emma couldn’t completely shake her irritation over the entire morning, and was relieved that she’d told Graham she wasn’t working that day. She needed time to process everything that had occurred since last night… and then suppress it.

“I need coffee,” she declared as way of ending their conversation, but couldn’t help offering him a small smile to let him know she wasn’t really mad at him as she said, “See ya around, Jones.”

“What about the house?” he called out as she headed up Main Street.

“I’ll think about it,” she shot over her shoulder without looking back at him, which made her miss the wide grin plastered on his face.

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It had been a completely friendly offer. Friends offer their friends places to stay, right? Mary Margaret had offered Swan a place to stay, and they were just friends. In fact, she’d asked Emma to come and live with her. He didn’t ask her to come live with him, even though he had plenty of room. He’d offered her a house. For a fair rent. As a friend.

*You’ve got it bad, mate.*
Killian locked up the pawn shop after what had been a fairly successful first day. Admittedly, most people had visited out of sheer curiosity, but there had been some that actually made purchases. With each transaction he’d wondered if the items were finding their way back to their rightful owners. If somehow, despite the curse, his patrons could sense a connection with the items the Dark One and the curse had stripped from them.

He continued to ponder that thought (it was less fraught with temptation than those of Emma Swan), as he made his way towards Granny’s. He was pulled from his musings by the sound of Swan herself. A rather irritable Swan. He knew that tone well...

“I wanna talk to you.”

Killian recognized the Sheriff’s voice moments before the two of them came into view. The man’s earnest and desperate expression caused Killian to hang back and slip into the alleyway next to him so he could observe their exchange unnoticed.

“Your bad judgment is your problem, not mine,” Emma dismissed as she continued to walk away from her boss.

“You don't know what it's like with her,” Graham exclaimed as he chased after her. “I don't feel anything. Can you understand that?”

“A bad relationship? Yeah. I understand a bad relationship. I just don't wanna talk about yours,” she sassed as she kept her pace.

“Look, I know you and Regina have your own issues, and I should've told you about us before you took the job,” Graham said, finally getting Emma to stop.

“Yeah, why the secrecy? We're all adults. You can do whatever you want.”

“Cause I-I didn't want you to look at me the way you are now,” Graham stammered uncomfortably.

“Why do you care how I look at you?”

“Because.”

“What?” Killian heard Emma ask, just before Graham stepped in, cupped her face in his hands, and kissed her.

A raging jealousy flared from deep within Killian, and his subconscious snarled, Mine! at the sight of another man’s hands and lips on his Swan. He braced himself against the brick wall of the alleyway, willing himself to remain where he was. The overwhelming urge to sink his hook into the man’s chest nearly overtook his sound judgment, he didn’t even have it with him, which was probably a good thing. Besides, Emma could take care of herself, and she wouldn’t thank him for interfering, especially after she learned he’d been spying on them. Plus, if he were being completely honest, Killian wondered if the sheriff’s advances wouldn’t actually be welcomed by her. A thought that shot a piercing ache through his chest just as he heard Emma cry out.

“What the hell was that?”

“Did you see that?” the sheriff questioned shakily.

See what?

“How much have you been drinking?” Emma accused. “That was way over the line.”
Killian could still feel the muscle ticking in his jaw as he tried to maintain his control, even as relief swept through him that Emma did not appear to welcome Graham’s advances.

“I'm sorry. I just-”

“What?” Emma demanded, standing her ground as Graham drew closer once again. “You what?”

“I need to feel something,” Graham pleaded.

“Listen to me, Graham,” Emma commanded. “You are drunk and full of regret. I get it. But whatever it is you are looking to feel, I can tell you one thing. You're not getting it with me.”

Killian watched as Emma stalked away leaving a despondent Graham in her wake. For several long moments he warred with himself. He’d like nothing more than to follow Graham, but knew he’d end up doing something that would require Emma to arrest him if he went after the sheriff. Not that he’d mind having Swan cuff him, but he’d prefer it under different circumstances. Killian thought it best to go after Emma to make sure she was okay. He may have resolved to wait in his more romantic pursuits until after the curse was broken, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t offer an ear or shoulder to lean on.

As a friend, of course.

Finding her at the docks, Killian could see a slight shiver course through her from the brisk night air coming off the sea. Even with only the small amount of moonlight, he could see the flush at her cheeks. Whether it was from the cold, her own agitations, or something else, he couldn’t say. He approached her cautiously but with determined enough steps that his presence wouldn’t come as a surprise.

“Emma?” he called out when he was still a few feet away. “What are you doing out here at this time of night? Is everything alright?”

“No offense, Jones, but I really don’t want to talk with anyone right now.”

“Alright,” he replied, but made no move to leave. “I’ll just stand here silently, then.”

He’d hoped a bit of levity might open her up to him. Unfortunately it seemed to have the opposite effect.

“Or you could just go away,” she snapped, squeezing her eyes closed and pursing her lips together as if she might regret her curt tone. “Just… would you mind just letting me be. I need to be alone right now.”

Killian sighed deeply. He knew Swan well enough to know there’d be no getting over that wall of hers tonight.

“As you wish,” he offered before he turned and headed off to leave her with her thoughts.

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Emma came down the stairs almost ready to start the day, after a cup of coffee or two, and heard Mary Margaret call out a greeting, “Oh! Hey.”

She was sidetracked from responding when she spotted a pretty flower arrangement sitting on the bar, and felt her annoyance and frustration boil over.
“Wait. What are you doing?” Mary Margaret exclaimed as she watched Emma stomp over, snatch the flowers and violently chuck them in the trash.

Deed done, Emma turned to face her roommate, and replied, “If Graham thinks flowers will work on me-”

“No, those were mine.”

Chagrined, Emma sheepishly asked, “Oh. From David?”

“No. Uh, Dr. Whale.”

Emma was surprised by that answer to say the least. “Dr. Whale… are you serious? What happened with David? I thought you said he left Katherine to be with you.”

“Well, that was before he got his memories back and decided that staying with his wife was the right thing to do.” Though she valiantly tried to keep the hurt and humiliation out of her tone, there was no disguising the heartbreak Emma knew her friend was feeling.

“I’m so sorry, Mary Margaret.”

“Oh, no, it’s fine,” Mary Margaret insisted. “I’m over it.”

Emma didn’t need her super power to detect that whopper, but let it go for now. If her friend needed some time with her denial, who was Emma to deny her that.

“Apparently,” Emma replied, turning her attention back to the binned flowers. “I can’t believe Whale sent you flowers after I all but tossed his ass out yesterday morning?”

“You what?” Mary Margaret sounded horrified and scandalized.

“Hey. You left him here for me to handle, so I handled him. Next time maybe take care of the morning after stuff yourself.”

“I’m so sorry. I know. I’m a disaster.”

Hating the uncertainty in her friend’s voice, Emma reassured, “No, you’re not. You're getting over David. Just give it some time before you jump into anything with Whale.”

“Mm, first of all, there's nothing to get over, and second of all, it was just a one-night stand.”

Disbelief colored Emma’s voice as she stated, “Not according to those flowers.”

“Yeah, maybe I shouldn't have called him.”

“Oh, my God. You called him? That is definitely not a one-night stand.”

“Well, okay, I'm still learning. I've never had one before. I felt guilty,” Mary Margaret shot back, sounding a touch defensive over Emma’s comments.

Baffled by her friends admission of guilt Emma asked, “Why? There's nothing wrong with what you did. Trust me. One-nighters are as far as I ever go.”

“Yeah, but that's because you're...” Apparently reconsidering her words Mary Margaret trailed off, looking anywhere but at her.
Feeling a bit defensive herself now, Emma’s ever present frustration rose to the surface again, as she inquired, “Because I’m what?”

“Never mind.”

“No, tell me. What am I?”

“You’re just protecting yourself with that wall you put up.” Mary Margaret seemed genuine in her explanation.

“Just because I don’t get emotional over men?”

“You don’t get emotional over men?” Mary Margaret gave her a disbelieving look as she continued, “Uh, the floral abuse tells a different story.”

“What story is that?”

“Well, one of two stories, actually. Either, you have feelings for Graham and you’re trying to suppress them, or you’re angry because those flowers weren’t from another accented man in town.” Emma rolled her eyes at her friend’s astute observation, while trying to keep her traitorous mind from wandering to that certain accented gentleman.

“Come on,” Emma deflected, but Mary Margaret totally had her number.

“There's that wall.”

“That's not a wall,” Emma argued. It was totally a wall.

“Really?”

“There's nothing wrong with being cautious.”

“Oh, true. True. But Emma,” Mary Margaret’s tone shifted and Emma was thrown by her earnest and sincere care, “that wall of yours. It may keep out pain, but it also may keep out love.”

Maybe Mary Margaret had a point. Emma had always lived by the philosophy of look out for yourself and you’ll never get hurt, but now she actually had people willing to look out for her. Henry, Mary Margaret, Granny, and… others.

Emma couldn’t help but think back to the night before when Killian had approached her at the dock. She’d ended up there after the Graham debacle, hoping to clear her head. Seeing that she was obviously upset about something, Killian had approached her with concern and care, calling her Emma again. The gesture had sent a flurry of butterflies through her chest and stomach, only to be followed by a spike of nerves at her reaction.

She’d taken her anger and anxiety out on him, had kept him at arm’s length because she was too freaked out to admit that she liked the way he whispered her name. She wouldn’t admit to herself that she wished it had been him that had kissed her and not Graham. She tried to deny the truth, that if she brought him back to the loft it would be for more than just a one night stand. She’d put up a wall between them, and she wasn’t sure if or how she would be able to take it down.

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Killian kept himself busy with matters at the pawn shop all morning, grateful that he had a new employee to train. Smee… er, William, rather, had come in the day before asking about the help
It had been a comfort seeing his old first mate, even if the man didn’t remember him as Captain. Killian had been avoiding those among his old crew ever since he’d woken from the curse, and given his reputation in town, they’d always given him a wide berth anyway. When Smee, William, had walked through the pawn shop door, however, Killian couldn’t bring himself to send him away. He needed assistance at the shop for when he couldn’t physically be there, and it was nice to have familiar company. Even if that familiarity was a bit skewed by the curse’s effects.

Acquainting William with the shop and all the ins and outs of his responsibilities had taken Killian’s mind off the events of the previous evening. Witnessing the sheriff kiss Emma, and then being rebuffed by Swan when he’d found her at the docks. She hadn’t seemed to welcome the man’s advances, but after she’d sent him away with such a cold dismissal, Killian had begun to wonder. Perhaps Graham’s advances weren’t entirely unwelcome. Perhaps Swan had simply been in too much of a shocked and angered state about his relationship with Regina. Killian’s relationship with the sheriff might be a bit contentious, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t admit the draw someone like Emma might have towards the sheriff. He was a good man, well respected around town, and, if Ruby was to be believed, rather easy on the eyes. Killian liked to think of himself as rather dashing as well, but he was also a scoundrel, and didn’t carry much favor with Storybrooke’s citizenry.

But Killian and Emma had a connection. He recognized something of himself in her and he was sure she did as well. There was something that had sparked between them from the moment they’d met in The Rabbit Hole that fateful night. Something that made him wish he’d met her before the curse, before he’d gotten his revenge. Something that made him want to be a better man. Perhaps he could still have that chance. He’d just have to fight for it.

And get her to believe in the curse.

And then find a way to break it.

Until then he’d stay on course. Help Henry with Operation Cobra, try to build a foundation of trust and friendship with Emma, and operate his new endeavor with the pawn shop. So far William had taken to trade just as he had to sailing, and Killian was pleased with the thought that he’d be able to get away that afternoon to meet Henry on the Jolly.

The sound of the bell above the door pulled Killian from his musings; looking up to greet his newest patron, his face fell to something akin to annoyance. Oh lovely, Her Majesty has decided to grace me with her opinion, can this day get any better?

“What the hell is this?!” Regina demanded as she stormed to the counter, pounding her hands upon its surface.

“What, this is a place of business, love. My place of business. So unless you’re here to buy, I suggest you take your leave.” Killian dismissed as he nodded to a skittish Smee to take his leave to the back room.

“What business?”

“Aye, Mine, he emphasized as he made his way around the counter. “According to the deed I discovered in my home, this derelict building and all the possessions therein belong to me. Killian Jones. Not you, Madame Mayor. Not the city. Not Rumplestiltskin. Not any longer.”

“What about the sign out front?” she hissed. “Captain Hook’s Treasure Chest? I’m surprised you
didn’t have it commissioned in neon if you were just going to announce to the entire town who you really are.”

“I haven’t announced anything, Regina.” Killian settled his stance before her with his hand on his belt as he continued on with an air of mocked camaraderie. “Henry believes me to be Captain Hook, so I thought I’d embrace it. Give the lad a boost. You do want Henry to be happy, don’t you?”

“You leave Henry out of this, Hook. What are you really up to?” she questioned accusingly, narrowing her gaze in an attempt to suss out his motives. “Are you hoping that your little sign will have some sort of effect on my curse?” she belittled as her expression and tone hardened. “Because it’s going to take a lot more than that to undo what I’ve done.”

“I don’t need to do anything, Regina,” Killian taunted as he rocked back onto his heels. “Your curse is already weakening.” Regina scoffed, but Killian could see the doubt behind her eyes. The curse was weakening, and she knew it. “I’m awake. The cricket finally grew a backbone. Cinderella already got her happy ending. Prince Charming is out of his coma, and though you may have bought yourself some time with that windmill stunt, you and I both know he and his princess won’t be able to stay apart forever.” Killian probably should have left it there, but he couldn’t help adding just a dash more salt to the wound. “And to top it all off, your control over your little boy toy seems to be slipping.”

“What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about Graham,” he stated, bitterness lacing his words. “You should keep the good sheriff on a leash, maybe then he wouldn’t end up kissing his deputy in the middle of Main Street.” Killian flexed his left hand, which he’d had clenched at his side without realizing.

Regina’s eyes flicked down to the movement and a sneer replaced the thin set of indignation at her lips. She raised her perfectly sculpted brow as she met his gaze once more, and Killian couldn’t help the involuntary swallow of discomfort he felt, knowing he’d said too much.

“Well. Perhaps you’re right, Captain,” she quipped in an overly civil and patronizing tone. “Perhaps I should concern myself less with your affairs, and see to my own. I believe a stop at the Sheriff’s Station may be in order. I’ll leave you to your… business. Have a nice day, Mr. Jones.”

Regina sauntered out the door with an air of victory causing Killian to let out a long suffering sigh as he ran his hand over his face. Why could he never seem to hold his tongue? Why did he allow her to goad him so? There was nothing he could do now, the damage had been done. He only hoped that her ire would be more focused on Graham, rather than Emma. Not bloody likely. Now, more than ever, he needed to get Smee up to speed so he could try to smooth things over with Swan.

As Killian entered the back room his spirits couldn’t help but be lifted by the sight before him. His new assistant standing before a mirror admiring his reflection that now boasted a newly found accessory. A red knit cap.
Emma was relieved when she made it to the sheriff’s station for her shift and Graham was nowhere in sight. She still wasn’t sure how to handle having to let her boss down again and making sure that her words actually stuck this time. Hopefully they could get past this kiss nonsense and go back to working the way things had been. She wasn’t interested in Graham regardless of how much he seemed interested in her, despite his relationship with Regina.

She filled the hours with paperwork that had been piling up. Having collected a fresh stack to complete before she filed them away in their appropriate drawer, she made her way back to her desk and spotted one of Graham’s darts lying discarded on the floor. She decided to give it a shot, to see if she could hit the target. Unsurprisingly, it bounced off the board and careened towards the floor.

As she bent over to pick it up again, Emma heard Regina’s snarky quip, “Our tax dollars hard at work, I see.”

Trying not to roll her eyes at the mayor’s pretentious demeanor, Emma replied, “Graham isn't here. I assumed he'd taken a sick day with you.” The look on Regina’s face, screamed surprise, for a split second, before she put her mask back in place.

“Oh, so you're aware of us. Good. That's why I'm here.” Pausing in typical Regina dramatic fashion, she moved closer to where Emma stood, her sneer firmly in place as she continued, “Because I’m also aware of your relationship with him.”

“I don't have a relationship with him,” Emma countered.

“Oh? So nothing's ever happened between the two of you? You forget, Ms. Swan. I have eyes everywhere.”

“Nothing that meant anything,” she responded truthfully.

“Well, of course not, because you're incapable of feeling anything for anyone. There's a reason you're alone, isn't there?”
Instead of acting on her baser instincts, Emma decided to reply instead, in the hope that this conversation would be over soon. “All due respect, the way I live my life is my business.”

“It is until it infringes on my life. Stay away from Graham. You may think you're doing nothing, but you're putting thoughts in his head. Thoughts that are not in his best interests. You are leading him on a path to self-destruction. Stay away.”

After Her Majesty decided to leave her be, Emma resolved to take out her anger, annoyance, and frustrations out on the remaining piles of paperwork, finally getting all of it completed and filed. Sliding the filing cabinet drawer shut after putting away the last of the files, Emma looked up at the clock on the wall, and realized she had worked through lunch.

Deciding to call it a day, Emma pulled her phone from her pocket to text Graham. She’d let him know the paperwork was done, and that she was leaving. He may not be respectful enough to let her know he wasn’t going to bother coming in today, but she was going to keep him apprised professionally, because he was still her boss after all.

Unlocking her phone, Emma noticed two missed messages from Killian. She remembered hearing her phone go off when Regina was here, warning her. Since she was leaving for the day anyway, Emma decided to go down to the docks to talk to Killian. She needed to apologize for being so short with him the night before. Maybe she’d see if he and Henry would join her for some food at Granny’s, too.

Killian gathered supplies from inside one of the dock warehouses that he and Henry would need for their project on the Jolly that afternoon. The task was providing less distraction than his earlier ones back at the pawn shop, and Killian was having a difficult time shaking off his agitated melancholy. Agitation over the continuous loop replaying in his mind of Emma and Graham from the night before, and his most recent encounter with Regina where he was yet again unable to keep himself from providing her ammunition in her ongoing war with Swan. Melancholy over Emma’s dismissal on this very dock when he’d gone after her, and the unanswered text messages he’d sent her earlier in the day.

After the mine incident, Emma had provided Killian with her cell number, claiming it was so she could keep tabs on Henry since he spent so much time with Killian. He’d yet to use it in the days since, not having any reason that pertained to Henry to justify the contact, but he’d given in to the compulsion to reach out after Regina had left the shop. The first had been to remind her that Henry would be assisting with the Jolly that afternoon, the second had been a bit more bold, inquiring as to how she was faring and letting her know that he was there if she needed to talk.

She hadn’t responded to either.

Perhaps Henry would be able to provide some insight on Emma’s state of mind. He didn’t wish to put the lad in an uncomfortable position, but a friendly inquiry as to whether or not he’d seen his mother that day, and how she was doing surely wouldn’t be seen as too intrusive. Right?

Have I really relegated myself to relying on the assistance of a ten-year-old boy in order to navigate the unchartered waters of a lady’s affections?

Killian collected the rest of his supplies and headed back toward the door, before he could reach the exit he heard frantic footfalls along the dock followed by the questioning voice of the lad himself.
“Hey, sheriff. What are you doing here?” Killian paused at the news that the sheriff had come to the docks. *What the bloody hell does he want?*

“Actually. Uh, I came here to find you, Henry. I was hoping you could help me.”

*Apparently I’m not the only one desperate enough seek out the counsel of ten-year-old,* Killian mused derisively. *Although, to be fair, Henry isn’t just any ten-year-old.*

“Help you with what?”

“It’s about your book,” the sheriff said hesitantly, his next words grabbed Killian’s attention with acute interest. “Am I in it?”

“Why? Do you remember something?” Henry whispered excitedly.

“I’m not sure. I’ve been getting these… flashes?”

“When did your flashes begin?”

“Right after I kissed Emma.” Killian clenched his fists at the memory, but willed himself to remain composed.

“You kissed my mom?” Henry asked, a tone of repulsion lacing his words before he continued in his inquiry. “What did you see?”

Killian listened patiently as Graham recounted visions of a wolf, Mary Margaret, and a knife within his hand. Through Henry’s astute questioning, the lad determined that Graham must be the Huntsman from Snow White’s story.

“So you really think that I could be another person?” Graham questioned incredulously.

“Makes total sense,” Henry replied with certainty. “You were raised by wolves. That's why you keep seeing one. It's your friend, your guide. It's trying to help you.”

“I'm remembering this because I kissed your mother? How is that possible?”

“Well, you two do have a special connection.” Killian’s heart dropped. Henry had never mentioned any such connection between his mother and anyone other than her parents. What did this connection mean? “She owes you her life.”

“Why?”

“Snow White's her mother, and you spared her,” Henry explained. “If you hadn't, my mom wouldn't have been born.”

“What happened after I spared Snow White?”

“The Queen took your heart. She ripped it out. It's kinda her thing. She never wanted you to be able to feel again.”

Killian winced. He knew first hand the pain and anguish such an act inflicted, and was all too familiar with the consequences that could come from having another literally hold one’s heart in their hand.

“Let me see that book,” Graham insisted, and Killian heard the rustle of pages being turned. “What's that? I saw that, too,” he asked. “The wolf was howling at it.”
“That’s her vault,” Henry answered sorrowfully. “That’s where she put your heart.”

“The wolf wants me to find it,” Graham declared resolutely. “Thank you, Henry.”

Heavy footsteps raced back down the dock toward the parking lot, while softer ones headed toward the slips. Killian remained inside the warehouse for several more moments, adding these recent revelations to his long list of considerations.

Graham was the Huntsman, he’d saved Snow White from Regina’s vengeful wrath, and had lost his heart as a result. Both Snow and Emma owed him their lives, and Emma’s kiss had awakened his memories. The thought that had been plaguing the far reaches of his subconscious since Graham had admitted to receiving these flashes after his kiss with Emma would be ignored no longer. *Had it been True Love’s Kiss?*

Henry himself admitted that the two had a special connection. Was that it? Had the fates ordained a True Love for Emma even before her birth? Had they protected the man from the vestiges of time, staying the aging process, and even death, so that they might find one another regardless of the distances such a love may have had to span?

Killian petulantly cursed the gods for their inequity. He had loved and lost. Lived for centuries in pursuit of revenge, only to gain it at the cusp of a curse. A curse that would bring him to the only woman who had ever made him believe he could find love again. A woman that seemed to be destined for another. Destined for a man she owed her very existence to, a man who had sacrificed his heart so that she might have a future. Certainly he was more worthy of the Saviour than a dirty pirate. More worthy than the Dark One.

Killian’s rage spiked. How long would the universe go on punishing him? *It’s not the universe, mate,* he told himself. *You did this to yourself.* True, but he was trying to be better. Henry and Emma had made him want to be better, but what was the point if he was only going to lose them in the end. Was there really any amount of redemption he could seek that would make the Dark One worthy of their love? And even if they could find it in their hearts to accept him, would it even matter if destiny had already arranged for another to receive the truest of their love?

Killian knew that Graham could no more control the fates than he could, but it didn’t keep him from channeling his ire and anguish against him. He made his way back towards the *Jolly* with churlish steps and took his time sorting through the supplies above deck before joining Henry below. The last thing he wanted to do was take his temper out on Henry or mar their time together in any way, but the more he tried to maintain a grip on his control, the more it seemed to slip away from him.

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Emma pulled up at the docks, hoping to seek out Killian, to try and make amends for her boorish behavior the night before. As she made her way towards the slips, Graham all but ran her over. Emma pulled back from Graham, to maintain a more appropriate distance, before she stated, “Mary Margaret was right, you look like you’re having a rough day.”

He looked a little bewildered as he asked, “You talked to Mary Margaret?”

“Yeah, she called me during the drive over here. I think you need to go home and get some rest.” Even as she spoke, Graham started shaking his head.

“I’m fine.” Graham was trying to exude an air of competence, but she wasn’t fooled by his words.

“No, Graham, you’re not fine, Mary Margaret said you were headed here to talk to Henry. You just
went to a ten-year-old for help.” She tried not to let her apprehension show in her voice.

“Well. He's the only one making any sense,” he stated, as if his reasoning should be painfully obvious, while looking at her as though she had just sprouted a unicorn horn.

“What's going on? What's really going on?”

“It's my heart, Emma. I need to find it.”

Believing that he was making reference to whatever it was he hoped would happen between them, Emma knew it was time to nip it in the bud. “Graham, we need to talk about this, this is getting a little out of hand—”

“I just need to follow the wolf,” Graham cut her off.

“What?” Emma asked, flabbergasted by those unexpected words.

I have so lost track of the metaphor... “What wolf?”

“From my dreams. He's gonna help me find my heart.”

Still confused, and having gotten no clarity from Graham’s answer, Emma decided to get straight to the point, “I'm sorry. I thought we were talking in metaphors here. You really think you don't have a heart?”

“It's the only thing that makes any sense. It's the only thing that explains why I don't feel anything.”

“Listen to me, Graham. You have a heart. I can prove it.” Emma grabbed his hand and placed it over his heart, so he could feel the rhythmic thumps, giving him a moment before she continued, “See? It's beating. It's real. Feel that? That is your heart.”

Graham pulled his hand away dislodging her own, as he shook his head and backed away a step before crying out, “No! It's the curse.”

The longer their conversation continued, the more frustrated and concerned Emma became for her boss. She again tried to make him see reason, “You can't really believe that's true.”

“What? Why not?” His tone affirmed his belief that Henry’s curse was actually real, but before she could retort and try to convince him further, Emma noticed something startling. An actual wolf. As it slowly approached them, teeth bared, and a growl in its throat, Emma pulled Graham towards her and away from the animal.

“Graham! Graham, be careful.” Concern laced her voice as she called out while he struggled free of her grasp making strides towards the wolf.

“He's my friend. He won't hurt us.” As soon as the words were past his lips, the wolf took off at a trot towards the woods with Graham hot on its heels.

Emma couldn’t in her right mind justify letting a clearly ill man pursue a wild animal by himself, to possibly get hurt. With a frustrated growl on her lips Emma took off after Graham. Unfortunately making sure her boss didn’t get eaten by a wolf took precedence over setting her relationship right with Killian; making amends would have to wait.

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“Hook!” Henry called out excitedly as he made his way above deck.
Killian knew that the lad only meant to use the name in jest, but in that moment it only served as another reminder of Killian’s shortcomings and unworthiness, further darkening his already foul mood.

“You’ll never guess what’s happened,” Henry continued gleefully, seemingly unaware of his friend’s sour disposition. “Sheriff Graham remembers who he is! Well, I mean. He’s starting to. He’s been having flashes of his life as the Huntsman, and…”

Henry continued to prattle on, retelling the entire exchange between himself and the Sheriff. With each jubilant tone, every ecstatic word, and overly animated gesture of excitement, Killian withdrew further into those dark recesses of his character, the demons of his villainy welcoming him back as an old friend as they rallied around his rancor.

“But my mom still has his heart in her vault, so I was thinking you could go there and get it back for him,” Henry concluded, a wide grin splashed across his face.

“No,” Killian answered hollowly as he continued to work about the deck, avoiding Henry’s confused expression.

“What do you mean, no?” Henry questioned as he followed Killian across the deck with urgent appeal. “You have to help Graham.”

“Really?” Killian turned and braced himself before the boy, his stance every bit the fearsome pirate captain Henry refused to see him as, but the lad’s denial didn’t change the truth. Killian was a selfish pirate and it was high time Henry came to understand just who it was he was dealing with. “And how would saving Graham benefit me?”

“Heroes don’t help people for their own benefit, they help people because it’s the right thing to do,” Henry protested earnestly.

“In case it has escaped your notice, Henry, I’m no hero,” Killian retorted with embittered flare. “I’m a pirate, always have been, always will be. A pirate’s life is forever. Whatever mess the good sheriff has found himself in with the Evil Queen is his mess to resolve.”

“But… Operation Cobra. If we can free Graham from my mom’s control he can help us get Emma to believe in the curse, too,” Henry urged cautiously, perhaps finally sensing that he was no longer dealing with the man he called friend, but his villainous alter ego.

“I agreed to help you with getting Emma to believe,” Killian replied through gritted teeth, his surfacing rage caused Henry to take a step back. “There was no mention of involving others, mate.”

Henry’s eyes had gone wide, and Killian could see the shimmer of tears pooling at the corners. His chin quivered with unchecked emotion as he pressed, “You’re really not going to help Graham?”

Killian could feel the muscle ticking in his jaw, he could no longer look the lad in the eye. Could no longer bear to see the hurt and disappointment reflected there.

“You really are a selfish pirate,” Henry accused sadly, his voice tight with emotion. “And here I thought you’d gone and changed… Hook.”

Henry’s words cut Killian deeper than any injury he’d ever received at the point of the sword, or end of a lash, and shame washed over him as he watched the boy make his way off the ship.

Fuck!
You've gone and done it again, you right arse, Killian chastised himself. *Think of what you’re doing to Henry, what you will subject the poor lad to, especially if Regina does something rash. Again.*

Realizing that Henry would suffer from his selfish inaction, and knowing how truly abhorrent it would be to not be in possession of your own heart, Killian had to admit that though he may not care for the Huntsman, he wouldn’t wish the fate he knew awaited him on anyone. Regardless of what the fates may have in store for them all, Killian had made a promise to Henry. A promise to help get Emma to believe so they could break the curse. If Graham had a role to play in their endeavors, then who was he to stand in the way?

With fresh resolve Killian grabbed his helmet and made his way towards his bike. Henry had said Graham’s heart resided in the Evil Queen’s vault. Killian suspected that he might know just where she had hidden it, so he sped off towards Storybrooke Cemetery.

As he approached the Mills Mausoleum on foot, having left his motorcycle off to the side of the road, Killian heard raised voices. When the vault came into view, he saw Graham, Emma, and Regina engaged in a confrontation. Not wishing to involve himself with Swan present, Killian concealed himself within the shadows of the tree line as he watched their altercation play out.

“You don't look well, dear,” Regina stated to Graham in concern as she took his hand and commanded, “Let's take you home.”

“No, I-I don't want to go home.” He wrenched his hand from her grasp before pointedly adding, “Not with you.”

“Oh? But you'll go with her?”

“Hey, this is between you two,” Emma deflected. “Leave me out of it.”

“She's right,” Graham said. “It's between us, and things have to change.”

Killian listened as the man insisted that his change of heart had nothing to do with Emma. Heard him tell Regina that he was leaving for his own happiness, and not because of anything happening between he and Swan. Killian looked on as Graham leveled Regina with the harsh truth that he’d rather have nothing than settle for less. Settle for what he had with her.

Killian could hear the sincerity in the man’s voice, knew he spoke the truth, and could almost commend him for his honesty and bravery. *Almost.* Because Killian could also see the reaction that display of honesty and bravery was having on Emma, her look of pride for the man radiating from her softened features and twisting within Killian’s gut.

“I don't know what I ever did to you, Ms. Swan, to deserve this. To have you keep coming after everything I hold dear,” Regina martyred.

“I told you, it's not her,” Graham countered.

“None of this happened until she got here.”

“I'm sorry, but have you ever stopped to think that maybe the problem isn't with me, but with you?” Emma accused, stepping forward to face Regina for herself.

“Excuse me?”

“Henry came and found me,” Emma needled. “Graham kissed me. Both were miserable. Maybe, Madame Mayor, you need to take a good, hard look in the mirror and ask yourself why that is. Why
is everyone running away from you?"

Killian began to move from the cover of the shadows as he saw Regina strike Emma, but halted when he saw Emma strike back, and force Regina against the stone wall of the mausoleum. Graham came forward to pull Emma from Regina and Killian flushed with rage once more at seeing the man’s arms around his Swan.

Emma extricated herself from Graham’s hold and took a moment to calm herself before muttering, “You’re not worth it,” as she stalked past Regina, with Graham following after her.

Regina watched them depart, and Killian could read each emotion as it rolled off her; humiliation, rejection, contempt, and, finally… murderous rage. She turned and made her way into her vault with purposeful steps, and Killian knew exactly what she was about to do. Graham’s life hung in the balance. It was now or never, but Killian was having a difficult time convincing his body to move.

After the fight in the cemetery with Regina, Graham had insisted on accompanying Emma back to the Sheriff’s Station to look at the damage Regina had inflicted. He had apologized a number of times since they’d gotten back, and as he organized the things needed to tend to her cut, he apologized again.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know what came over me, you must think I’ve lost my mind.”

“It’s okay. You were tired, and feverish, and heartbroken.”

“I don’t know why I let myself get caught up with her.” His voice dripped with genuine confusion and remorse.

“Because it was easy and safe. Not feeling anything is an attractive option when what you feel sucks.” Emma hissed as Graham applied the disinfectant to the cut above her eye. “Felt that,” she muttered.

“All better?”

“Yeah.” She smiled at Graham, grateful for his help, but started to panic a bit when he leaned in, looking like he might kiss her, again.

Emma released a sigh of relief at the small kiss-it-and-make-it-better press of his lips against her bandaged cut before she saw his face change to a pensive expression.

“What?” Emma asked, confused by the abrupt change in his demeanor. “Graham? You okay?”

“I remember.” His response came out more as a breathy exhale than actual words, but she was able to hear it well enough.

“Graham?"

“I remember.”

“You remember what?”

“Everything. I remember everything. I- I have to go. You’re acting sheriff till I get back.”

“Graham? Graham wait!” The shrill ring of the phones kept Emma from going after him as he ran off into the night like a bat out of hell.
Chapter Thirteen

Killian made his way down the stone steps inside Regina’s mausoleum that led to the vault below. The musty, earthen air permeated his senses, sticking in his throat causing it to dry out. Stifling the urge to clear it, and risk drawing the Queen’s attention, Killian watched as she drew a box from a collection amassed in the wall of an alcove. Opening the box revealed the glowing heart of the Huntsman. Killian took a deep breath of resolve and stepped out from the shadows just as she grasped the enchanted organ.

“I wouldn’t do that, love.”

Regina’s head snapped toward him, eyes wide with indignation as she spat, “Get. Out. This doesn’t concern you.”

“Afraid it does,” he sighed as he sauntered toward her. “See, I made a vow. A vow to the lad. He asked for my help in retrieving that heart, and I mean to see it through.”

“Henry?” Her voice shook slightly as she realized the implication of his words. “Henry knows that I…”

“Indeed he does,” Killian replied. “He knows the truth. About us both. And he’s tasked me with a mission of saving our good sheriff from your clutches, so I’ll be returning that to its rightful owner.” He opened his hand toward her expectantly, but Regina hesitated. “Don’t make me have to say please,” he taunted menacingly, forcing her to hand Graham’s heart to him.

“Extraordinary isn’t it?” he mused, more taunts dancing at the end of his tongue. “All these hearts. All this power and control, hell, even a curse to do your bidding, and it still isn’t enough. It’s all slipping away, Your Majesty. Tonight’s altercation is proof enough, even if you choose to ignore the signs around you. Your reign is coming to an end, and when it does… you’re going to lose everything.”

“And what about you, Hook? You can play hero all you want, but you and I both know the kind of man you truly are… what you are,” Regina sneered.

“Aye. We do,” he acknowledged with a feigned air of apathy. “But unlike you, Regina, I can admit my villainy. My quest for vengeance cost me everything. That’s how I know you’ll lose in the end.
“Just like I did. But worse.”

“Worse? What could possibly be worse than being the Dark One?”

“Resigning yourself to it,” he answered, and in that moment Killian knew that not all hope for him was lost. He could still fight. Fight the darkness. Fight his own villainy. Fight for Henry and Emma, fight for himself. *A man unwilling to fight for what he wants, deserves what he gets.* “My name might be scrawled across that dagger, but that doesn’t mean I have to give into its darkness. I’ve already endured several lifetimes living up to a persona of darkness and villainy afforded to me by a piece of hardware. I won’t do it again.”

“You really think you can change that easily?”

“I never said it would be easy,” he countered. “I’m sure it wasn’t easy for Graham to decide a different path with a dark and sinister hold on his heart, but he did it.”

“Sure. Because of her,” Regina groused indignantly, and continued to mutter her displeasure as though he weren’t there, “I still don’t understand what’s so special about that woman.”

“Don’t you?” Killian smirked smugly with a lifted brow.

“What?” Regina demanded, her attention once again on him. “What do you know?”

“I know a great many things, dearie,” Killian taunted, but then cringed at the crocodile’s vernacular. Killian could see speculation beginning to swirl behind Regina’s eyes as she considered that Emma might be more than a mere nuisance to her otherwise perfectly planned and structured existence.

“She’s important, isn’t she?” It was more a statement of fact than a question.

“Important? Well, I suppose in as much as she gave birth to Henry, aye, she’s important,” Killian deflected.

“That’s not what I mean, and you know it.”

“Are you asking why everything seems to be crumbling now that Emma Swan is in town?” Killian asked rhetorically. “Well, to answer that Regina, you may want to take Swan’s answer into consideration. Maybe it isn’t her. Maybe it’s you,” he suggested, attempting to redirect Regina’s thoughts, lest she figure out the significance Emma held in breaking the curse.

“No,” Regina rebutted. “It’s her. It has to be. None of this started until she came to town.”

“Really?” Killian shot back. “So, Henry didn’t already suspect you were the Evil Queen who cursed us all? Come now, Your Majesty. You know none of this is Emma’s fault. Just pure coincidence.”

Killian used every bit of bluster and pirate deception he possessed to sell the idea that Swan was of no greater consequence than Henry’s birth mother, but he was fairly certain that Regina wasn’t buying any of it. She’d begun pulling at the thread of possibility that there was more to Emma than met the eye, and no amount of misdirection would deter her until she’d unraveled it.

“No. I don’t believe in coincidence,” Regina continued on, following her speculations as though they were weaving themselves within the walls of her vaults. “Pretend all you like Captain, but there is something about Ms. Swan, and I will get to the bottom of it. I’ve lost all I’m going to lose to that woman.”
“Including the Huntsman’s heart. Which I ought to be returning,” Killian needled. He took the opportunity to excuse himself before he said anything more that could aid Regina in putting the pieces together about Emma. “Pleasure as always, Your Majesty.”

“Do you really think she’s going to choose you over him, Captain?” Regina inquired after him as his boot hit the first step that led out of her crypt. “Give Graham his heart back and it will only intensify the feelings he has. Are you really willing to risk Ms. Swan preferring his attentions over yours?”

“Swan must have hit you harder than I thought, Regina,” Killian scoffed. He kept his expression neutral, despite how much the Queen’s comments flustered him. “Who Swan chooses to give her attentions to is her affair. I came here on Henry’s behest. Perhaps you should concern yourself with his attentions from now on. It’s going to be rather difficult to pretend this is all a figment of his imagination now… Your Majesty.”

Taking a moment to revel in the reaction his parting blow had achieved, Killian offered Regina one last pointed look before turning once again to make his way up the stone steps. The Huntsman’s heart weighed heavily in his hand, the pulsating glow and flutter of life sending an unnerving current up his arm. The man’s life literally rested within the palm of his hand. So fragile, so vulnerable, and yet so intoxicating in its offer of power. The power of control, over life and death, all resting within that organ and with the one in possession of it.

Killian would be lying if he said that kind of power wasn’t tempting. The power to end the man’s pursuit of the woman Killian desired, whether by crushing his heart into dust, or merely keeping it to maintain control over him. Tempting, yes, but Killian knew first hand what is was to be in the control of others, to be powerless and at another’s mercy. Enslaved.

He didn’t want that kind of power. Not now. Not ever.

Even if it meant giving the man back that which could ultimately rob Killian of his chance with Emma, Killian would not be that man. Regina had said they both knew what kind of man Hook was, and she was right. Hook was a scoundrel, a pirate, a villain, but Killian Jones had been something else once. Something he desperately wanted to be again.

A man of honor.

Renewed in his purpose, Killian stowed Graham’s heart safely within the zippered pocket of his jacket and set off towards town. It was time to reunite the Huntsman with his heart.

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Killian pulled his bike to a stop in front of the Sheriff’s Station. He wanted to give the heart back quickly, so he could be done with the man. He strolled into the bullpen to the sound of a phone being slammed into its cradle, and a very frustrated growl from a rather irate sounding Swan.

“Everything alright there, Swan? You seem vexed.” Killian questioned as he looked about for the sheriff.

“What? Oh, um.” She was clearly frazzled, hair pulled back haphazardly, and a small bandage over her eye. She was frantically pulling her jacket on as she searched for her keys and badge. “I’m sorry, Jones. Now isn’t a good time.”

Killian tried to swallow down his disappointment at her dismissal. The second he’d received from her in twenty-four hours time. He wasn’t sure how things between them had become so strained, and
he had no clue as to how to fix it.

“Right. Of course,” he replied. “I was just looking for Humbert.”

“Well, good luck,” Emma snapped, her irritation grabbing Killian’s attention. “Graham ran off, and I have to go break up a bar fight.” Finding her badge under a stack of paperwork, she clipped it to her belt and turned to face him, a softness he wasn’t expecting, given her tone and manner, set within her eyes. “Look,” she continued, “we need to talk, but I’m afraid it’s gonna have to wait.”

“I find any time a woman says that I’m rarely in for a pleasant conversation,” Killian teased in an attempt to alleviate some of her tension. He was rewarded with a slight half smile, still radiant when coming from Emma Swan. “Where did the good sheriff run off to?”

“Hell if I know,” she answered as she made her way to the door. “He was helping me get cleaned up from an… altercation, started prattling on about remembering something after he kissed me, named me as acting sheriff and split.”

Killian clenched and unclenched his fists at the news that Graham had again kissed his Swan again. He attempted to tamp down the gnawingly possessive instincts he knew he had no right to feel. Before Emma exited she turned back to address him one final time.

“Hey, I’m sorry about last night, and that I can’t stay and talk right now. I promise we’ll talk soon, I just…” she trailed off, her features had again softened as she apologized, but then turned hard once more as she added, “If you find Graham, will you please tell him to call me and explain what the hell is going on with him?”

“Aye, Swan. I’ll tell him.”

“Thanks, Killian,” she replied as she headed out into the night, leaving more than just promises of reconciliation in her wake.

*Graham said he remembered. Remembered what, exactly?* Killian mused, although he had a pretty good idea. *Time to go find out.*

It didn’t take Killian long to track Humbert down. The sheriff rented a cabin in the woods, a cabin that belonged to Killian, courtesy of the curse. He approached the cabin cautiously, unsure as to what state he might find the Huntsman in, and how much the man, who already fostered a severe disliking for him, would be privy to in regards to Killian’s true identity.

It took several moments after Killian knocked on the cabin door before it swung open. Shock and apprehension were apparent on Graham’s face as he regarded Killian, though he quickly schooled his expression to the standard cool yet slightly hostile demeanor usually reserved for him.

“What can I do for you Mr. Jones? I’m certain I’m not behind on my rent.”

“Afraid I’m not here about your rent, mate,” Killian replied as he pushed past an incredulous Graham and welcomed himself into the man’s domain. “I’m here on a more personal piece of business.”

“You and I have no personal business, mate,” Graham clipped.

“You’re right,” Killian acquiesced. “This business is more between you and Henry, but seeing as how the lad asked me to intervene on your behalf, you’ll have to endure my involvement… Huntsman.”
Graham’s eyes widened and the color drained from his face as he began to stammer, “How? Did Henry… I don’t know what you m-”

“I know you’re awake,” Killian responded, affirming that they both knew the curse to be real, and that he too was no longer under its effects. “I believe this belongs to you.”

Killian removed the heart from his jacket and Graham seemed to pale even more as he stiffened in panic.

“What? You have it? How did you get it from Regina?”

“Doesn’t matter mate, all that matters is I did.”

Graham visibly swallowed, clenching his fists as he asked, “What do you want?”

Killian cocked his head to one side, casting a confused look towards the Huntsman, prompting the man to clarify, “We both know you didn’t come here to just hand that over. So what’s your price… Hook?”

“Ah, so you’ve heard of me,” Killian replied, a false grin at his lips as he tucked his thumb into his belt and rocked back onto his heels, displaying his pirate swagger even as he bristled at the contempt the Huntsman continued to throw his way.

“Yes. I’ve heard of you,” Graham sneered. “I heard about how you killed Cora. That you even murdered your own fath-“ Graham clasped a hand over his chest as he doubled over in response to the added pressure Killian applied to his heart.

“Then you know not to cross me,” Killian replied darkly, letting up on his grip and allowing Graham to take in a breath.

“Are you going to kill me now?” Graham accused.

“I have no such intentions, mate. Just a warning… stay away from Emma.”

“What?!”

“Emma,” Killian repeated, his possessive pirate nature flaring once more in the face of the man who had taken liberties he’d had men lashed for, or worse, in the past. “It’s bad form to trifle with that which does not belong to you.”

“She’s a grown woman,” Graham countered, “and she doesn’t belong to you either. In fact, she’s too good for you… pirate.”

“On that score we agree,” Killian replied. “She deserves to know the full truth about us before getting caught up in matters of the heart.” Both men cast a glance at the still fluttering and luminous organ within Killian’s palm, the irony not lost on either of them. “All I’m saying is,” Killian continued, “it isn’t fair to Emma to expect her love and affection when she doesn’t even know who you really are.”

“Is that what you’re worried about?” Graham questioned, assessing Killian with a new look; one he’d never seen the sheriff apply to him. “You don’t have to worry about that. Emma is not the one I plan on giving that to.” Graham nodded towards his heart, and an understanding passed between the two men as Killian handed it over to him.

“Without magic, I’m afraid there isn’t a way to actually return it to you properly,” Killian explained.
“Though having it in your possession, under your control, will afford you the same benefit as if it were residing within your chest. Keep it somewhere safe.”

“I will,” Graham responded. “And... um... thank you.”

“Oh, I didn’t do it for you, mate.”


Something prickled along Killian’s skin at the Huntsman’s words; a compulsion to strike those words into a deal that would later serve some dark or selfish purpose, a favor to extract at some future date. Currency of the controlling and manipulative specters that, though currently dormant within him, occasionally stirred and rippled through Killian’s consciousness, urging him to entrap desperate and unwitting souls into bargains that would ultimately be their downfall.

Burying the sensation, Killian firmly stated, “No. You don’t,” before taking his leave. A snarling disappointment that was not his own welled up within his chest as he made his way out into the night.

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Killian set out the next afternoon in search of Henry. It wasn’t lost on him that he’d needed to make amends with the lad more times over the past fortnight than in the several years they’d kept company under the curse. Probably wouldn’t be the last time either, given Killian’s tendencies to fall back into old, dark habits. Habits, he hoped, would diminish over time as a more honorable man emerged. Well, as long as the Land Without Magic kept the Dark Ones at bay.

Killian could see Henry’s despondency as he approached the wooden castle on the beach, the boy’s sanctuary, and a blade of guilt twisted in his gut. How many times would he call upon this boy to forgive him? At what point would Henry’s accepting nature run out when it came to offering mercy to the infamous Captain Hook? Would today be that day?

Elbows on his knees, head in his hands, Henry didn’t even look up as Killian sat down beside him. Fiddling with his rings for a few moments, he wracked his brain for the proper opening. Something that might alleviate the tension, and open the lad up to him. With a heavy sigh, Killian decided to simply share the news of Graham’s heart and leave the lad to his thoughts.

“I retrieved the sheriff’s heart from Regina,” he began softly. “Delivered it back into his hands last night.” He paused to gauge the lad’s reaction, then tried again as Henry remained quiet. “Apparently he ran out of the Sheriff Station after kissing your mother again, leaving her as acting Sheriff. He’s fully awake now.” Henry still had not moved or shown any response to Killian’s statements, his chest tightened with grief. So this is it, then. “For what it’s worth, Henry,” he continued forlornly. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be,” Henry murmured into his hands. “You did the right thing in the end. That’s what matters.”

Taken aback by Henry’s words, Killian assessed the lad with fresh eyes and saw something that looked like a newspaper sitting in his lap. Before he could ask about it, the boy continued.

“Thank you for getting it back from my mom. She really is the Evil Queen, isn’t she.”

It wasn’t a question. Killian knew that Henry had suspected that truth for quite some time, and that his own confession had only solidified it. Still. The full weight of that knowledge seemed to have finally settled upon the lad, and Killian’s heart felt all the more heavy at the boy’s burden.
“Aye, she is,” he replied. “But she isn’t as powerful here. Especially once Emma breaks the curse.”

“She can still hurt people, though,” Henry argued, finally turning to look at Killian, and he could see clearly that it was in fact a newspaper in the boy’s lap. “Look at what almost happened to David. What could have happened to Graham. She can hurt people. Like you. Like Emma.”

“I’m not going to let that happen Henry,” Killian reassured, laying a hand on the young shoulders that were carrying far too heavy a weight.

“She’s the Mayor. She owns the town. How are you going to stop her. How can anyone stop her?”

“Henry?” Killian began questioningly. “What’s this really about? Has something happened since you and I quarrelled yesterday? Something I don’t know about?”

Henry picked up the paper from his lap and handed it over to Killian as an answer. Splashed across the front page was Emma’s mugshot from when she’d been framed, and arrested, for stealing Dr. Hopper’s files, with a large headline that read: Ex-Jailbird Emma Swan Birthed Babe Behind Bars.

The article revealed that Emma had served an eleven month sentence for being in possession of stolen watches when she was a mere seventeen years old, and while incarcerated had given birth to a child. The child currently sitting next Killian.

“Sydney wrote it,” Henry said. “But I know my mom put him up to it.”

“Most likely,” Killian agreed. Most definitely, Killian knew, and all because of him. He’d planted the thought in her mind the night prior and clearly Regina had wasted no time investigating Swan. Bloody hell! “Have you talked to Emma about this, lad?”

“Yeah. We met at the diner after school. She said the records were supposed to be sealed and wanted to make sure I wasn’t scarred for life.” Killian chuckled, it was such an Emma thing to say. “Then she said she was going to go talk with my mom, but it’s no use.”

“Why would you say that?” Killian asked. Henry’s words sounding nothing like the infernally optimistic boy Killian knew and loved.

“Because she’s the Evil Queen, and Emma is The Saviour. Good can’t beat evil because evil plays dirty. Like this,” he emphasized with a gesture at the paper. “Emma is good, and good loses. Good always loses because heroes play fair and villains don’t.”

“Good thing you’ve both got a villain for an ally, then,” Killian quipped. “Or did you forget who you were talking to, lad?”

“But you’re not really a villain,” Henry argued, filling Killian’s heart with a different sort of sensation than had been there at the start of their conversation. “Not anymore.”

“I’m still a pirate, though. And as I told you yesterday,” he reminded with a wink, “a pirate’s life is forever.”

Henry gave him a small smile and hummed an amused sound before challenging, “I thought pirates only cared about themselves.”

“Well, you’ve a lot to learn boy,” Killian answered with a smile of his own as he ruffled Henry’s hair. “Why don’t you run along home, and let me worry about Regina. Contrary to your earlier assessment, she does not own this town, and it’s high time she was reminded of that fact.”
“What are you going to do?” Henry asked with a hint of trepidation.

“Nothing unsavory, I assure you,” Killian promised. “I’ll be operating well within my legal and documented rights. Not even Emma will be able to find fault with my actions.”

Satisfied with his assurances, Henry headed off toward home while Killian made his way to the Jolly Roger. He needed to collect a certain something before making his way to the Mayor’s office. Something that would wrest even more control out of Regina’s grip.

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Emma tapped her foot as she waited outside the Mayor’s office. She’d been told upon her arrival that Mayor Mills was in a very important meeting, but would be available shortly. That was forty-five minutes ago.

“How much longer is it going to be?” Emma asked, again.

“Shouldn’t be too much longer,” the receptionist replied.

“You said that fifteen minutes ago,” Emma snapped. “Who’s she meeting with, anyway?”

“Sydney Glass,” the receptionist replied offhandedly.

With that revelation, Emma decided she was done waiting. Despite the receptionist’s protests, she slammed through the office door, rattling the glass that read MAYOR in ostentatious print, and squared herself off against the two conspiring figures within.

“This was a juvie record,” she attested angrily, while waving the day’s paper in the air. “It was sealed by court order! I don’t know how you got it, but that’s abuse of power as well as illegal.”

Sydney shrank back and attempted to disappear into the wallpaper at the use of the word illegal, but Regina cast her usual unaffected, yet condescending gaze at her as she responded. “Oh, I'm sorry. You didn't want people to know you cut his cord with a shiv?” Regina attempted to be coy, but failed to hide her perverse satisfaction at the quip.

“I don't care what people know, but this hurts Henry,” Emma stated emphatically, slamming the newspaper onto the middle of Regina’s pristine desk.

“He would’ve learned eventually. We all lose our heroes at some point,” Regina declared with an air of cool indifference.

“He doesn't need to lose anything. He's depressed, madam mayor. Don't you see that?”

“He's fine.” Emma’s heart broke for Henry as she continued to observe Regina’s callous behavior in regards to their son. The boy she espoused to love so much.

“He's not fine,” Emma all but shouted. She paused to take a deep breath, to keep from reaching across the desk to do something rash. “I mean, think about it, watching his adoptive mother attack his birth mother with illegally obtained records on the front page of the paper? You don't think that would be the least bit upsetting to him?

“All I did was expose him to the truth. And as for the legality, I did nothing wrong.”

“No, but Sydney did,” Killian stated as he entered the office. His dramatic arrival drew the attention of everyone in the room.
“This is none of your affair, Mr. Jones,” Regina addressed coolly.

“Yeah, Jones,” Emma replied tersely. “I’ve got this. I don’t need you to fight my battles.”

“Of that I have no doubt, Swan,” he acknowledged before proceeding. “I’m actually here to see Sydney. The paper was kind enough to inform me that he was here meeting with the Mayor.”

“M-me?” Sydney stuttered. “Why were you looking for me?”

“Why, to fire you of course.” Emma could see the self-satisfied smile on Killian’s face at that pronouncement.

“What?!” Sydney yelped.

“You don’t have the authority-”

“I think you’ll find that I do, “ Killian interjected, cutting off Regina’s protest. “You’ll see from this document that I own the controlling interest in The Storybrooke Daily Mirror.”

Killian handed the paperwork to Emma and continued as she and Regina looked it over. Well, I’ll be damned, Emma thought.

“I’ve always been content to leave things in the seemingly capable hands of my editor. I see now that has been a mistake,” Killian turned to Emma and she was struck by the hard, yet sincere look he gave her as he said, “My sincerest apologies, Sheriff Swan. Mr. Glass’ last act as editor will be to issue an apology on the front page of tomorrow’s paper. He will then cooperate fully with any investigation you wish to pursue in the matter of your sealed records.”

“I will?” Sydney asked in an astonished tone.

“Of course not,” Regina scoffed.

“Aye,” Killian countered, shooting the man a dark look that had Sydney recoiling. “You will. And you’d best get to it, as I’ll be expecting a copy to look over in the morning before it goes to print.”

Sydney cast a furtive glance between Killian and Regina, probably trying to decide who he feared more in that moment.

Jones won.

Tail tucked firmly between his legs, Sydney scurried out the door and down the hall.

“Miss Swan, I need a moment with Mr. Jones,” Regina insisted, and the thick tension rolling off both her and Jones was enough to make Emma want a few minutes to herself as well.

Emma stepped into the hall, but didn’t move too far from the door after she closed it behind her. Angry, yet hushed words she couldn’t quite make out seeped through the door, and Emma couldn’t help but lean in a little closer. As she did she heard something quite unexpected.

“This is not over Hook.”

“Oh, I think it is. Good day, Your Majesty.”

Hook? Your Majesty? Has everyone in this town lost their minds? Why would Killian and Regina use the personas Henry believes them to be? Was it some petty, name calling thing they’d adopted in light of Henry’s beliefs? Wrapped up in her thoughts, Emma didn’t notice Regina’s office door
opening, until Killian was veritably on top of her.

“Apologies, Swan,” Killian offered, clearly startled to find her standing so close to the door.

“No, no. My fault,” Emma replied. “I just, uh… wanted to say thanks. You didn’t have to do that.”

“Actually, I did,” Killian countered. “Ever since you came into town, you’ve opened my eyes to things. Things I cannot let stand. Regina’s reign has lasted for far too long.”

“You don’t have to take up a crusade against Regina on my account,” Emma stated, a bit of defensiveness making its way into her tone.

“I assure you, I’m not,” Killian replied, earning him a knowing look from her that conveyed the reminder of her superpower to him. “That is to say, not entirely,” he amended. “I have a long history with Regina, with my own issues and battles to resolve.”

Emma could see the truth of his words even without her special little gift. He wasn’t trying to fight her battles for her, he wanted to fight a common foe alongside her, and that realization settled the remaining uncertainties she’d held towards him.

“We never got to talk about the other night,” she said, and then went on to clarify when she saw the perplexed look on his face. “At the docks. After my fight with Graham. I shouldn’t have brushed you off like that.”

“It’s alright, Swan,” he waved off. “No need to explain. I intruded. There’s no need to discuss it further.”

“Well, there is one thing I’d like to discuss,” she replied, worrying her lip for a moment.

“What’s that, Swan?”

“Is that offer of the house still on the table?”

Killian quirked his lips as he reached back to scratch behind his ear. He took a slow step forward to bring himself closer to her. “There are a great many things I’d like to offer you on a table, Swan,” he purred salaciously, pulling his bottom lip between his teeth as he arched his brows. His audacious flirtation earned him an amused eye roll. “Aye,” he continued on with a bit more seriousness. “Why don’t we meet at Granny’s for breakfast in the morning and we can discuss it.”

“Sounds like a date,” Emma responded flippantly.

“No, Swan,” he answered earnestly, “when I ask you for a date, you’ll know it.”

Realizing what she’d said, a blush made its way up Emma’s neck. She let out a scoffing breath hoping to distract him from her flustered reaction. His brows lifted in response and she could feel the flush deepen at her cheeks.

“See you in the morning, Swan,” he said, winking at her before turning and heading down the hall.

As she watched him go, Emma contemplated how much she’d rather be following him out into the night, rather than heading back in for round two with Regina. Some other time, she told herself.
Chapter Fourteen

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out! And @flipperbrain made a lovely pic for our belated Christmas presents, both the banner and the pic can be found on Tumblr.

Apologies for the late upload, we got distracted by our birthday weekend shenanigans. We hope you enjoy the chapter.

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

Making her way to the diner the next morning with an exuberant Mary Margaret by her side, Emma continued to contemplate whether or not she was making the right choice in renting the house from Killian. She’d expected her current roommate to be a tad disappointed at the prospect of her moving out, but Mary Margaret had all but squealed and hugged her at the news. Emma knew it was simply old hurts and fears that were causing her to second guess the opportunity, so she endeavored to press on with her decision. She’d do the brave thing, and keep moving forward on this new path Henry had set her on when he brought her to Storybrooke. A path she’d decided to continue forging after Killian Jones had read her like an open book during their very first meeting, when he’d told her if she were going to leave she’d have done it already.

Mary Margaret had insisted on accompanying her to Granny’s for her breakfast date. *Nope, not a date. Jones had made that clear,* Emma reminded herself, and a whole host of fresh questions began to assault her mind. *Did he want to date her?* He’d said when he asked, she’d know it. *When, not if.* Did she want him to ask? Emma hadn’t really ever even been on a date before, unless you counted the traps she’d set in the course of her job as a bail bondsperson. It’s not as if Neal had ever… *Nope. Not gonna give that man another moment’s consideration.*

Henry’s father had plagued her thought processes for far too long. He and Killian might share similar qualities of charisma and charm (and a penchant towards legally questionable lifestyles), but Emma knew when it came down to the important things, Killian Jones was nothing like Neal Cassidy. He’d already proven that to her with the way he cared for Henry, was willing to set right his past wrongs, and respected her ability, and capability, in fighting her battles with Regina. All while trying to assure her that she could count on him, even when her habits of self-preservation and her protective nature tried to keep him at arm’s length.

No, Killian Jones wasn’t like any other man Emma had ever encountered. No one had ever puzzled her, challenged her, or had her back the way Jones did. The way he kept her guessing, the intrigue
he offered with his honest and sincere words while holding back some part of himself he didn’t think she was ready for him to reveal (or perhaps he was the one that wasn’t ready), his absolute belief in her when she struggled to find it within herself, it all made her want to hide away in Mary Margaret’s loft for the remainder of forever.

Which was why she wasn’t going to.

She was going to march into that diner, sit in that booth across from the unfairly attractive man, sign a lease agreement, and then maybe ask him on a date.

Emma was so caught up in her own thoughts that she didn’t notice Mary Margaret diligently checking her watch every few minutes as they got closer to the diner. Nor did she notice the disappointed expression on her friend’s face upon entering, or the slightly joyous one that overtook her face when a certain man entered from the back hallway at seven fifteen on the dot, causing her to miss Killian’s greeting.

When Mary Margaret didn’t respond to Killian, Emma nudged her with her shoulder.

“What? Oh! Yes, I’m sorry. Good morning, Mr. Jones,” Mary Margaret replied politely, even as she cast furtive glances towards the blonde man at the counter.

“Please, Miss Blanchard,” Killian responded, a suppressed smirk ticking at the corner of his lips as he, like Emma, had apparently caught on to the woman’s distraction. “Killian will do.”

“Well, then. I insist you call me Mary Margaret.”

“Happily. Will you be joining us for breakfast this morning?” Killian asked, pulling the woman from her other focus.

“Oh, no. I don’t want to intrude. I just came for coffee and to read for a few minutes before I have to be at school. You all go ahead. I’ll just be here. Reading. And having coffee. Don’t worry about me.”

Emma could feel her brows arched high upon her forehead, probably matching Killian’s in their expanse. Glancing over, Emma could see the shake of a suppressed chuckle in Killian’s shoulders before he met her gaze and gestured for them to have a seat within his booth.

“Remind me to never entrust that woman with a secret,” Killian whispered across the table, “she has the worst poker face I’ve ever seen.”

Emma let out an amused breath at his extremely accurate assessment, and her heart rate picked up speed a little when she caught his eyes. His very blue, amused, stupidly piercing, liner rimmed eyes. She wet her lips in an effort to collect herself and his eyes flickered down to follow the movement, rendering her attempt to calm herself completely useless. Clearing her throat she looked around to find Ruby, and after managing to order herself a cup of coffee from across the diner she turned back and settled her gaze on the small stack of papers in front of Killian.

“So are those for me?” Emma asked, nodding towards the documents.

“Aye,” he answered, sliding the pile towards her. “You’re welcome to take them and look them over at your leisure, but it’s just your standard lease agreement. There are a few things that will need to be done to the property before you move in, minor repairs and some sprucing up, but I’ll see to those.”

“I don’t mind helping,” Emma offered as she glanced through the papers, batting away the images of
evenings alone with a sweaty, paint covered Killian Jones from her thoughts.

Feeling a flush come over her, Emma squirmed in her seat hoping that the all too observant man seated across from her hadn’t picked up on the eager tone in her voice. The all too observant man who seemed to stiffen in his seat, causing Emma to finally look up at him. His hardened stare was focused at the front of the diner, and Emma only had to question his change in demeanor for a scant second before the reason appeared next to her.

“Ah, Acting Sheriff Swan. There you are,” Regina snarked. “I tried looking for you at the Sheriffs Station, silly me for thinking that’s where you’d be.”

“Did you need something, Madame Mayor,” Emma sighed exasperatedly.

“Yes. To give you these,” Regina answered as she dropped several folders onto the table with an echoing thud. The clatter of silverware drew the attention of most of the diner’s patrons.

“What’s all this?” Emma questioned staring uneasily at the perilously high stack of files before her.

“These are the additional assignments and duties required of the Sheriff’s department during the holiday season,” Regina explained with mock cordiality. “Added patrols, information on meetings you’ll need to attend that affect the town’s holiday activities, crowd control requirements for those activities, overseeing the canned food drive for Thanksgiving, then the toy drive for Christmas, not to ment.”

“That seems like an awful lot for just one person,” a voice chimed in from behind Regina.

As Regina turned, Emma craned her neck to look around her in order to determine who had spoken up. Both women were surprised to see David Nolan standing next to Mary Margaret’s table.

“It is,” Regina admitted coldly, “but seeing as Sheriff Humbert felt the need to take some personal time,”

“No thanks to you,” Emma muttered under her breath, earning her a smirk and raised brow from her table mate.

“Acting Sheriff Swan will just have to do the best she can. Unless of course,” she paused as she turned back to face Emma with her false smile, “you don’t think you’re up to the job.”

“I can do the job,” Emma replied curtly.

“Good, then I’ll see you in an hour for the canned food drive meeting.”

Before leaving Regina turned back to David and said, “Tell Katherine hello for me.” Her focus flickered down to Mary Margaret who looked away guiltily. “Actually, nevermind. I think I may call her and schedule lunch. She and I have some catching up to do.”

The shift within the diner at the Mayor’s exit was palpable, as if everyone within had given a collective sigh of relief that she’d gone. Emma’s relief was short lived as she took in the insurmountable stack of duties before her.

“Bloody infernal woman,” Killian muttered darkly. “Half of those so-called required and necessary duties are complete and utter rubbish, Swan.”

“Yeah, I don’t remember Graham doing much of anything additional to his normal duties, outside of showing up to the community events,” Mary Margaret added, now out of her seat and standing next
to David.

“It’s fine,” Emma assured, though it was anything but. “With Graham on sabbatical, or whatever the hell he’s doing, I answer directly to Regina, and I’ll be damned if I let her get the best of me.” With a resigned sigh she focused her attentions to Killian and his clenched jaw, still clearly as frustrated with Regina’s antics as she was. “I guess this means I won’t be able to help out as much as I’d hoped with getting the house ready.”

“It’s alright, Swan,” he said with a soft smile. “I can manage. It might take a few days longer than you wanted, before you can actually move in, but-”

“Well, I could help,” Mary Margaret offered, drawing three sets of eyes to her. “I mean, I’m pretty handy with a paint brush.”

“Me, too,” David chimed, casting not so subtle glances in Mary Margaret’s direction.

“Really, mate?” Killian asked incredulously.

“Yeah,” David replied. “I still kind of owe you all for that whole saving my life thing,” he added with a grin and a tone of light humor.

“Well, um, thanks,” Emma said, slightly stunned at all the offers to help. Though if she really thought about it, David wanting to help probably had more to do with Mary Margaret’s involvement than some feeling of a debt owed to them all.

“I should get going,” Emma stated, organizing the files as she made to stand. “It seems I’ve got a meeting to prepare for. I’ll look these over and get them back to you later today,” she told Killian, setting the lease agreement he’d given her on top of the pile before grabbing her jacket from where she’d set it in the booth.

Mary Margaret and David made their excuses to depart as well, there was an excruciatingly adorable display of uncertainty and awkwardness as they said their farewells.

Emma shared another knowing look with Killian as she pulled her jacket on.

“Swan?” Killian questioned, his head tilted as he watched her pull her hair from under her coat and settle it over her shoulder. “Isn’t that my jacket?”

Emma’s lip twitched mischievously at the fact that he was only just noticing she was wearing the jacket he’d given her the night he’d discovered her about to sleep in her bug, outside the pawn shop.

“I don’t know what you’re talking about, Jones,” she replied innocently, earning her a raised brow.

“Oh, I think you do, love,” he accused teasingly. “You’ve gone and pilfered one of my favorite jackets.”

“Pilfered? You gave it to me.”

“Ah! So you admit that it belongs to me, then.”

“I admit nothing,” she answered with a smirk, causing him to chuckle as he wagged a finger at her.

“Good girl. I always suspected there was a little pirate in you, Swan.” Killian picked up his coffee mug and winked at her over the rim.

“Pirate?” she scoffed, rolling her eyes as she picked up the stack of files. “I guess it would take one
to know one, huh… Captain?”

Emma could hear Killian’s laugh all the way to the sidewalk.

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The days that followed were hectic, to say the least. Emma was pretty sure she’d forgotten what sleep was, and probably had more caffeine flowing through her veins than blood.

While Killian, Mary Margaret, and David, (and Henry when he could get away with it) all worked to get the house - her house - ready for her to move in, Emma waded through a never ending stream of extra duties that she knew were only sent her way out of pettiness and spite. Every day there had been a new meeting, a new area that just had to have extra patrols, and a new list of complaints received by the Mayor’s Office. Most of the complaints were code and ordinance infringements that the Mayor was no longer choosing to ignore, violations that required citations that, apparently, only the Sheriff’s station could issue.

Emma hadn’t seen Henry in days, and if it weren’t for Killian’s insistence to ensure she got at least one meal into her system each day, she probably wouldn’t have seen him either. Between his mornings at the pawn shop, early afternoons at the paper, after school with Henry, and evenings getting the house in order, he was just as busy as she was, and yet, he’d managed to come by each day after his time at the paper and before meeting Henry, to bring her a late lunch. He’d catch her up on all the work they’d done, bring her samples to choose from so she could personalize some of the features, and update her on how Henry was doing. She tried to not be jealous of the time Killian was getting to spend with her son, but she’d be lying if she said it didn’t grate on her. Killian seemed to sense her envy and made sure she knew how much Henry missed her, too, while reassuring her that her current schedule wouldn’t last forever. Although she hadn’t said as much, Emma hadn’t been too sure that was ever going to be the case, until Jones came in with good news.

She was working through a large pile of paperwork, hoping to get it all filed away by day’s end so she might have some time over the weekend to actually move into her house, when Killian walked in with a grease soaked bag from Granny’s.

Placing the heaven sent care package on her desk, Killian announced, “Grilled cheese, just the way you like it.”

“With fries?” she questioned.

“Onion rings,” he smirked.

“Oh, good. I was just testing you,” she teased, taking the contents of her meal out of the paper sack.

“Pull up a seat, Jones,” she invited. “What have you been up to today?”

Emma had come to really enjoy these quiet moments of respite with Killian. They’d talk about their day, share stories of humorous encounters they’d had with the town’s people, vent about the frustrations of their respective occupations, and sometimes offer small pieces of themselves with personal revelations or anecdotes. It was nice getting to know the man behind the persona he’d long carried within the town, and see him lower his guard bit by bit. She counted Killian among those she was closest to in town, and though she still wondered if things might progress beyond what they were, she was glad they’d had this time of busy distraction. She’d come to truly trust in Killian during these interludes, and though she looked forward to a slower pace and less hectic days, Emma didn’t want to see these moments with Killian Jones end.
“I hope you don’t mind, Swan,” Killian began as he took a seat across from her, “but I took it upon myself to discuss something with Regina on your behalf.”

“You went to talk to Regina about me?” she questioned, while tamping down feelings of trepidation that reared themselves from the back of her mind.

“No. I was meeting with our esteemed leader on another matter,” he quipped, with a fair amount of snark geared toward Her Majesty the Mayor, “and at the conclusion of our meeting I asked which day this weekend would be better for you to have off so you could move in to your new accommodations. Her answer was Saturday, by the way.”

Emma stared wide eyed and slack jawed at the news Killian had just presented her. She didn’t think she’d get more than a couple of hours over the course of several days, to move into the house. Granted she didn’t have much in the way of possessions, but Killian and Mary Margaret had taken on the extra project of picking out furnishings and decor they thought might suit her, in an effort to make the place feel more like a home, and all of that had to be moved in and organized.

“How in the hell did you ever get Regina to agree to giving me an entire day off?”

“Easy,” he shrugged, his attention on the paper clip he was fiddling with, “I asked politely. Even said please.” A small smirk ghosted his lips and Emma got the feeling she was missing some significant detail to this tale, but he continued on before she could press him about it. “I’ve already worked out delivery on appliances and your furniture that day, and both Mary Margaret and David have agreed to come help.”

“And?”

“Of course they have,” Emma muttered.

In addition to updates about the goings on at the house, Killian had also kept her apprised of the goings on with her friend and soon-to-be-former roommate, and the married man she was still pining after. A pining, according to Killian, that seemed to be mutual. The whole situation was a disaster waiting to happen, and Emma hadn’t had much of an opportunity to confront Mary Margaret about it. Maybe move-in day would afford her the chance.

Before she could say anything else on the matter, the shrill sound of the station’s phone rang out. With a groan Emma reached over to pick it up, only to be beaten to it by Killian’s hand slamming down on top of the receiver.

“Eat, Swan,” he commanded, before lifting the phone from it’s cradle.

“Sheriff’s Station,” he answered cordially, and Emma’s lips quirked up into a smirk when she recognized the gruff voice of Leroy through the receiver. Emma listened while she munched contently on her grilled cheese and onion rings, chuckling at Killian as he fielded whatever new complaint the grumpy little man was issuing this time.

They couldn’t have asked for better conditions when Saturday rolled around. Moderate temperatures that started cool in the morning, but warmed up considerably by the afternoon. Much warmer than anyone would have considered normal for Maine, nearly two weeks before Thanksgiving.

Warm enough that they’d all shed their light jackets by lunchtime, and the men, who had the burden of the heaviest lifting, had peeled off an additional layer by mid-afternoon, leaving them both in only tank undershirts. Sweaty, clingy, distraction inducing undershirts.

Not that the sight of Killian Jones in a light grey tank top, with a generous amount of chest hair
peeking out over the top was distracting. Nor was the way he used the bottom hem to wipe his brow from time to time, exposing even more luscious hair that swept over firm abs as it trailed down to… Seriously, Emma?!? Not helping!

By the flushed looked on Mary Margaret’s face, her friend was faring no better with similar displays from her current infatuation. They could both probably use some fresh air, or a cold shower, but needing a small break seemed like a more reasonable option. So, with a quick word to the boys, Emma grabbed Mary Margaret by the arm and led her out to the back porch in order to collect themselves.

“Are you sure we shouldn’t be in there with them?” Mary Margaret asked. “What if they need our help?”

“I’m sure they’ll be fine without us for a few minutes,” Emma replied as she handed her friend a cold bottle of water.

“It’s just that David can only stay until five. He works the evening shift at the animal shelter on Saturdays.”

“Is that why you’ve been so eager to help with getting the house ready and moving me in? Because of David being here?”

“No! Of course not!” Emma shot her a disbelieving look that had Mary Margaret crumpling. “Maybe a little bit.”

The two sat in strained silence, Emma suspected her friend had more weighing on her heart and mind, that she might wish to take the moment to confess. Sure enough, moments later Mary Margaret began purging her soul.

“Before we started helping out here, I’d go to Granny’s every morning. He always comes in at 7:15 to get coffee.”

“For him and his wife,” Emma reminded gently.

“I know, I know, I know,” she relented. “I just like seeing him. I’ve been here every time I knew he’d be here, too. I can’t get him out of my head.”

“I know,” Emma commiserated. She’d been the same way with Killian. Always making sure to be back at the station when she knew he’d be coming by with food. Thinking of him far too often while out on patrol, maybe driving past the pawn shop or docks a few extra times hoping to catch a glimpse of him. She was no better than Mary Margaret when it came to their slightly stalkerish obsessions. The difference, however, was Emma’s fixation wasn’t married. Killian wasn’t leading some double life of deception that would only end up ruining lives.

“Since I demanded that you all take tomorrow off from helping me get unpacked and organized, David offered to come Monday to help hang curtain rods,” Emma said.

“I know,” Mary Margaret replied, her brow furrowed in confusion over what Emma was getting at.

“Maybe the first step is not showing up here Monday night,” Emma advised with sympathetic eyes cast at her forlorn friend.

“Love’s the worst,” Mary Margaret muttered as she rested her chin in the palm of her hand, her elbow braced against her knee. “I wish there was a magic cure.”
Emma didn’t have a magic cure for what ailed Mary Margaret, and she wasn’t all that great at hope speeches, but she did have compassion for her friend. Pushing past any feelings of awkwardness Emma placed her arm over Mary Margaret’s shoulder and allowed the woman to lean into a hug. A small gesture, but one Emma knew spoke volumes to her friend in that moment.

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Tuesday evening Killian was happy for the company of David Nolan. When the man had called the day before to tell Killian he wouldn’t be able to come to Swan’s house to hang the curtain rods until the next day, Killian had been glad for an evening to himself. Or so he’d thought. The truth was that Killian hadn’t really been alone with his own thoughts in quite some time.

Ever since that first vision had overtaken his consciousness, revealing Emma to be the Saviour, more and more memories had surfaced from the dredges of whatever dark corner of Killian’s soul the Dark One occupied. With each encounter, each innocent touch, and each piece of their walled existence that found itself exposed to the other’s scrutiny, Killian could reach further into the collective knowledge of which he wanted no part. Though he couldn’t deny that such knowledge had been useful a number of times, and could prove even more useful should it eventually reveal the means by which the curse could be broken.

Killian and Henry had spent the previous week pouring over the lad’s story book. Studying page after page for some clue as to how the Saviour was suppose to destroy the darkest of curses to ever exist. They were no closer to an answer than when they’d started.

The only thing Killian did know, via the Dark One memories, was that once the curse did break they would all remain there in the Land Without Magic. It was transport to this land that had caused the Crocodile to recruit Regina in the task of casting it in the first place. All so he could reunite with his son, Baelfire.

Killian had been floored when that particular revelation had played out in his mind.

Partly because he hadn’t been prepared for it. The visions had only ever come either while in Emma’s presence, or just after interacting with her, but that day he hadn’t seen Swan yet. Henry had come by the diner before school to talk with him about Operation Cobra and just as the lad left, the all too familiar swirl of images had assaulted him.

Killian’s other reason for shock at the discovery of Bae being in this land was the mystery of how the boy had escaped Neverland. Pan himself had told Killian that he had no intentions of ever allowing the boy to leave the island, so how had Bae managed it? Where was he now? How long had he been here? All questions Killian knew would go unanswered for the time being, because the Crocodile had pondered them as well.

The knowledge that Bae was also in this land, coupled with the additional memories of the Dark One’s dealings with the poor unfortunate and desperate souls that had sought him out for help, had plagued Killian for many evenings over the course of the week. Not to mention his own, actual, thoughts and considerations of a certain Acting Sheriff, and the rapidly growing feelings he had towards her. Feelings he had to continue to refrain from acting upon if he wanted to have any sort of chance with her after the curse was broken.

Actions that were becoming more and more difficult to abstain from. The bloody enticing woman certainly wasn’t making it any easier. Not with the way she moaned over her first bite of grilled cheese when he brought her sustenance from Granny’s; a sound that settled somewhere in the vicinity of his groin each and every time she uttered it. Nor with the seductive little smirks and challenging brows that were replacing her eye rolls and glares now that she’d started matching him
wit for wit. Flirty innuendo met with flirty innuendo in more and more of their conversations. Not to mention what it did to him to see her wearing his jacket.

The true test of his restraint had come three days before when they’d moved her belongings into the house. The sheen of perspiration that had clung to her neck and settled in the hollow of her throat, the way he kept catching her eyes as they seemed to roam over him in the exact manner his had been appreciating her, and the way her chest had heaved from the efforts of their exertions, had all tormented his fortitude. It had been damn near impossible to leave her later that evening without pulling her into his arms the way he’d been wont to do for weeks. Sleep hadn’t come easily that night, and like most nights, thoughts of his Swan in the most indecent of contexts plagued him every bit as much as his other tormentors. Though he’d gladly take the sweet torture thoughts of Emma offered, over the other ponderings of his dark mind.

Yes, indeed. Killian was glad for the evening’s task, and a companion to work alongside, to say the least. The fact that the man currently assisting him was actually Emma’s father helped to curb any untoward considerations of her as well.

Killian hadn’t been too sure what working with Emma’s father would be like, but over the course of the week he’d found himself enjoying the man’s company. Of course, Killian knew that David Nolan was the man’s cursed persona, and therefore couldn’t accurately gauge what the prince was truly like, but Killian believed he’d caught glimpses of the man’s true nature shining through every so often. There were times when he infuriatingly reminded him of his brother, Liam; with a streak of stubbornness and innate bend towards good form, those moments of familiarity had made his heart simultaneously swell and clench at the memories they evoked.

Killian wondered what the man would think when he learned he’d been working next to, and befriending the infamous Captain Hook, or that it had been the Dark One who’d had a hand in helping find him when he’d first come out of his comatose state. Would moments of camaraderie like this one continue? Would the prince demand that Killian keep his distance from Emma? How would things progress between them once the curse was broken? Would they be friends or foes?

“We should go out and grab a beer together sometime,” David suggested as they finished measuring the next window.

“What?” Killian asked, his mind still wrapped up in musings over the curse.

“A beer,” David repeated. “I don’t know about you, but I haven’t got too many… how do you say it? Mates?”

Killian chuckled at the man’s attempt at his accent. “Aye… mate ,” he replied, “that sounds grand.”

“Terrific! How about-” David’s words were cut off by a gasp. Looking over, Killian saw Mary Margaret standing in the doorway like a deer in headlights; her gaze fixed squarely on David.

Without a word, she turned on her heel and marched right back out the door.

“Mary Margaret!” David called as he ran after her. “Mary Margaret. Wait!”

The battle within Killian’s conscience, to eavesdrop or ignore the situation, lasted for less than a minute before he found himself peering out the front window in order to spy on this strange development occurring between Emma’s parents.

“What are you doing here?” Mary Margaret questioned.

“Hanging curtain rods. What are you doing here?”
“I thought you were going to be here last night to do that.”

“Well there was a change of plans. Why is my being here tonight such a big deal?”

Killian watched as the princess struggled momentarily to formulate her thoughts into words before hearing her just blurt them out, much like Emma sometimes did.

“I still have feelings for you.”

“What?”

“Why do you think I went to Granny's every morning at 7:15? Or that I’ve been here every time you were? It was to see you. I don't know why, because it just makes me miserable. Every time I see you, it just reminds me that you chose Katherine instead of me.”

The prince began to chuckle softly, causing an offended look to cross the princess’ face.

“You think this is funny?”

“No,” he responded intently. “No, it's just the reason I went to Granny's every morning at 7:15, and why I volunteered to help fix up Emma’s house was to see you.”

“But you chose Katherine,” Mary Margaret reminded him resolutely.

“I know, but I still have feelings for you. I can’t get you out of my head, and I thought that if... if I didn’t show up last night then maybe... I-”

“You were trying to not see me,” she finished for him.

“And you were trying to not see me,” he said.

“Well, how do we stop seeing each other?”

“Apparently, we can’t.”

“This is a problem.”

“Yes.”

The two had been making their way closer to one another during the exchange, until they finally stopped fighting that which Killian could see was inevitable. Not wishing to spy any longer on such a private and tender moment, Killian went back to the task at hand and allowed the prince and princess a few moments of privacy.

Killian knew Emma wouldn’t approve of this new development between David and Mary Margaret, but she didn’t know, or rather she didn’t believe, that the two were actually meant to be together. No curse, no false memories, no amount of denial could suppress what lay just beneath the surface, and Killian felt a pang of jealousy surge through him.

What he wouldn’t give to just say to hell with it and be with Emma the way he wished to, the way he suspected she may wish to be with him, but Killian knew it would be wrong. When the truth was finally revealed, no one would doubt that Prince Charming and Snow White were meant to be together. No one would fault them for this transgression while cursed in separation. But what right did Captain Hook have in wooing an unsuspecting Emma Swan? Snow and Charming would forgive one another for their actions while victims of the curse, but Killian knew no such mercy was likely to be afforded to him for taking advantage of Emma while the truth was still concealed. So, he
resolved once more to bide his time and wait.

But, oh how he abhorred waiting.
Chapter Fifteen

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out! And @flipperbrain made a lovely pic for our belated Christmas presents, both the banner and the pic can be found on Tumblr.

Apologies for the late upload, we got distracted by our birthday weekend shenanigans. We hope you enjoy the chapter.

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

Emma couldn’t remember the last time she was this nervous. Her heart was racing, her palms were slick from nerves, each breath was just a hair too shallow, and her hands wouldn’t stop shaking. Damn, you’d think she was having royalty over for dinner, and not her ten-year-old son. Her son whom she hadn’t seen for more than a scant few moments here and there in over a week.

Henry was coming to Emma’s new place for dinner so she could show him the finished result. Regina had to work late that night and had therefore begrudgingly agreed to it. Emma still couldn’t figure out how Killian managed to get the woman to be so agreeable with just a simple please, but she wasn’t going to look a gift horse in the mouth.

Emma had finished her shift, forwarded calls to her cell in case there was an emergency, swung by Granny’s to pick up their dinner, then called Killian on the way home. Per usual, Henry had spent the afternoon with him at the docks, and Killian had offered to bring him to the house once he’d gotten word from her that she was finished at the station.

After she placed the last necessary items on the dining table, Emma took a good look around to make sure everything was in place, ready for Henry’s inspection, and hopefully his approval. She still couldn’t believe she lived there. She had to hand it to Killian and Mary Margaret, they’d both done an outstanding job in selecting things that really captured her aesthetic. The care and thoughtfulness that had gone into the entire process of getting the house ready, and then organized and decorated just for her was overwhelming. Emma wasn’t sure how she would ever repay them for all they had done.

If she were being honest with herself, it was all very difficult to accept sometimes. Most times, actually. She wasn’t accustomed to other people doing things for her, putting her first. She’d learned to count only on herself. To do things for herself. She didn’t need help. Never asked for help. She didn’t need people. She only needed herself.
At least, that’s how it used to be. Or, at least, she wants it to be a used to be. She was trying to make it a used to be.

If the past week had shown her anything, it had revealed that just because she could do things for herself, didn’t mean she had to. Not when there were people like Mary Margaret, David, Killian and others who were willing to step in. Not because they thought she couldn’t handle things on her own, but because they wanted to do things for her. Emma had never really had people before, and as terrifying as the prospect was, she couldn’t find it in herself to want to push back from it. To run from it. Which was another entirely new sensation.

A sharp knock at her front door echoed to the back of the house, and Emma went to answer it, knowing who she’d find on the other side. With one last fortifying breath Emma pulled the door open and revealed a beaming Henry.

“Hey kid,” she greeted, bracing herself with one hand against the doorframe when Henry caught her around the middle in a tight hug.

Her other arm wrapped around his shoulders and she placed her chin on the crown of his head, allowing his warm and eager response to calm her remaining jitters. Emma glanced up at the other figure present on her porch and her heart stuttered at the tender look on his face. Releasing Henry, she wet her lips and swallowed past a fresh spike of nerves that had tightened her throat.

“Thanks for, uh, for bringing him by,” she stammered.

“My pleasure, Swan,” Killian replied before turning to step off her porch.

“Wait,” Henry called out after him, “aren’t you going to stay and eat with us?”

Killian stopped and looked back at them, clearly taken aback by the offer. When his questioning eyes caught hers she knew it was futile to resist that blue gaze, not to mention the brown pleading one beside her.

“It’s just lasagna and salad from Granny’s, but you’re welcome to join us,” she offered.

“Are you sure?” he asked. “I wouldn’t want to intrude on your eve-”

“It’s fine, Killian,” she assured, and his expression changed, as it always did when she called him by his first name. It was a mixture of gratitude and appreciation, with a simmering of something viscerally heated just below the surface.

She liked that expression.

Killian helped her plate the meal, then they all sat down to eat before taking Henry on a tour of the house. Henry chattered excitedly about everything that had happened at school, and things that he and Killian had done on the Jolly. Most of it she had already heard from Jones, but she didn’t mind sitting through it again in order to experience it all through Henry’s eyes. An experience that continued when Killian walked Henry from room-to-room explaining all the work he, Mary Margaret, and David had done.

With each detail the man pointed out, each question he patiently answered from the curious little boy who hung on his every word, Emma was struck again by how much her life had changed in such a short amount of time, and how much change she might still be in for, if she would only open herself up to it. Change she now hoped would lead to Henry making semi-permanent use of one of the rooms in the house. It was Killian who had first suggested it, the idea of creating a bedroom just for Henry. At the time Emma felt it might be too soon for such a step, but now that she had Henry here
she wished she had acted upon Killian’s idea. It wasn’t too late, though. She could still make a place for him, if he wanted.

Emma fought the rising panic that itched in the palm of her hands, and once again resolved to do the brave thing. “Hey, kid,” she said, interrupting Killian’s story of how he and David had nearly killed themselves in trying to repair the crown molding in the front room. “Sorry, but there’s one more room I want to show you.” Killian shot her a confused look, but followed as she led Henry up the stairs towards the bedrooms.

Emma opened the door to the empty second bedroom and stepped over the threshold before turning to look at Henry, her heart slammed in her rib cage as she said, “I thought that, if you want, maybe we could set up this room… for you.”

Killian’s head snapped toward her, eyes wide with surprise at her words, but then a small smile tugged at the corners of his mouth. He dipped his head, and then glanced up at her under his thick lashes, a look of proud understanding evident in his gaze and the raise of his brows.

“Really?!” Henry exclaimed. Joy and excitement beamed from his smile.

“Well, yeah,” Emma answered. “I mean, we still have a long ways to go before I think Regina would ever let you stay here, but as Mary Margaret would say, we should prepare for the outcome we hope for… or something.”

“This is awesome!” Henry rushed around the room, mapping out where his furniture would go, and deciding what color he wanted the walls painted.

“Well done, Swan,” Killian murmured over her shoulder. “I think it’s safe to say, you made the lad’s year.”

“I just hope I haven’t got his hopes up too much,” Emma replied, doubt creeping into her mind as to whether or not she should have mentioned the room just yet.

“Don’t do that, love.”

“What?”

“Second guess yourself,” Killian answered knowingly. He always seemed to know what she was thinking. “The fact of the matter is you are Henry’s mother. You have every right in wanting to make room for him in your life.”

“Not legally,” she reminded him.

“That can always be changed.”

Change.

Was she ready for that kind of change? Was she ready for that kind of fight? Regina wasn’t going to give up sole custody of Henry easily, and a legal battle could get real ugly real fast. She didn’t want to put Henry through that.

Maybe she wouldn’t have to.

Maybe Regina could be persuaded, in time, to agree to a more informal arrangement of shared custody. It was certainly worth pursuing before jumping into a courtroom full of advocates and lawyers and red tape. She could start small. Regina had already agreed to Henry having dinner there
that evening, maybe she’d be willing to let him spend part of Thanksgiving day with her at Granny’s Friendsgiving Feast.

“I think I’ll start by asking Regina if I can have Henry for part of Thanksgiving Day before I get an attorney on retainer,” she commented to Killian, who, like her, was still watching Henry dream up the perfect room.

“Would you like me to assist you in that endeavor, Swan? I’d be more than happy to ask her with a pretty please for you,” he said with a smirk and twitch of his brow.

“That’s okay,” she replied with an amused tone. “I’d rather keep all this between me and Regina, for Henry’s sake.”

“As you wish,” he conceded, “but don’t hesitate to call upon me if you have need.” He offered her another saucy look, drawing his bottom lip between his teeth and stepping a little further into her space.

“Actually,” she murmured softly, “there is something I need from you.”

“Oh? Do tell, love.”

“I’m not sure you’d be up for it though,” she challenged in a husky voice.

“I assure you, I’d be more than happy to provide any service you require,” he purred, taking an additional step toward her, his hands flexed as if he were trying to keep them at his sides and off her.

“I’m glad to hear that.” She leaned in and he stiffened, breath hitching, as she ghosted her lips over the shell of his ear to whisper, “Because I’m going to need someone to paint this room as soon as Henry chooses a color.”

Emma patted him on the shoulder as she stepped past him, his full bodied laugh following her out the door and down the stairs where she headed back to the kitchen to get the rocky road ice cream out for dessert.

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Emma had hoped to make it by Town Hall that next day. She’d planned to thank Regina for letting Henry come over for dinner the night before, and broach the subject of Henry spending part of the Thanksgiving holiday with her. Unfortunately, Mayor Mills had meetings scheduled all morning, and just when Emma was heading out of the station to try and catch her before another round of late afternoon meetings began, a call about shoplifters at the pharmacy had come in.

Emma pulled up in front of Dark Star Pharmacy and saw the Mayor’s car parked out front. Well, that was lucky. Maybe she’d get a chance to broach the subject of Granny’s Friendsgiving before she dealt with the shoplifters.

“My son doesn’t eat candy,” Regina’s tone was clipped as Emma walked through the door, “and he knows better than to steal. It was obviously those two. We’re going.”

Emma registered Regina’s words and caught sight of a despondent Henry, putting the pieces together that he was somehow involved in the call she’d received.


“Ms. Swan,” Regina started condescendingly, “must I remind you that genetics mean nothing?
You're not his mother, and it's all taken care of.”

Wow. Definitely not the time to bring up Thanksgiving.

“I'm here because I'm the acting sheriff,” she reminded.

“Oh, that's right,” Regina relented coolly. “Go on. Do your job. Take care of those miscreants.”

Emma watched Regina sweep Henry out the door. She probably should have insisted that he stay to
give a statement, but she could always get it later if need be. Her Majesty clearly wasn’t in the mood
to cooperate, and Emma’s attention clearly needed to be focused on the frightened looking kids
before her.

“Did you call their parents?” Emma questioned Mr. Clark, the pharmacy clerk.

“The number they gave me was disconnected.”

“Did you guys give Mr. Clark a fake number?” Emma asked, turning her attention to the boy and girl
who didn’t look any older than Henry. Both shook their heads vigorously. “Then why is it
disconnected?”

“Because our parents couldn't pay the bill,” the girl replied tearfully.

Emma assessed the items the two were accused of stealing. Toothpaste, toilet paper, shampoo,
canned soup, these were necessary items of day to day life, not the items of frivolity that kids would
usually try and pilfer. Emma knew that all too well, and recognized instantly what was really going
on with the children in front of her.

“You guys were just trying to help out, huh?” she surmised sympathetically.

“Please,” the girl begged. “Please don’t arrest us. It'll just make things worse for our parents.”

The area in the back of Emma’s mind where her super power resided stirred. It continued to sound as
she drove the kids, Nicholas and Ava, to the house they claimed to be home. Emma knew it wasn’t,
knew that things didn’t add up with these kids, and her instincts proved right once again when she
cought them squatting in an abandoned house.

After learning that the two were orphans, Emma decided to take them to Mary Margaret’s loft. They
clearly needed a hot meal, and perhaps her old roommate could shed some light on their story, seeing
as how she probably knew them from school. Before heading to the loft, Emma made a stop at the
sheriff’s station to see if she could find any information about the siblings, and to call and give Mary
Margaret a heads up. With a file marked Zimmer - the name the twins had given her - stowed in her
bag, Emma ushered Ava and Nicholas through the door of the loft. While the kids were occupied
with their second helping of macaroni and cheese, Emma pulled Mary Margaret aside.

“Do you know them? Do they go to your school?”

“I've seen them,” Mary Margaret confirmed. “but I had no idea. None of us did.”

“They’re Ava and Nicholas Zimmer. Said their mother was a woman named Dorrie Zimmer. She
died a few years ago,” Emma said, looking through the file she’d collected from the station, and the
few notes she’d made during phone calls, placed while the kids had been occupied by Mary
Margaret and the first helping of food. “No one seems to know her or remember her.”

“And the father?”
“There isn't one. At least not one that they know.”

“What does, uh, what does social services say?” Mary Margaret asked, and Emma could no longer look her friend in the eye, giving away her lack of following protocol. “You didn't report them.”

“I report them, I can't help them,” Emma insisted. “They go into the system.”

“The system that's supposed to help,” Mary Margaret offered naively.

“Yeah, says the woman who wasn't in it for sixteen years.” Emma couldn’t stop the embittered tone from creeping into her voice. “Do you know what happens? They get thrown into homes where they are a meal ticket. Nothing more. These families get paid for these kids, and as soon as they're too much work, they get tossed out and it all starts over again.”

“But they're not all like that,” Mary Margaret argued feebly, perhaps trying to convince herself more than Emma.

“All the ones I was in were.”

“So what then?” Mary Margaret questioned sympathetically.

“I want to look for their father,” Emma revealed, unable to keep the hope - that she totally blamed Mary Margaret for - out of her voice as she went on to explain. “They don't know him. He may not know they exist.”

“And you think if he knows, he'll want them?” Emma felt slightly deflated at her former roommate’s hesitant and carefully weighed response.

“I don't know,” Emma responded. Don’t do that, Killian’s words from the night before, telling her to not doubt herself, echoed in her mind. “But what I do know,” she continued with determination, “is it's hard enough finding foster families to take one kid that isn't theirs, let alone two. It's their best shot or.”

“We're gonna be separated?” a frightened voice interrupted.

Emma turned and looked into the tearful face of Ava. “No,” she assured, “that's not gonna happen.”

“Please. Please don't let it.”

Emma’s heart broke watching Ava turn to look at her brother, both unconvinced by Emma’s promise and clearly scared out of their wits. She brought her attention back to Mary Margaret who had a slightly incredulous look on her face; the remains of her response to Emma’s assertion that the twins wouldn’t be separated. The look only fueled Emma’s resolve. If Mary Margaret wouldn’t bring herself to believe in a happy ending for these kids, then Emma would have to believe enough for the both of them.

How’s that for change, Emma asserted silently. She left the loft to get to the Town Hall records office before they closed.

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Emma made it to the records room with little time to spare. After filling out the required paperwork - in triplicate - she was told that the files she was looking for had already been removed… by the Mayor herself. Terrific.
“Don’t worry, Ms. Swan. You can relax,” Regina quipped after Emma entered her office asking to see the files. “I’ve contacted social services. Turns out these kids are on their own. They need help.” Emma’s heart dropped at her words, this was exactly the situation she’d been trying to avoid.

“Which is exactly what I’m trying to do,” Emma asserted, not swayed one bit that the Mayor would actually give a damn about two orphaned kids. “I’m trying to find their father.”

“Well he doesn’t exist,” Regina stated, handing the files over to Emma.

“He has to.”

“Well, of course, biologically, he exists, but there’s no record of him,” Regina informed her, a fact that was backed up by the information, or lack thereof, in the file. “Which means we have no choice. These children need a home, so they will be put into the foster system.”

“Storybrooke has a foster system?” Emma questioned, unable to remove the skepticism at such a prospect from her voice.

“No, but I’ve contacted the state,” Regina replied, moving out from behind her desk to the wet bar on the other side of the room. Emma thought she could use something stronger than the juice Regina poured for herself. “Maine’s group homes, unfortunately, are filled, but they’ve put us in touch with two homes in Boston - a boys’ home and a girls’.”

“They’re separating them?”

“I don’t like it either, but we’ve got no choice. You’ll need to have them in Boston tomorrow night.”

“Me?”

“Well, you are the acting sheriff,” Regina told her smugly. “This is what sheriffs do. Yes, you’re taking them.”

“No,” Emma objected. “I promised them they wouldn’t be separated.”

“Well then, perhaps you should stop making promises you can’t keep,” the mayor admonished before taking a step towards Emma. “These children need a home,” she contended. “I’m just trying to find the best one.” Believing that was the end of the matter, Regina steered them to a new topic. “I have a few other tasks I need you to see to as well,” she said as she picked up a fresh stack of files. “I’ll need them complete before you leave for Boston, or else you’ll have to work Sunday to catch up.”

Emma knew she’d never be able to get the mayor to understand how important the Zimmer case was to her. She wasn’t sure that anyone could truly understand. The arm load of new duties weighing her down as she left Town Hall was nothing in comparison to the guilt and despair she felt in disappointing those kids. Once again, a familiar lilt brushed over her thoughts, reminding her to not second guess herself. It wasn’t too late. She had twenty-four hours to find the father, and she wasn’t going rest until she found him.

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Emma rubbed her eyes, the words blurred on the page in her hand, a clear sign that she needed another cup of coffee. She’d been at it all night. Searching file after file, and paper after paper, for some clue that would lead her to the identity of Ava and Nicholas’ father.

Killian had brought back issues of The Mirror the evening before. They’d spent hours combing through announcements, public interest pieces, and articles. She’d finally sent him home at midnight.
with the promise that she’d head home as soon as she got things squared away for the next day.

She hadn’t.

“Any luck?” Henry asked as he made his way into the sheriff’s office. His tendency to simply show up where ever she was no longer surprising her.

“No,” she answered with a sigh.

“I know who they are,” he declared, opening his storybook as he espoused his theory. “A brother and sister, lost, no parents. Hansel and Gretel.” He laid the book before her, images of the fairytale children staring up at her from the pages.

“Anything in there about the dad?” she asked, playing along.

“Just that he abandoned them.”

“Great,” she mumbled, gathering up a few files and making her way to the file cabinet, since they hadn’t provided her with the answers she sought. “Sounds like a familiar story. Whoever this guy is, he could be in Laos by now.”

“No, he's here,” Henry said, following her as she moved through the station.

“How do you know that?”

“'Cause no one leaves Storybrooke. No one comes here. No one goes. It's just the way it is.”

“I came here.”

“Because you're special. You're the first stranger here. Ever.”

“Right,” she said, closing the file cabinet drawer. “I forgot. Well, if he's around here anywhere, I'm gonna find him.”

Emma settled in a chair to go through a new stack of files. Henry hopped up to sit on the desk next to her, a tentative wobble in his voice as he asked, “Can you tell me about him?”

“I don't know anything yet,” Emma answered offhandedly, her attention affixed to the pages before her, and not the curiously anxious boy beside her.

“Not their father,” Henry corrected hesitantly. “Mine.”

Emma’s head snapped up, a wash of cold dread swept through her in the face of those nervous, yet eager brown eyes.

“Told you about your parents,” Henry reminded her. “Please?”

Emma warred with herself, worrying her lip for several moments while she considered what to do. She should have seen this coming. Of course Henry would want to know about his biological father, but by the look in his eyes Emma could tell that his hopeful expectation of the man would not be fulfilled by the truth.

“Henry,” she began softly, turning her chair in order to give him her full attention. “I’d love to tell you that your dad was this amazing guy. That he was someone noble like a firefighter, or relief aid worker. But I can’t tell you that. I promised I’d always be honest with you, Henry.” Henry’s brow furrowed, and Emma spoke her next words as delicately as she could, knowing it was not the tale
he’d been hoping for. “The truth is… I was very young. I thought we were in love, that he loved me. But he didn’t. He set me up for a crime he committed. That’s how I ended up in jail. I didn’t find out about you until after I was already in prison. Long after he left.”

Emma gave Henry a moment to process her words, fighting the urge to fill the uncomfortable silence, and wondering if she’d made the right decision to tell him the truth, rather than some fantasy. Oh, how she wished she had a fairytale story to share with him. Henry deserved that. He deserved the kind of father who would have fought for them, who would see all the special qualities Henry possessed, and encourage and support him even when his curse theories got a bit out of hand. Someone who wanted to spend time with him, and teach him all the things boys should learn from that special male figure in their life. She wanted Henry to have everything she didn’t growing up, and while he’d had a mother (a poor excuse for one in her opinion, but a mother nonetheless), and now had her, it pained Emma that this equally important role would go unfulfilled in his life.

“So he doesn’t even know that I exist?” Henry questioned in a small voice, eyes cast down to the floor.

“No,” she answered. “And he doesn’t deserve to know. He once told me something, Henry. Something someone said to him when he was a kid. ‘A man unwilling to fight for what he wants, deserves what he gets.’” she quoted. “Those were his words. He didn’t think I was worth fighting for, so he doesn’t deserve to know a terrific kid like you.” Henry nodded, but still wouldn’t look up from the floor, and Emma’s doubts began to creep in. “Should I not have told you?” she asked. “Should I have lied and let you go on believing good things about him?”

“No,” Henry replied, finally meeting her eyes. “I’m glad you told me the truth. I’d rather know the truth. I’m sorry he did that to you.”

“Oh, Henry.” Emma reached out and placed a hand on his knee. “You never have to apologize for anything he did or didn’t do.”

“Do you know where he is now?”

“No,” she answered sharply, then grimaced at the small flinch Henry gave at her response. “No, I don’t know where he is, and even if I did…” I wouldn’t let him within a hundred miles of you, she finished to herself.

They sat quietly, engrossed in their own thoughts and inner turmoil the subject had brought upon them. The shrill sound of the station phone jarred them from their thoughts.

Emma gave Henry a small, apologetic smile before she reached over to answer. “Sheriff’s station.”

“Oh, Emma! It’s Mary Margaret. You weren’t answering your cell.”

Emma groaned. She didn’t have her charger at the station so she never plugged her phone in, which meant it was most likely dead.

“Look, I might have a lead on Ava and Nicholas’ father.”

“What? How?”

“Well, I saw Ava holding something. She seemed rather protective of it. When I asked what it was, she said it was something that had belonged to her mom. She let me take a look at it, and it’s this old, broken compass. Ava said she thinks her mom kept it because it had belonged to their father. I know it’s a long shot, but maybe there’s a way to track him down through the compass?”
“Mary Margaret that’s amazing!” Emma said, a wide smile encompassed her face over the first real lead she had. “I’ll be right there, and maybe you can help me come up with a list of places to check in town.”

Emma hurriedly hung up the phone and shot out of her chair. “Henry, I’ve got to get over to Mary Margaret’s. She thinks she has a lead. Wanna come with?”

“Um, no,” Henry replied, surprising Emma. “Actually, Killian was going to take me out on the Jolly today. He said it’s the last chance we’re likely to get before the weather turns bad.”

“He’s taking you sailing?” she replied incredulously. “Does Regina know?”

“I doubt it.” Henry shrugged before he hopped off her desk.

Emma made a mental note to talk to Killian about that later. Right now she needed to get a jump on that compass.
The cold sea air burned in Killian’s lungs. It was probably a tad too cold for pleasure sailing, but Killian couldn’t pass up the opportunity to take Henry out one last time. They hadn’t been out since before Killian regained his memories, which made today’s excursion all the more meaningful for him. Based on the lad’s quiet and distant demeanor, however, Killian wasn’t so sure Henry felt the same.

“Something on your mind, lad? You’ve been awfully quiet,” Killian asked as he navigated them around the bay, while being mindful of the boundary line that encompassed the curse’s purview out upon the waters.

“Sorry, Killian. I’m just… I don’t…”

“Henry, my boy,” Killian began softly. He could now see just how upset Henry was, a shimmer of tears pooled in his mournful brown eyes. “If something is troubling you, I’d like to try and help, but only if you wish to discuss it.”

Killian waited patiently for Henry to decide whether or not share his burden.

“Emma is trying to find Hansel and Gretel’s father. And it got me thinking about… about my father.”

Killian’s hands tightened on the wheel. Fathers. This was never a subject Killian was very good with.

“And did you ask Emma about him?”

“Yeah.”

“And?”

“Ever since Mary Margaret gave me the storybook I’ve wondered if I was like Emma. That my parents had to give me up for my own good, because they were brave, noble people.”

“Would you not consider that true of Emma?”
“Well… yeah, of course,” Henry agreed.

“So it’s the man that fathered you, then. He isn’t who you hoped he’d be?” Killian didn’t want to press the boy too much, but he couldn’t help his own nagging curiosity about the man who had sired him. The man Emma had once been involved with so intimately.

“He doesn’t even know I exist,” Henry whimpered. “He set my mom up to go to jail and left her there. She didn’t know she was pregnant until later. He was a thief who abandoned my mom. Abandoned me.”

The muscle in Killian’s jaw ticked furiously, his knuckles nearly white with rage. What sort of man would have been fool enough to cast someone like Emma Swan aside? Killian knew that Swan had been underage at the start of her incarceration. No more than a child. Used and left to rot for this despicable excuse of a man’s crimes, only to find out that he had left her with child.

“I’m so sorry, Henry,” Killian sympathized. “A man like that… he doesn’t deserve to know who you are, Henry. He doesn’t deserve to have you call him father. You deserve to have someone who would fight for you, Henry. A man—”

“A man unwilling to fight for what he wants, deserves what he gets.”

Killian felt a prickling of cold apprehension creep over him. His heart slammed in his chest causing the rush of his pulse to sound in his ears.

“Henry. Where did you hear that expression?”

“My mom told me it was something he said to her once. That someone had said it to him when he was a boy.”

Killian looked over the boy he’d known for the better part of four years with fresh eyes, and was stunned. How had he never noticed before? The same brown eyes, the same color hair, the familiar expressions all displayed in stark familiarity with another boy Killian once knew. A boy he’d first seen in a dimly lit tavern when he was no older than Henry had been when Killian had first caught the lad on his ship. If he hadn’t been cursed at the time, if his memories had been present he might have come to see the resemblance sooner.

The resemblance that bore testimony to who Henry’s father truly was.

_Baelfire._

_The Crocodile’s son. Milah’s son._

The boy Killian had once been willing to change his entire life for. Forsake his revenge and start anew, if only the boy could have found it in his heart to forgive Killian for tearing his family apart.

A tempest of guilt swirled in Killian’s gut as he glanced over at the crossed out Port and Starboard markings carved into the helm. Killian had taught Bae all he knew of a seafaring life. A pirate’s life. How to steal and swindle. How to use people for one’s own purposes, trading their misfortune for his gain.

Seems he’d been an apt pupil.

Of course, Bae had endured harsh lessons in his youth. First from his mother’s abandonment, then his father’s, and then Killian’s. He’d traded Bae’s freedom in order to curry favor with Pan, and though he’d made attempts to make it up to the boy over the course of their years in Neverland,
Killian had left him behind once more when Pan refused to allow the boy to leave with him that final time.

Yes, Bae had been the recipient of a scoundrel’s education, with Killian as his private tutor. Now he was face to face with the fruits of those labors, a lad whose effervescent belief and hope were now dimmed as he stood there deflated. A lad whose mother was a wary woman, guarded and armored as a result of a broken heart from a man Killian had a hand in molding.

“Killian?”

He heard Henry question, snapping his attention back to the lad.

“Aren’t you going to answer that?”

Killian became aware of his cell phone ringing and pulled it from his back pocket. SWAN flashed across the screen, and Killian tamped down the shame and remorse rising within him as he answered the call.

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Emma was already waiting when Killian made his way back to the pawn shop. She’d called to ask if he could meet her there. Something about an object she hoped he might have record of in the shop. Henry had filled in the blanks that it involved her quest to find Hansel and Gretel’s father. Once they’d docked, Killian suggested that Henry go pay the children a visit, that they might could use a friend about now.

“Thanks for meeting me, Killian,” Emma greeted. “Sorry to cut the sailing trip short.”

“No worries, Swan,” he replied. “We weren’t going to be out much longer anyway.”

“Yeah, about that,” Emma began hesitantly. “Maybe next time you could run it by me before you whisk Henry off like that. I get not wanting to ask Regina, because she’s just going to say no, but-”

“My apologies, Swan. I wasn’t thinking,” Killian offered. Emma was right. Things were different now. He and Henry didn’t have the right to just go anywhere and do whatever they pleased without Emma’s approval. She was the boy’s mother after all. “I suppose I’m just accustomed to not having to run our adventures by anyone. I never gave a damn about Regina’s approval, because, as you said, she never would have given it. It’s pretty much just been he and I for nearly four years, so I-”

“No really, it’s fine,” Emma interrupted, “I don’t have a problem with you spending time with Henry. I think… I think it’s great that he has you.” A look as though she’d come to some sort of realization encompassed her expressions, and she offered him a soft smile.

Killian flushed, and his heart swelled at Emma’s endorsement. Henry had come to mean so much to him, and it meant the world to Killian to know that Emma trusted him with her son.

“How is he doing?” Emma asked. Killian furrowed his brows and gave a confused tilt of his head, which prompted her to add, ”Henry. How is he?” She shuffled her feet a bit before planting them. Her arms crossed over her chest and she rocked back on heels, busying herself with surveying the pawn shop as she continued, “Did he, uh. Did he mention anything about our conversation about his father?”

Killian’s hands flexed and clenched beside him, and he swallowed heavily around the lump of guilt lodged in his throat. “Aye. He did. I’m so sorry you were hurt that way, Swan.”
Emma tucked an errant strand of hair behind her ear and wet her lips, her gaze trained on the counter beside them. “It’s not like you had anything to do with it,” she dismissed, unaware of just how much of a hand he very well might have had in Baelfire’s reprehensible behaviour. “Besides, it was a long time ago. I’ve had time to deal with it. Right now, I’m worried about how Henry is dealing with it.”

Killian doubted very much that Swan had ever properly dealt with the man’s betrayal and abandonment, more likely she’d buried it deep within herself, only to quarry it later in order to erect the walls that surrounded her heart.

“The lad is understandably upset. Hearing what his father did, who he was… a boy wants a father he can look up to and be proud of. A man he can admire and count on, but,” Killian added, taking a step forward and catching Emma’s eyes when a crumpled expression of sadness crossed over her face, “Henry’s a resilient lad. Give him time to process the news and make his peace with it. In time he’ll see that it’s better off knowing the truth, and being spared from having someone like that in his life.” Someone like me, Killian thought bitterly. He was no better than Bae, really. What right did he have to want a place in Henry’s life? 

Emma quietly nodded after taking in his words. A small smile pulled at the corners of her mouth and despite his own torments, Killian was heartened to see a measure of peace replace the worry in her countenance.

“You’re right. Thank you, Killian,” she replied softly. “I’m glad he’s at least had you.” Killian blanched at her words, but his reaction didn’t deter her from continuing to speak what was on her mind. “If Henry can’t ever have his biological father in his life, and believe me, I hope he never does, it’s comforting to know that you’ve been there for him, and that you will be there for him. You mean a lot to him, Killian.”

Killian’s cheeks burned with emotion, and the swelling of his heart had become almost painful. He forced his feelings of guilt and bitterness aside. He might have played a part in shaping the man who had abandoned Henry’s mother, ultimately causing her to make the choice to give him up, but, as Swan had said, he at least had been there for the lad. Would continue to be there for him. To fight for him. And for the woman Baelfire was foolish enough to leave behind. Killian would never stop fighting for them, both of them.

“Henry means a lot to me, too,” Killian professed, his throat tight from the repressed declarations he was tempted to reveal. Declarations of how much she had come to mean to him, and how he wanted to be a better man for her. For her and Henry. And for himself, as well.

But now was not the time for such declarations. There was still Regina’s curse, and Emma’s belief, and all the happy endings hanging in the balance that needed tending to. Starting with Hansel and Gretel’s.

Killian’s eyes fell to the object in Emma’s hand, and he focused his attention on the matter at hand, lest he start confessing all that beat within his heart in that moment.

“Is that the object you came to see me about?”

“Oh, uh,” Emma stammered, seeming to have been pulled from her own set of distractions. “Yeah. It’s an old compass. I’ve been all over town and no one can remember ever seeing it, or selling anything resembling it, so I hoped you might have record of it.”

Emma placed the compass in his hand and as he brought it up to take a closer look the swirling visions of an unlocked memory began to manifest within his mind. Flashes of a woodcutter and a deal that would provide him with an enchanted compass ensuring his family would always be able to
find one another. Killian recognized the visage of the woodcutter immediately.

“Well,” he began, clearing his throat as he made his way behind the counter to pull out a file box. “Let’s see what we can find out, shall we? We’re fortunate my predecessor kept extensive records.” Killian made a show of flipping through the index cards, the blank index cards, for a few moments before declaring, “Ah! Here we are.”

“You found it?”

“Indeed,” Killian answered. “It seems this compass belonged to Michael Tillman.”

“Do you know who he is?” Emma asked in hopeful anticipation

“As a matter of fact, I do,” Killian replied with a smug smile. “He’s the town mechanic. His shop is just around the corner. I can walk you over and introduce you, if you’d like.”

“Oh my God, Killian. Thank you!” Emma reached out and placed her hand on his left where it rested on the counter. A current shot up his arm leaving prickles of awareness under his skin. He met her gaze and could see from the stunned expression and slight part in her lips that she had felt it, too. It wasn’t unusual for Killian to feel something spark between them whenever they shared a close proximity. He’d become all too accustomed to the visions that would be released, or the stirring he’d feel in various parts of his body and soul just from her light touch or mere presence.

This was different, though.

It was as if he could feel the joy, the elation, and the relief she had felt at the prospect of being able to reunite those children with their father. A force of energy that seemed to emit from within her, encompassing them both within the hope that had broken free from her bottled up emotions, but one that dissipated just as quickly as it had manifested.

“It’s my pleasure, Swan,” Killian murmured. He began to turn his hand, hoping to hold hers within its grip, perhaps offer a soothing caress over her knuckles with his thumb, but she pulled hers away quickly, dropping her gaze to the compass that sat on the counter between them.

“Right. Well. We should… we should get going,” Emma insisted, pocketing the compass and looking anywhere but at him.

“Right,” Killian responded, a disheartened feeling from her guarded behavior replaced the joy that had coursed through him moments ago. “Shall we?” Killian gestured toward the door and followed her out, leaving the shop in Smee’s capable hands.

A strained silence practically echoed between them as they made their way to Tillman’s garage. Each engrossed in their own thoughts concerning the shared moment that had occurred between them. Killian could feel the shift in Emma as she refocused her attentions. Whatever her thoughts had been about the strange occurrence, they were pushed aside while Killian introduced her to the woodcutter, Michael Tillman.

Killian did not attempt to interfere as Swan dropped the news of the man’s twins in his lap. He had planned to simply observe with detached interest, not wishing to add any further pressure to an already delicate and urgent situation. What Killian had not been prepared for, was the reopening of centuries old wounds by the man’s steadfast refusal to acknowledge, much less take responsibility for his own children.

Swan’s words of the twins’ plight as she recounted their homelessness ever since their mother passed away, their living in an abandoned house because they did not wish to be separated from each other,
and how they were about to be shipped off to Boston, unless the man stepped up and took responsibility for them, had Killian’s hands clenching and unclenching in time with his jaw.

“Look I can barely manage this garage. I can't manage two kids,” Tillman argued. “And why are you so sure they're mine?”

“Besides the timing?” Emma quipped before removing the compass from her pocket and holding it out toward him. “Have you ever seen this?”

“I lost this,” the man whispered, his voice heavy with something akin to affection or wonder as he held the compass in his hand.

“Let me guess,” Emma continued. “12 years and 9 months ago?”

Tillman’s head snapped up, a look of stunned acceptance passing over his features.

“I know it's a lot. Believe me, I know,” Emma empathized as she took a step closer to the man. “A month ago, a kid I gave up for adoption showed up on my doorstep, asking for help with... something. And I ended up moving here, for him.”

“I heard about that. The mayor's son,” Tillman replied, his moment of shock giving over to the resolve he’d held moments ago. “But staying in town is... it's a lot different than taking him in.”

“I don't have my kid because I don't have a choice. You do,” Emma countered, her voice catching on the emotion Killian knew she was valiantly trying to keep at bay, and his heart broke for her. “Those kids did not ask to be brought into this world. You brought them into this world. You and their mother. And they need you. And if you choose not to take them, you are gonna have to answer for that every day of your life. And sooner or later, when they find you... because believe me, they will find you, you're gonna have to answer to them.”

Killian shut his eyes and tried to will away the memory of his own experience with such an accounting from the father who’d abandoned him.

“I'm really sorry. I am,” the man said as he handed the compass back to Emma, “But I don't know anything about being a dad.”

Killian watched the man turn to leave, a lead weight of bitterness, rage, and anguish settled in his gut at the man’s dismissal.

“If it's a good home you're looking for, it's not with me,” Tillman professed before making his way into his office, closing the door firmly behind him.

The despaired look of rejection on Emma’s face gripped at Killian’s heart. He wanted nothing more than to go after the man and beat him until he saw sense, or just beat him for being an utter bastard. No. This isn’t Tillman’s fault. It’s the curse, Killian reminded himself, which was the only reason he wasn’t giving over to his baser instincts. That, and because it would do nothing to alleviate the guilt and disappointment currently plaguing Emma as she came to grips with having to relay the news to the children.

“Swan?” Killian hesitated, moving toward her slowly, unsure of how she would react to this devastating setback. “Are you alright, love?”

Emma snapped out of her melancholy demeanor and straightened her shoulders. “I’m fine,” she lied, marching past him and back towards Main Street. She’d pulled her phone from her pocket and dialed before Killian could catch up to her.
Emma stomped down Main Street. With each heavy footfall she tried to tamp down the raw sting of rejection Michael Tillman’s words had dredged up. She knew that his refusal to acknowledge his children and take responsibility for them had nothing to do with her personally, but she couldn’t help but be hurt by them. She didn’t have time to give in to her own insecurities, though. Those kids needed her to be strong. Henry needed her to be strong. Not to mention, she was unwilling to let Killian see yet another broken piece of herself. He already knew that Henry’s father hadn’t thought her worth sticking around for, and although she was sure he knew about her lack of parents - seeing as how Henry kept insisting Snow White and Prince Charming had sent her through a magical wardrobe - she didn’t need him to see how broken she truly was. She didn’t need, or want, the man’s pity, or worse, for him to realize that there was a reason everyone left her, and decide she wasn’t worth the investment.

Emma had her phone pressed tightly against her ear, simultaneously willing Mary Margaret to answer, while hoping she wouldn’t, so Emma didn’t have to say the words. *She failed.*

“Hello?”

“Hey, Mary Margaret. It's me. Are you where you can talk?”

“Is everything okay?”

“Don't say anything in front of the kids, but no, it's not.”

Emma could hear movement, the opening and closing of a door, and the shuffling sounds of the phone being repositioned before her friend spoke again.

“Okay, I stepped out into the hall. What’s going on? Did you find their father?”

“Yeah, we did,” she answered tightly. “He doesn’t want the kids.”

“Oh, Emma,” Mary Margaret sighed sorrowfully. “I’m sorry, but at least you did everything you could. Are you on your way back to tell them?”

Emma stopped and looked up at the building before her. She and Killian had made it back to the outside of the loft, but Emma couldn’t bring herself to make her way into the building.

“I can’t,” Emma choked out, holding back a sob. She felt Killian step up beside her, but she couldn’t look at him. *You have to keep it together, Emma.* “Because I’ll only be telling them that the false hope I gave them is exactly that.

“The truth can be painful, Emma, but it can also be cathartic.”

“I agree on the painful part,” she said. Her voice sounded smaller and more vulnerable than she wished it to, given her audience.

“Well, hey, look,” Mary Margaret replied in an attempt to rally her spirits, “you told Henry the truth about his father. About what he did... and he's handling it okay.”

“Yeah, but he doesn’t have to handle it alone. He has you, and me, and Killian,” Emma felt a surge of gratitude course through her even as the misery of the twins’ reality settled onto her. “I take those kids to Boston and they won’t even have each other.”

“So what do we do now, Emma?”
“I don’t know. I just wish I had more time to come up with another idea.”

“Maybe there isn’t another idea. Maybe you just have to accept the fact that you’ve done all you could.” Emma blinked back tears of frustration, knowing Mary Margaret was most likely correct. “I need to get back in there. I’ll have them ready to go when you get here.”

Emma stood on the sidewalk completely numb, awareness of Killian’s concerned scrutiny began to prickle under her skin as he stepped closer.

“Swan, I-”

“Shouldn’t you be on the interstate?” a curt voice questioned.

Emma and Killian spun around in time to see the mayor approaching. “What are you doing here?” Killian grumbled darkly.

“Seeing to it that acting sheriff Swan does her job.”

“You know you don’t need to check up on me,” Emma asserted. “I know what I have to do.”

“Really? Because those kids are supposed to be in Boston tonight. I assume you’re behind schedule because you were finishing up those tasks I gave you yesterday. Because they have to be completed by Monday morning, and I’d hate for you to have to come in and work on your only day off.”

Regina brushed past them with an infuriating smirk set on her lips after Emma’s expression all but told her she’d forgotten about the stack of work she’d left ignored all day. Damn it! All the exhaustion from long hours, missed sleep, emotional turmoil of painful revelations, reminders of betrayal and abandonment, as well as the resentment and anger over the fact that no one could ever possibly understand, prompted Emma to raise her phone with the intent of smashing it against the sidewalk.

Killian’s reflexes were quick. He grasped her wrist and plucked her phone from her hand, saving it from certain destruction. “I know you’re angry Swan, but there are better ways to channel your frustrations about the twins than letting rage overcome you.”

“Really? Like what?” she snapped. “You know what, nevermind. I don’t expect you to get it.”

“Of course I get it,” he snapped back. “You don’t want to abandon those kids the way you were abandoned.”

Emma froze in shocked paralysis before remembering that his words were probably based on assumptions, given the limited history he knew about her. “Henry, right? Because he keeps saying my parents put me through a magic wardrobe to spare me from the curse. That’s why you think you know me so w-”

“Even if Henry had never mentioned his belief that Snow White and Prince Charming are your parents,” Killian interrupted. “I would still have known, Emma.”

“How?”

“That look in your eye,” he stated quietly. “The look one gets when they’ve been left alone for too long. I recognize it.”

“Really?” Emma scoffed, crossing her arms over her chest in an effort to mask how close he was in his assessment. “From where?”
Killian took a step toward her and met her hard gaze with one of soft understanding. “From the mirror, love. Every time I look in one, I see it in my own eyes.”

Emma swallowed thickly around the rising emotion making its way from her chest up to her throat. Killian’s forget-me-not eyes expressed the absolute truth of his words.

He did get it. Got her. “Killian. I-”

“Emma! Killian!” Henry called out as he ran up to them. “You can't take them to Boston. They can't leave Storybrooke, Emma. They can't. Something bad will happen if you try and take them over the town line.”

Henry was right. Something bad would happen to the twins if they left Storybrooke. They would lose one another, and the look Killian spoke of, the one Emma had already seen flickering in their eyes, would only intensify in its permanency. There had to be something else she could do. But what?

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Emma leaned against the broke down cruiser and waited for Michael Tillman to show up in his wrecker. She knew this was a gamble, but it was the last play she had to try and keep the kids together. The approaching headlights of the tow truck washed over Emma, the cruiser, and the two frightened kids huddled in the car’s backseat. Tillman exited the cab of his truck and made his way towards them. Emma moved to meet him halfway.

“Is that them?” Tillman asked, his head gesturing in the twins’ direction

“That’s them,” Emma confirmed.

“And your car? It's fine?” he further questioned with a slight accusatory tone lacing his words.

“I just wanted you to see them. Just once,” Emma confessed, and then pressed on with hopeful urgency when she sensed the man’s resolve might be waning. “I didn't think I could do it either. I gave up Henry 'cause I wanted to give him his best shot. When I saw that he didn't have it, I couldn't leave. I was just as scared, more so probably. But once I saw him, got to know him, I couldn't go back.”

Ava and Nicholas’ father took several steps forward, his eyes sweeping over the faces of the children - his children. He turned back and choked out the question, “You’re taking them? To Boston?”

“I don’t have to,” Emma assured. An unspoken question of her own hanging between them.

“No,” he affirmed a moment later. “You don’t.”

Emma watched as the man approached the car, opened the backdoor and then crouched down to speak with his children. She stepped to the side to afford them a bit of privacy. It was only as she stepped out of the beam of the truck’s headlights that she became aware of another person’s presence.

“Jones? What are you doing here?”

“I was with Mr. Tillman when he received your call,” Killian answered. A smirk and amused brow lifted in tandem when he added, “I had a feeling you might have been engaging in a bit of trickery in order to get him to face his decision. Well done, love.”
“Thanks,” she huffed lightly, a blush creeping up her neck at his approval, before the rest of his response hit her. “Wait. Why were you with him? You weren’t… please tell me you didn’t threaten him or something.”

“I assure you, Swan. I only went to talk with him.”

“About what exactly?”

Killian hesitated for a few moments before answering. The tension and discomfort over the prospect of what he was about to share radiated off him as he took in a deep breath and began his tale. “My father abandoned my brother and I when I was just a boy. He was a fugitive on the run, and I guess Liam and I were slowing him down. He traded us for a means of escape when faced with certain capture.”

“Traded you? Like, human trafficking?” Emma tried to keep her revulsion at the revelation out of her voice, but she wasn’t sure she had been successful based on the look that crossed his chiseled features.

“I suppose you could term it as such.” Killian only paused long enough to take a fortifying breath, before he pressed on, “I wanted Mr. Tillman to understand that the only way I was able to endure the abandonment, betrayal, and subsequent atrocities was because I had my brother beside me. That his choice to not accept responsibility for the twins meant they would be ripped from one another. I wanted him to know the reality of having the person you thought you could always cling to, taken from you.”

“Your brother,” Emma stated. By the mere fact that he was standing before her, Emma knew that Kilian had somehow managed to free himself from whatever hell his father had left him in, but somehow she just knew things had not ended up as well for his brother. “What happened?”

“He died. It wasn’t until after we’d been able to escape our… situation, but he was all I had after our father left. I thought it was important for Tillman to hear things from that perspective. You were able to speak to him as one who was blindsided with the responsibility of parenthood, and I was able to speak with him as one who knows the pain and anger of willful, cold abandonment. Not that you couldn’t have done th-”

“No. Your experience probably hit closer to home than mine. I never knew them. My parents. I don’t really know what happened, or why they left me on the side of the road. You knew your father. You know he chose to leave. It probably impacted Tillman more coming from you.”

“Don’t sell your efforts short, love. He wasn’t convinced even as we made our way out here. Not until he fell into your scheme and saw them.” Killian gazed at her with a shine of wonder in his eyes, the purging of his past hurts from his soul left him more at ease, which allowed him to once again don that trademark smirk as he quipped, “I don’t mean to upset you Emma, but I think we make quite the team.”

Emma smiled and knocked his shoulder with her own. She couldn’t help but be relieved when Tillman and the twins approached them. After confirming that he was taking Ava and Nicholas home, Emma and Killian got back in her cruiser and headed towards town to get her bug so they could set off for their respective houses.

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Emma turned them down the road that led to their shared drive, and broke the companionable silence that had settled between them. “Do you maybe wanna come in and have some coffee… or
Killian chuckled. They could both certainly use a nice stiff drink after the day they’d had; and although he would’ve loved nothing more than to remain in her presence, he wasn’t sure he could trust himself to keep things strictly platonic between them. Given how emotionally raw and vulnerable the day had left them both, he could only see things progressing into dangerously intimate territory if left alone with nothing more than the comfort of one another and a half bottle of rum.

“What the hell is Mary Margaret doing here?” Swan questioned aloud before he had a chance to respond to her offer of a nightcap.

“Only one way to find out,” Killian replied. With the presence of the princess, Killian felt more at ease accepting Emma’s invitation. “Shall we go in and find out? I’d be only too happy to join you and Miss Blanchard for a drink.”

The mouth watering aroma that greeted them as Swan’s door swung open, made him even more grateful to have accepted Emma’s invitation. It had been too long since he had truly enjoyed a proper home cooked meal. If I ever have… maybe before mother passed?

“Hey,” Mary Margaret chirped as she turned to see the two of them coming through the entry way.

“What are you doing here?”

“I thought you might need some comfort food to come home to,” Mary Margaret explained as she pulled items from the oven, “but I wasn’t expecting you so soon. What happened?” she questioned. Her curious eyes bounced between he and Swan.

“Their dad showed up,” Emma declared proudly, and the princess’ mouth dropped open, her gaze swinging over to him as if seeking confirmation.

“Aye, it’s true,” he attested. “Mr. Tillman changed his mind.”

“Changed his mind? Just like that?”

“He might have had a little nudge,” Emma confessed while exchanging a conspiratorial smile with Killian.

Killian and Emma shared the tale of their search and the subsequent reunion between the twins and their father, while they enjoyed the meal the princess had prepared for them. The more personal details he and Swan had shared over the course of the day remained just between them, however. Killian caught Emma’s eye a few times as she seemed to be regarding him with a fresh estimation; one that spoke of the new camaraderie they now shared in knowing they were truly spirits of a kindred nature.

Dinner finished and the mess cleared away, the trio poured themselves a drink and retired to Emma’s living room.

“They found their father,” Mary Margaret continued to muse as she took a seat on the sofa next to Emma. “That’s great.”

“I wonder what that would be like,” Emma pondered aloud.

Killian watched mother and daughter contently settle themselves next to one another and couldn’t help the sly smile that crept to his lips when he offered, “Maybe you’ll find out.”
Emma hummed a disbelieving sound, and cast a doubtful look over at him in the leather club chair he’d taken for his own whenever he spent time in her home.

“You can't give up,” Mary Margaret encouraged.

“I don't know,” Emma sighed. “I kinda think giving up might be the best plan. I think I need to let go.”

“No, you don't,” Mary Margaret and Killian replied in unintended synchronization, then exchanged smiles at the shared thought.

“Really?” Emma argued. “If they wanted to know me, they wouldn't make it so hard to look.”

“Maybe,” Killian acknowledged, his focus set on the drink he swirled in his glass, lest Emma begin to suspect that his words were more than simple encouragement. “But maybe there are other reasons.”

“He’s right,” the princess agreed. “Maybe there is an explanation.”

“If there is, it's something crazy,” Emma muttered. “Something even crazier than Henry’s theory.” Killian looked up in time to see Emma’s pointed look in his direction, which caused him to shift uncomfortably in his seat.

“What's Henry's theory?” Mary Margaret asked.

“Well,” Emma began hesitantly. “That my parents put me in a magical wardrobe and sent me to this world to save them.”

“And who does he think they are?”

“Well... you, for one.”

“Me?”

“Well... Snow White,” Emma clarified.

“Snow White has a kid?”

“Apparently, that book you gave him? Not exactly the stories in the most traditional sense.” Killian couldn’t stop himself from snorting into his glass of rum.

“I have a kid,” the princess mused. “You'd think I'd remember that.”

“Yeah, you’d think,” Emma quipped.

Mary Margaret studied Emma’s face with a sharp eye. “You do kind of have my chin,” she stated.

For a moment Killian wondered if the woman was truly seeing the resemblance he’d long come to identify between mother and daughter. That is, until the two dissolved into a fit of giggles over the perceived ridiculousness of it all.

“I’d better go. It’s getting late,” the princess professed after catching her breath from the moment of their shared amusement.

While she slipped her coat on, Mary Margaret’s interest fell to something draped over the back of the sofa. She reached out to take a closer look, and Killian realized almost immediately what the princess
was holding. Lovingly knitted in stark white yarn, with a purple ribbon threaded around its edges, and the name *Emma* stitched in the same royal hue, the item could only be Swan’s baby blanket.

“What a pretty blanket,” Mary Margaret complimented with a curious tone.

“Thanks,” Emma replied from the door, where she waited to bid her friend good-bye.

By the way the princess was studying the blanket, and holding it with such delicate regard, Killian silently questioned whether it might have sparked something within her. Snow White’s eyes flicked up and met his, causing Killian to hold his breath in hopeful anticipation.

“Good night, Killian,” she chirped politely, placing the blanket back on the couch and walking to the door.

Killian let out a disappointed sigh as Mary Margaret left. His frustrations over the damnable curse and how to break it prompted him to throw back the rest of his drink.

Killian saw that Emma’s glass was also empty, and though he should probably take his leave as well, seeing as their *chaperone* had just left, Killian found himself asking, “Care for another drink, love?”

“No, thanks.”

“Why?” He smiled up into the pensive expression she wore as she stood in the center of the room. “Afraid you’ll find me even more irresistibile after a few libations?”

“No,” she huffed amusedly. “There’s a call I need to make.” Killian quirked a brow in question, and Emma answered with a smirk. “I’ve got to give Regina the good news, and tell her to let Boston know that their group homes are no longer needed.”

A wide grin broke over Killian’s face. “Make sure to let Henry know as well,” he reminded as he collected his things. “And then get some rest, love. You look exhausted.”

“Thanks,” she deadpanned. “It’s from all that lack of sleep.”

“I’m serious, Emma,” he chided. “You need your rest, duty be damned.”

“I need to stay on Regina’s good side if I’m going to get her to agree to Thanksgiving,” she argued, and then waved him off when he opened his mouth to protest further. “It’s fine. I’m fine. I can handle it.”

Killian believed Swan capable of a great many things, but as much as he wanted to believe her, he couldn’t shake the sense that something bad would happen if she continued to push herself to these extremes. Emma might have been willing to open herself up to certain types of help over the past weeks as it related to the house, or even that day with finding the twins’ father, but Killian knew how important it was to her that she fight this battle with Regina on her own. To fight for her place in Henry’s life on her own two feet. For that reason, Killian was choosing to honor Emma’s wish that he stay out of the quarrel, but if things didn’t change soon, he wouldn’t hesitate to intervene. There were factors at play which Emma had not yet come to believe in, and Killian couldn’t shake the cold sense of dread that crept up his spine. He feared that Emma’s continued denial of being the Saviour would be the thing that would cost her - cost them all - in the end.
Chapter Seventeen

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out! And @flipperbrain made a lovely pic for our belated Christmas presents, both the banner and the pic can be found on Tumblr.

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

Killian is a godsend, that man truly is too good to be true. Emma continued to internally sing the man’s praises as she took another hearty swig of the life giving coffee. She didn’t know how he could be so in tune with her, and yet so clueless about some things. He had walked into the Sheriff’s Station earlier that morning, right as she was contemplating making a run to Granny’s on the way to her meeting with Regina. Now here she sat on the most uncomfortable chair imaginable, waiting for Her Majesty to deem her worthy of her time. They needed to go over all of the ridiculous assignments Emma had gone in on her only day off to complete, because they had to be done by this morning. No doubt she would be leaving here with a stack of more urgent things that had to be seen to personally by the acting sheriff, and only the acting sheriff.

“Sheriff, Mayor Mills will see you now.”

“Thank you.” Emma stood from the uncomfortable chair, balancing all of the files and her coffee, as she walked into the lavish and austere office, that could double as a throne room if the need arose.

“Acting Sheriff Swan, you can just set those on my desk there, and I will look at them later when I have the time. We need to discuss the preparations that you should already have put in place, as well as the preparations I’m sure you haven’t even thought about, for the severe weather that we’re expecting.”

Emma took the opportunity to jump in, “Actually, Madame Mayor, you don’t have to worry about that. I’m on top of it. I took it upon myself to draft a list of everything I’ve got in place, as well as the volunteers that are on standby, should they be needed.” Emma handed over the packet with a self-satisfied smile. As Regina looked it over, Emma could see her snarky eyebrow of disbelief climb her forehead.

“Well, look at you, I bet you were a girl scout when you were growing up.” Regina sneered in disdain before she continued, “but if you had let me finish what I was saying, I was also going to inform you that all of these,” she paused for effect as she waved her hand in the direction of a stack of files three times as high as the one she’d brought in this morning, “just came in. They will all need to be seen to before I leave Wednesday afternoon, what with Thanksgiving being Thursday and all.”
“Seriously? All of *that, has* to be done by Wednesday?”

“I don’t believe I stuttered Ms. Swan… yes *all* of that must be done by Wednesday. That won’t be a problem, will it?”

“Nope. No problem at all, but speaking of Thanksgiving… I was hoping to talk to you, about being able to have Henry spend part of the day with me. Granny is doing a Friendsgiving dinner, and I was hoping to bring him with me.”

“Well now, that is quite the request Ms. Swan. I will have to think about it, you will receive your answer by the end of the day.” Regina looked back to what she was working on when Emma had walked in. “That is all Ms. Swan, good day. Don’t forget your files.”

Emma bit her tongue and plastered on a smile despite the fact that Regina wasn’t even looking at her, “Good day Madam Mayor.”

Killian stood at the far end of the counter in Granny’s waiting for his to-go lunch order. Given the pace at which Emma was having to work in order to keep up with Regina’s demands, he knew Swan wouldn’t take the time to eat unless he saw to it himself. So it was a bit of a welcomed shock to see the woman walk through the diner’s door, though the exhaustion he had seen earlier, evident in her face and countenance, seemed to sit even heavier upon her shoulders.

“Swan,” he called out grabbing her attention as he walked to meet her at the other end of the counter. “I was just about to bring you some lunch, but since you’re here why don’t we sit and enjoy a nice leisurely meal together.”

“You have to eat, Swan,” Killian countered in exasperation, stopping before her while leaving a respectable distance between them.

“I will.”

“Oh? When?” he asked, tilting his head to add emphasis to his disbelief.

“Later,” Emma snapped. A chagrined look crossed her features and her shoulders fell before she continued, “Look, Regina gave me all these new files that I have to look into by the end of the day Wednesday. So in addition to the storm preparations, and the *actual* duties and responsibilities of my job, I now have to canvas neighborhoods and get statements from residents about graffiti artist crime sprees, and holiday displays impeding walkways, and an aggressive looking deer that’s been spotted around town in the company of a skunk and a rabbit, so I’m a tad busy, Jones.”

“All the more reason to keep up your strength, love,” Killian persisted, taking an involuntary step towards her. “Perhaps I could assist you with some of that? I’ve battened down the hatches for many a storm, I could oversee the remaining preparations for you.”

“You’d really do that?”

“Of course, Swan. What are friends for?” He caught a quick look of what he hoped might be disappointment cross her face at the friend reference, and although that’s where things had to remain at the present, he didn’t want her to think he’d lost interest in the possibility of more. So with a seductive smirk and salacious arch of his brow he leaned in and purred, “We’ll just add it to the ever growing list of favors you owe me.”
“I believe it’s only one favor I’m indebted to you for,” she reminded with raised brows, a sly smile teasing the corner of her lips.

“Aye. I better make it a good one then.”

“Yep, because one is all you’re likely to ever get.”

“If you’d like,” Granny’s voice cut in, “I can get the two of you a room upstairs to go with this lunch order.” The stern looking woman plopped Killian’s to-go order on the counter, and gave them both a pointedly exasperated look. Killian hadn’t realized how close he and Emma had gravitated towards each other during their exchange, and his skin began to prickle in awareness of her proximity. They each took a step back, flustered and stammering in response to Granny’s words.

“Um…”

“We don’t need…”

“We’re not…”

“Yeah, yeah. Whatever,” Granny waved them off. “Just take the food before it gets cold.”

Killian grabbed the bag and passed it to Emma. After settling the bill he turned back to her, still a bit off kilter from their banter and scratched behind his ear as he steered them back on course.

“Right. So, about those storm preparations.”

“You’re sure you’re okay doing this?” Emma questioned, an attractive flush graced her cheeks betraying the effect their flirtatious moment had on her. “I know you’ve got a lot on your plate with the pawn shop and the paper.”

“It’s fine, Swan. William has things well in hand at the shop, and my new editor is working out brilliantly,” Killian fought against the flare of guilt that arose at the mention of his new editor. A woman he’d never expected to cross paths with again, and one he’d have to give quite an account of reckoning to once the curse broke. Pushing those thoughts aside for another time, Killian pressed on in his offer, “I am at your service, love.”

“Thank you,” Emma exhaled. “Then can you run some things over to the school for me? Volunteers are using the gymnasium to fill sandbags and I was suppose to have the supplies there by now. I’ve got to follow up on that graffiti thing, but then I could meet you back at the station and get you a list of things I could use you for.” Killian couldn’t help the instinctive smirk and brow response to her words, which made Emma scoff humorously, “You know what I mean.”

“Aye, love,” he replied with a chuckle. “I’ll deliver the items, check in with William, and meet you in a bit. But Granny was right.” He fixed her with a heated gaze and saw her breath catch before she wet her lips, her eyes wide in anticipation of his next words. “Best eat that before it gets cold,” he said with a wink after nodding toward the bagged lunch in her hand.

Emma rolled her eyes, her lips twitched into the beginnings of a smile, but the action was thwarted by a yawn that overtook her. Her weariness became apparent once more and Killian’s fists clenched. She couldn’t keep going like this.

Exiting the diner together, Killian followed Emma to her car and collected the supplies she needed him to drop off at the school. She stowed the lunch he’d purchased for her on the front seat and then ran back inside for the coffee she’d intended on acquiring when she’d first arrived, saying she would never make it through the day without it. As they parted ways Killian decided it was time to
intervene.

“What do you want, Hook,” Regina answered impatiently after Killian’s fourth call.

“Meet me at my pawn shop in half an hour.”

“I’m busy. I have a town to run, being Mayor and all.”

“Well, then allow me to rephrase the request, Your Majesty” Killian growled before applying a false cordiality to his tone. “Meet me at my pawn shop in half an hour, please.”

It took Killian longer to drop off the supplies at the school than he’d intended. Walking in on an adulterous scene, well adulterous to those who didn’t know they were cursed, and then having to listen to excuses and pleas for his discretion for ten minutes after Killian had declared it was none of his business had put a wrinkle in his timetable. It was only after handing off the supplies to Mary Margaret and promising David that they would grab that beer soon that Killian was able to head back to the pawn shop, albeit a few minutes later than he’d told Regina to meet him.

A few minutes that would end up costing him dearly.

Killian knew from the Mercedes parked in the alley that Regina had already arrived. Her voice cut through the shop as Killian entered through the backdoor, and her words made is stomach drop.

“What do you mean they’re for Henry’s new room. What new room?”

“The one at Sheriff Swan’s house,” Killian heard Smee answer. He rushed through the curtain that separated the front of the shop from the private workspace in the back to try and salvage the damage his first mate had just unknowingly inflicted.

“My apologies for keeping you waiting Madame Mayor,” Killian greeted nonchalantly as he directed Smee to the back room with a wave of his hand. He was going to have to have a conversation with the man about discretion.

“What the hell is the meaning of this?” Regina demanded, gesturing to the box that sat on the counter labeled For Henry. “Does that woman have a room for my son in that house you’ve put her up in?”

“How Sheriff Swan chooses to set up her new household is none of my affair,” Killian side-stepped. “I merely had William set some things aside that I thought Henry might be interested in. Shelves are getting a bit crowded.”

“It’s acting sheriff, and don’t even bother playing dumb. We both know nothing that woman does escapes your attention. You follow her around like a pathetic puppy dog,” Regina jabbed, but Killian wasn’t going to take the bait. Not this time.

“You’re right,” Killian responded. Regina’s eyebrows shot up into her hairline at his agreement. “Nothing about Emma escapes my attention, including the fact that you’re pushing her too hard.”

“What’s the matter, Captain?” Regina smirked. “I thought you wanted Graham out of the way. It isn’t my fault she isn’t up to the task of running the sheriff station on her own.”

“You know full well she’s more than capable, Regina. This isn’t about the job, its about you punishing Emma because she won’t bow down to you.”

“Oh? I don’t know about that,” Her Majesty countered coyly. “She’s jumping through my hoops rather nicely at the moment. She seems to think she’s proving some sort of point in being a model
employee. That it will somehow butter me up to the idea of letting Henry spend Thanksgiving with her.”

“You can’t deny her that, Regina,” Killian growled. “She’s Henry’s mother.”

“No. I am Henry’s mother,” she snapped. Her cool facade contorted into a mask of indignant rage. “I have the final say when it comes to who he spends time with and where, and it won’t be with that woman. Not at some Thanksgiving meal at that flea bag’s diner, and certainly not in whatever room she seems to think is going to be Henry’s in that house of yours.”

“Well, if you please, do not ban the boy from my presence at least,” Killian quipped with a smug smirk, enjoying the flush of fury that crossed her face. “And as for Emma, won’t you pl-”

“Don’t. You. Dare. Say please,” Regina seethed. “I am done catering to your requests. If you say please to me one more time I’ll see to it that you lose everything you care about.”

“Do your worst, Your Majesty,” Killian taunted. “We both know it’s only a matter of time before such a fate befalls you. This farce can’t last forever. Your reign is coming to an end, and when it does, I won’t need to say please. I’ll be the one holding all the cards.”

“We’ll see about that,” Regina snapped before she turned and stormed out of the pawn shop.

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Emma sat at her desk in the sheriff station finalizing the storm preparation list for Killian. She’d expected him to be the next person she’d find sauntering through the door, and had to quickly mask her annoyance when she heard the unmistakable clack of the mayor’s heels coming down the hall.

“Ms. Swan, may I have a word?”

“Of course, Madame Mayor. Was there something we neglected to cover this morning?”

“No. This is about something that has come to my attention since our meeting. I don’t know what you were hoping to accomplish in having Killian Jones assist you in creating a bedroom for Henry, but now that I know about it, I hope you’ll go back to your job, which is upholding the law, not breaking it.”

“I haven’t broken any laws.”

“Maybe not, but there’s not a judge in the world that would deny me a restraining order after learning a woman, who surrendered all legal rights to the child she gave up in a closed adoption, suddenly showed up, ingratiated herself with the child, and then proceeded to create a place for him in her home against the express wishes of his legal parent. You don’t get to see my son unless I say so, and right now? I don’t say so.”

“But that’s-”

“Not open for discussion,” Regina snapped. “Henry will not be spending Thanksgiving with you. Or any holiday for that matter. He will not be visiting your home or staying over in his room. He is my son. Mine.”

The two women were interrupted by the clearing of a throat, and Emma was simultaneously relieved and despondent at Killian’s presence.

“Apologies if I’m interrupting,” he offered hesitantly, his concern filled gaze fixed on Emma. “I
volunteered to help Sheriff Swan with storm preparations, but I can come back la-”

“No need,” Regina replied imperiously. “Acting Sheriff Swan and I are finished.”

Emma numbly watched Regina walk out of the sheriff’s station. She should have known better than to hope. She never should have listened to Mary Margaret, should never have allowed Killian to plant the idea of a room for Henry into her mind. How could she have been so stupid as to believe that Regina would ever allow that kind of access to him. Allow her to see him on Thanksgiving, or spend time with him at Christmas, or maybe stay over for a weekend. She had allowed herself to hope, and that hope had blinded her to the truth. She wasn’t Henry’s mother. She had no right to be in his life. All of her efforts to change, to open herself up to the possibility of happiness had been for nothing.

“I’m so sorry, Swan,” Killian professed, coming to stand before her with remorse swimming in his blue depths. “I’m afraid Sm-William let slip that I was putting items aside for Henry’s new room. I never meant for th-.”

“It’s fine” Emma dismissed curtly, turning her back to him to busy herself with items on her desk.

“It’s not fine,” he countered. He grasped her elbow and turned her back to face him, the muscle in his jaw jumped and Emma could see a blaze of fury spark in his eyes. “She can’t do this. She can’t keep Henry from you.”

“Yeah. Actually, she can,” Emma retorted. “She’s his mother.”

“So are you!”

“Not legally. I’m not,” she reminded him, and her voice caught. Her throat tightened in its attempt to argue with him further. “So, yeah. What she said… She’s well within her rights, and I… There’s nothing that I…”

Emma pulled her gaze from him and trained it on the floor. The stinging prickle of tears threatened at the corner of her eyes. She would not cry in front of Killian Jones.

“Let me go talk to her,” Killian proposed as he brought his hands up to rub her upper arms in an attempt to soothe her. “Perhaps I can make Her Majesty see reason.”

“No.” Emma jerked away from his touch, an action she immediately regretted when she saw the hurt look of rejection cross his face.

“I only wish to help, Emma. You and Henry.”

Emma softened in response to his sincere and apologetic tone. “You can, but not like that,” she asserted. “I don’t want Henry to lose you, too. Regina could file a restraining order against you and then Henry wouldn’t have either of us.” The thought of Henry alone with only the poisoning influence of the woman he believed to be an evil queen made Emma shudder. “Please, Killian. Don’t get involved. For Henry’s sake,” Emma pleaded. “Let me figure out a way to deal with Regina. You focus on keeping Henry happy. Can you do that for me?”

Emma was unaware that she’d taken Killian’s hand during her earnest appeal until she followed his gaze to their joined hands. She fought the urge to pull away and allowed herself to draw comfort from the light squeeze and brush of his thumb over her knuckles.

“Aye, love. I think I can manage that.”
Emma sat on one of the benches at the docks waiting for her phone to ring. A sick feeling churned in her gut at the conversation she was about to have. Killian had offered to explain things to Henry, but she’d been adamant about finding a way to do it herself, despite Regina’s threats. They’d made their way back to the harbor so Killian could meet Henry for their usual after school time. The plan was for Emma to wait for his call so she could speak to Henry herself and try to explain, but she wanted to be able to see him while she did it. Wanted to show him that this wasn’t her choice. She wasn’t leaving. She wasn’t abandoning him. She just didn’t have a choice right now.

“Why are you so far away?” Henry asked when she answered the phone, not even allowing it to get past the first ring. “Come join us. I’m sure the captain will give you permission to come aboard,” he said cheekily; something that would have earned him a smile or humorous scoff most days, but today it stabbed at her already tender heart.

“Sorry, kid. I can't today.”

“What’s wrong?” he questioned nervously, obviously having heard the catch in her voice.

“Your mom. She, uh… she doesn't want us seeing each other for a while,” Emma explained.

“You don't have to listen to her,” Henry insisted.

“Actually, this time, I do. I screwed up, Henry. I upset your mom about… something, and well, we're just gonna have to be apart for a little while.”

“Is it because of Operation Cobra? Did she find out who you really are? That you’re the Saviour?”

“No, Henry, she-” Emma paused, a heavy sigh escaping her lungs. This was just going to further cement his belief that Regina was some Evil Queen hell bent on taking away happy endings.

“I don't want to be apart,” Emma heard Henry confess softly, and she had to again fight back the tears that had been on the cusp of overtaking her since Regina had confronted her in the sheriff station.

“Neither do I, but right now we have to. Don't worry, though,” she reassured. “I'll find a way back in, and you’ll have Killian to turn to if things become too unbearable at home. He’s going to stay on your mom’s good side so she won’t have a reason to keep you two apart.”

She could practically see the raised furrowed brows she just knew accompanied the tilt of Killian’s head as he overheard her statement. Even from this distance the implied, I never agreed to go that far, was evident as he cast his gaze her way.

“I'm not worried,” Henry asserted bravely.

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. The Evil Queen is no match for the strength of the Saviour and the cunning of Captain Hook.”

There was no way she could have missed the beaming smiles being sent to her from the deck of Killian’s ship. A pirate and his apprentice offering their support and confidence to one they saw as a hero. Emma didn’t feel much like a hero, though, and after finishing her call with Henry she made her way back to her cruiser and spent the tears of failure and defeat that finally got the best of her.
Killian didn’t need the forecasters, or the modern instruments of weather prediction, or even the red glow that had accompanied the morning sunrise to tell him there was a storm brewing just beyond the horizon. He could feel the charge of it in the atmosphere and each of his nerve endings as he breathed in the salty air blowing in from the sea.

Most of the preparations had been seen to the day before, but Killian wanted to check in with Swan to make sure she didn’t need any further assistance, and to see how she was faring after Regina had made her royal decree about Henry the day before.

The wind had whipped itself up into a frenzy by the time Killian reached Main Street. He’d forgone his motorcycle, not wishing to combat the day’s elements with such little protection, and opted instead to drive his rarely used Jeep into town. Angry storm clouds were rolling in quicker than expected, and Killian felt the temperature drop even further as he made his way from his car to the door of the sheriff station.

“I hope you’ve got everything squared away, Swan,” Killian announced as he strode into the bull pen, “because that’s not a storm coming. It’s bloody damnation!”

“Bit dramatic, don’t you think?” Emma responded, stifling a yawn.

“Did you not sleep last night, love?”

The dismissive shrug of her shoulders told him all he needed to know. No. She had not.

“I’m just worried about Henry, is all,” she shared.

“He’ll be alright, Swan,” Killian assured. “He’s a tough lad. Just like his mother.”

Emma looked up at him, and Killian could distinctly see the dark smudges under her eyes. A pallor had replaced the healthy glow of her creamy skin, and the smile she offered him in response to his words did not reach her eyes. The woman was clearly exhausted.

Killian was pulled from his assessment of Emma’s well-being by the entrance of David Nolan. Dark splotches littered his coat, and drops of rain clung to his hair and skin. The storm was, indeed, moving in much faster than they’d expected.

“David? What are you doing back here already?” Emma questioned.

“When I pulled up to the lot Mayor Mills was there. She said it was too dangerous to put anymore sandbags down around the castle, and she’s right. The storm surge is already making its way up the beach.”

“But what about Henry’s castle? It’ll be-”

Emma’s words were cut off by the ringing of the station phone. She took a calming breath before answering. “Sheriff Swan.”

“Acting Sheriff Swan why did you not take better precautions in protecting Henry’s castle from the oncoming storm?” Killian heard Regina criticize through the receiver.

“I did,” Emma argued. “But several levels of bags were removed sometime overnight. I sent a volunteer to replace them this morning, only to find out that you denied him access to the site.”
“Well, of course I did,” Regina stated. “Perhaps it’s escaped your attention that conditions are now too dangerous. I really don’t look forward to telling my son that you failed to keep his beloved castle safe. Try and make sure nothing else gets lost or damaged, won’t you? Oh, and maybe don’t send hapless volunteers out to do your job because you’re too incompetent to see to them the first time around.”

Killian heard the call disconnect. The stiffening of Emma’s shoulders matched his own as they both took exception to Regina’s barbs. He and Emma had taken great pains the evening before to make sure there were enough sandbags in place to protect Henry’s castle from the swells that would accompany the storm. Killian didn’t have to think too long and hard about how the bags had gone missing, and who was behind it.

“David, are the extra sandbags still in your truck?” Emma asked.

“Yeah,” David answered.

“Then I’m going to need your keys.”


“Swan,” Killian interjected. “You can’t possibly be thinking of going out there now. It’s too late, love.”

“No!” Emma exclaimed, a wild, haunted expression flared within her eyes as she barrelled on, “I’m not going to let Henry lose that castle. I’ve already disappointed him enough. First about his father, then not being able to see each other. I can’t let him down again!” Emma turned to David, giving him a hard stare, and demanded, “Give me your keys, Nolan.”

“They’re in the truck,” David answered, clearly overcome and a bit panicked by Emma’s tirade.

Emma moved to grab her coat from the back of one of the desk chairs and Killian grabbed her arm.

“No, Swan,” he contended. “Don’t do this. I can’t let you go off half-cocked on some fool’s errand that will most likely get you bloody killed!” He loosened his grip slightly when he saw the resigned fall of her shoulders. “The castle can be rebuilt, love. If the storm destroys it, I’ll rebuild it myself. You have my word.”

Emma slowly nodded in response, then brought her head up to meet his eyes, a soft smile upon her lips.

“I appreciate that Killian,” she said, and Killian offered a relieved smile of his own when he felt her hand find his wrist in what he thought might be a gesture of gratitude. Oh, how wrong he was. In one swift movement, Emma pulled her cuffs from their holster, slapped one end to his wrist and the other to the bars of the cell next to them, and said, “But I have to try and save that castle. It means too much to him, and to me.”

Emma pulled on her coat and brushed past a stunned David as she hurried out the door with Killian’s shouts of Swan! following her out into the storm.
Chapter Eighteen

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out! And @flipperbrain made a lovely pic for our belated Christmas presents, both the banner and the pic can be found on Tumblr.

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

Killian pulled into the beach parking lot, the blinding rain had cost him further precious time once he’d been able to extricate himself from Emma’s cuffs. The driving winds and torrent coming in from the sea assaulted him as he stepped out of the Jeep. With bracing steps and balance he’d honed from centuries of weathering such tempests on the deck of a ship, Killian made his way towards Henry’s castle.

Emma had driven David’s truck right onto the beach and was unloading sandbags from its bed. The shouts of her name fell on deaf ears as gale force winds practically stole the words from his lips. Killian could see the swells beginning to crest the blockade that remained from their efforts the day before, and he knew there wouldn’t be time to build the wall back up. Swan was in a precarious position, whether she knew or even cared, Killian couldn’t say, but he knew if he couldn’t get her to abandon her plan things were going to end very badly.

Emma set a couple of bags in place then turned to head back to David’s truck for more. As she walked next to Henry’s castle Killian’s worst fears became a reality. A swell broke over the temporary levee and swept her feet out from under her. He could hear the thud of the back her head slamming against the beams of the structure even over the barrage of the storm. The waters carried her limp body back toward the ocean, but she got caught against the wall of sandbags. Killian managed to get to her just as the next surge broke over the dam and he threw himself on top of her, bracing them against the undertow that threatened to pull them both out to sea.

Once the surge had fully passed back over the wall, Killian half carried, half dragged Emma back up the beach and deposited her onto the wet sand when he felt they were a safe enough distance away from the surf.

“Emma?! Emma!” he cried out as he knelt over her. His hand tapped against her cheek in a desperate attempt to rouse her. “Emma, love, wake up!” Killian bent over and pressed his ear to her chest, begging any god he could name that he might hear a pulse and the steady cadence of her breath. “Emma, come back to me.” A rush of relief enveloped him at the sounds of evidence to that answered prayer.
Killian lifted Emma into his arms and carried her to David’s truck, which was closer than his own. He laid her down along the bench seat and then climbed into the driver’s seat, carefully placing her head on his lap.

“It’s alright, Emma,” he said, probably to soothe himself more than her, considering she was still unconscious. “I’ve got you, love.” Killian continued to murmur words of comfort as he sped off toward the hospital.

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There was a flurry of activity once Killian managed to get Emma to the hospital. Orderlies assisted him in getting her onto a gurney while nurses asked him to recount the tale of her injuries. He was barred from following as they wheeled her off for x-rays and other tests, and it wasn’t until the adrenaline began to subside as he paced the waiting area that he thought of others who ought to be notified of her condition.

He cursed himself for leaving his phone in his jeep and made his way to the nurses station. “Is there a phone I could use?”

The nurse turned a phone toward him and instructed him to dial nine for an outside line. He was wracking his brain to try and remember actual phone numbers, when Dr. Whale approached.

“Mr. Jones, we’ve concluded our tests on Sheriff Swan. She hasn’t regained consciousness, so she’s being admitted for observation overnight. Do you know if she has any family we can contact?”

“Is she going to be okay?”

“I can’t really discuss her condition with anyone other than family, Mr. Jones.”

“Bollocks,” Killian seethed. “You know Emma doesn’t have any relations… that she knows of. Just tell me how she is.”

“I can’t do that, Mr. Jones. Hospital policy states-”

Killian grabbed Whale by the lapels of his lab coat, swung him around, and slammed him against the wall of the waiting room. “Don’t talk to me about hospital policy, mate,” Killian growled. “I’m on the bloody Board of Directors! Now tell me what’s going on with Emma, or so help me-”

“She’ll be fine,” Whale squeaked out. “She has a mild concussion, but she’s going to be fine.”

“When can I see her?”

“Only family is allowed outside of vis-” Killian slammed the man against the wall again. “I’ll have a nurse take you to her room as soon as you’ve finished making your calls.”

Killian released Whale, took a step back, and fixed the man with one last hardened stare before turning back to the nurses station. “I’m going to need Mayor Mills’ home phone number,” Killian called out to no one in particular.

One of the nurses hastily set a phone book on the counter before him, and Killian began dialing after he located the number.

“Hello?”

“Henry, my boy. It’s Killian. I hate to have to be the one to tell you this, but Emma has been
hospitalized.” Hearing Henry’s frightened squeak on the other end of the line, Killian hurried to finish before Henry could cut in. “She will be okay lad. The doctor just wants to keep her overnight for observations, she has a rather nasty bump on her head.”

“But… but, she’ll be okay. Right Killian?”

“Aye, she’ll be fine, lad. I’ll stay with her to make sure of it.”

“This was my mom’s doing, wasn’t it.”

Killian closed his eyes and took a breath, willing the rage and madness within him to still. He had his suspicions that Regina was behind the tampering of the sandbags at the castle, but Henry didn’t need to concern himself with such a notion.

“It was an accident, Henry,” Killian replied. “Emma was trying to add more sandbags around your castle and the storm came in faster than expected.”

Killian spent several more minutes reassuring Henry about Emma and his castle, agreeing to keep him apprised of any changes in Emma’s condition, and promising to repair or rebuild his castle once they were able to assess the damage. He made two more calls before insisting on being shown to Emma’s room; one to Mary Margaret and the other to David.

A nurse brought him some scrubs to change into, and he resolutely rebuffed her offer to check him over for injuries beyond the minor cuts and scrapes he’d acquired. Cuts and scrapes that matched the ones that littered Emma’s face and arms as she lay prone in her hospital bed.

David and Mary Margaret arrived not long after he’d gotten changed. The princess had a to-go bag from Granny’s for him, and the prince had been able to get his jeep and bring it over. They exchanged keys and the three of them sat in companionable silence as they kept vigil over Emma; the to-go bag sat undisturbed and forgotten as the hours wore on.

Eventually David and Mary Margaret had to take their leave, though the latter rather reluctantly. The princess told him she’d be back in the morning with some of Emma’s things, and he assured her that he would attempt to get some sleep. Though he knew such an endeavor would be unlikely.

The faint rays of morning were making their way into Emma’s room when she finally began to stir. Killian had dozed on and off throughout the night, but had given it up as a lost cause about an hour prior and was now on his second cup of coffee.

“Hello, beautiful,” he whispered softly when he saw her eyes open, their viridian hue just discernible in the soft glow permeating the room.

“Killian?” Emma croaked, her voice tight and tired. “What happened?”

Killian poured water into a cup and handed it to her. “You tried to fight Mother Nature, and she won,” he quipped.

“How long have I been out?” Emma asked.

“About eighteen hours.”

Emma’s eyes went wide at the news and she sat up quickly only to groan and lay back down.

“Careful,” Killian admonished. “Whale says you’ve got a mild concussion.”
“Have you been here all night?” she questioned, taking in his weary and rumpled appearance.

“Aye.”

Emma wet her lips and swallowed at his admission before asking, “How long am I going to have to stay here?”

“As long as the doctor says you need to.”

“I can’t just lay here, Jones. I’ve got a job to do, and—”

“To hell with the job, Emma! You almost got yourself killed!” Killian roared. His fatigue and the fear that had gnawed at him all night at the prospect of almost losing her caused his ire to spike to the surface.

“I’m sorry. Am I interrupting something?” Mary Margaret’s voice sounded from the doorway.

“I… no,” Killian replied, a flush of chagrin replacing the heat of anger at his cheeks. He ran his hand through his hair and then down over his face. “I’m sorry, Swan. I—”

“It’s okay, Killian,” Emma replied, a look of contrition apparent on her features.

They held each other’s gaze for several long moments before Mary Margaret broke them from their reverie.

“I, uh… I brought you some of your things,” Mary Margaret began, focusing on Emma and allowing Killian a moment to collect himself. “Toothbrush, toiletries, clothes, stuff like that. I wasn’t sure how long they planned to keep you, but thought you’d want to freshen up a bit either way.”

“Thanks, Mary Margaret,” Emma said, then tilted her head in confusion. “Shouldn’t you be at school right now?”

“No school today,” the princess informed them. “Some windows were broken during the storm, so they cancelled classes until after the holiday weekend so they could repair them and clean up the mess. I thought I’d relieve Killian and keep you company for a bit, if that’s okay.”

Killian didn’t want to leave Emma, not until the doctor came by and affirmed that everything was alright, but he could feel himself losing that battle as the two women stared expectantly at him.

“Go home, Jones,” Emma encouraged. “You look like hell.”

Killian gave her a tight smile. “Flattery will get you nowhere, Swan,” he sassed, “but I’ll take my leave. I’ll let Henry know you’re awake and well.” Killian turned to Mary Margaret and added, “You’ll call me if she needs anything?”

“I’m sitting right here,” Emma grumbled, but Killian paid her no mind as he waited for the princess’ reply.

“Of course,” Mary Margaret replied. “I’ll keep you posted on what the doctor says, and when they plan to release her.”

Killian nodded and turned back to Emma, unsure of what to say to her. His temper still hanging by a fragile tether.

“Thank you, Killian,” Emma offered earnestly. “If you hadn’t followed me I’d… wait. How did you get out of those cuffs?”
Killian shrugged and shot her a smug smirk as he quipped, “Pirate, love.” Emma rolled her eyes and scoffed amusedly, then sobered at his change of expression. “Don’t ever do that to me again, Emma,” he commanded in a low tone that made her eyes go wide. He could see from her expression that she understood that last remark wasn’t in reference to the handcuffs, but in the way she had scared him with her recklessness.

With a final nod to Mary Margaret, Killian grabbed his things and took his leave before he gave in to the temptation to gather his Swan in his arms and never let go.

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“Mills’ residence.”


Killian heard the indignant click of Regina’s tongue, followed by the murmured exchange of voices before the lad’s eager voice came over the line.


“Emma is just fine, lad,” Killian assured. “She’s awake and none too worse for wear.”

Henry let out an audible sigh of relief. “My mom just left for work. Are you still with Emma? Can I talk to her?”

“I’m sorry, Henry. I’ve already left the hospital. Mary Margaret arrived to relieve me since you don’t have school today. I didn’t want to leave, but I’ve got something I have to do. Something that will ensure Emma doesn’t get pushed to the brink like this again.”

“What’s that?”

“I think it’s time for Sheriff Graham to get his ar-, er… self back to work. I’m going to pay the Huntsman a visit and drag him back into town if necessary.”

“I’m coming with you,” Henry insisted.

Killian wanted to object, but in all honesty, having Henry there would probably deter him from throttling the man who had left Emma at Regina’s mercy for the better part of three weeks. An abandonment that had almost cost Emma her life, the very reminder of which had Killian seeing red all over again. Aye, perhaps it would be best if the lad tagged along… for the Huntsman’s sake.

“I’ve got to run by home and get changed,” Killian replied. “I’ll pick you up within the hour.”

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Killian pulled up to Graham’s cabin and parked next to the rather distinctive red camaro. Ruby Lucas exited the cabin as Killian and Henry made their way up the front walk, a basket hanging from the crook of her elbow.

“Hey Ruby!” Henry called out in greeting.

“Hey kid! Mr. Jones.”

“Lass, we’ve been over this before, you can call me Killian.”

“Okay. Killian. What are you two doing here?”
“We came to see Graham,” Henry answered.

“Yeah? About what?” Ruby asked cautiously, her focus trained on Killian.

“Given what happened to his deputy yesterday, I think it high time our good sheriff returned to work,” Killian replied in a strained tone.

“I heard about that,” Ruby sympathized. “How’s she doing?”

“She’ll be fine,” Killian assured. “But she’ll need her rest, which means she needs Graham to get back to work.”

“Hey, you’re preaching to the choir there,” Ruby disclosed. “I’ve been telling him that for over a week now.”

“You’ve been coming by often, then?” Killian asked with a curious raise to his brow.

“Couple times a week,” she answered. “Just making sure he’s got provisions and isn’t going crazy from all the nature. I like to bring him a goodie basket to soften the blow as I lay into him about getting his shit together and coming back to the land of the living. Maybe you’ll have better luck.”

Ruby practically skipped back to her car, then drove off as Killian and Henry knocked on the Huntsman’s door.

“Henry?!” Graham exclaimed after opening the door. Shifting his attentions he added a curt, “Jones.”

“Sheriff,” Killian clipped. “Mind if we come in? There is something we need to discuss.” Not even pausing long enough for the man’s permission, Killian pushed past Graham, and made his way into the rustic cabin, with Henry in tow.

“By all means. What can I help you with, Jones?” The look plastered on the Huntsman’s face screamed that he would rather Killian just turn back around, and leave.

“Oh no. This isn’t about me Huntsman, this is about Emma.” Killian saw the surprise pass over the man’s face but didn’t pause long enough to let him say a word. “How dare you leave her at Regina’s mercy,” Killian seethed, hands clenched at his sides. “You nearly got her killed because you are too much of a coward to come back to town and face your new reality. I get that things are complicated, but Emma needs you. The town needs you.

“Operation Cobra needs you,” Henry interjected.

“Aye,” Killian agreed. “It’s time to do your part in helping us find a way for Emma to break this bloody curse.”

“I thought Operation Cobra was need to know,” Graham quipped to Henry.

“Well, congratulations, mate,” Killian gritted between his teeth. “You’ve just been promoted to a full fledged member.”

“Maybe I don’t want to be a member,” Graham shot back. “Maybe I just want to be left alone in my solitude. Left alone to try and reclaim who I was when I still had that luxury!”

“What do you mean?” Henry questioned. “You know who you are now. You just have to play along with the curse for a little longer, and once Emma breaks it everyone will know who they really are.”

“I’m not just talking about the cursed me versus the real me, Henry,” Graham replied.
“You’re talking about all that time Regina had your heart,” Killian sympathized.

“Exactly. I haven’t been in full control over myself for over thirty years. I’ve spent the past three weeks trying to determine what actions, decisions, desires, and wants were actually mine. What parts of the last few decades have actually been orchestrated by me. Do you have any idea what it’s like to not know your own mind? To not know whether an impulse is yours, or whether it’s the bidding of someone else?”

A cold wash of dread swept over Killian. He did know. For a few terrible moments while he stood in the clearing before Regina’s curse had struck, he’d been assaulted with thoughts and feelings that were familiar enough in their dark envisionings to be his own, yet he knew they hadn’t been. They had been the Dark One’s. Even now, with the darkness lying dormant within him, there were times when Killian questioned whether or not the darker impulses he desperately tried to ignore were actually his own. Despite knowing that when the curse broke, he need not fear the darkness taking hold because they would still be in the Land Without Magic, Killian could not help the terror that sometimes seized him at the thought of it breaking free.

“It matters not,” Killian began softly. “You can’t change the past. What’s done is done. But there are a great multitude of people living the same hell you once did. Living in this hell Regina has cursed them to. Are you really willing to stand by and do nothing?”

“What do you expect me to do? I don’t know how to free all these people. Do you?”

“Not as yet, no,” Killian admitted.

“But my mom will break the curse,” Henry declared. “She’s the Saviour. Rumpelstiltskin said she was destined to break it, but she isn’t going to be able to if we don’t help her believe.”

“Which she can’t very well do buried under mountains of Regina’s paperwork, working herself into an early grave from sheer exhaustion. You need to come back and resume your duties as Sheriff. Act as a buffer between her and Regina, and help draw her focus to the things that might open her eyes to what’s really going on.”

Killian and Henry looked on for several long minutes as Graham internally wrestled with everything they had said.

“I just don’t know if I can put myself into that cursed persona again. It’s been so difficult keeping the truth from Red, er Ruby. I’m tired of living a lie.” Graham ran a hand over his weary features and sighed. “I’m sorry, but you’re going to have to give me more time to think about it.”

Graham walked over to the door and pulled it open, not meeting Killian or Henry’s eyes as he left them with little choice but to take their leave.

“Fine,” Killian said as he made his way for the door, “but ask yourself this. Do you want all those years of being Regina’s puppet, all that uncertainty you’ve wrestled with for the past three weeks to be in vain? You saved Snow White’s life for a reason. Emma is that reason. Don’t you owe it to yourself to see that action through? To make the sacrifice worth it?”

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Having just dropped the lad off at home, Killian felt a surge of annoyance over the fact he hadn’t heard any news about Emma since he’d left the hospital that morning. Before heading back in that direction, Killian decided to give Mary Margaret a call.

“Hello?”
“Mary Margaret, It’s Killian.”

“Hi, Killian.”

“What did the doctor say about Emma? I’m headed back to the hospital now. Does she need anything?”

“Oh! Don’t worry about coming back by. They’re going to be releasing Emma within the next thirty minutes, as soon as they get all of the discharge paperwork finished.”

“That’s great news, I’m relieved to hear it. I can still come get Emma since she doesn’t have her car.”

“No! I mean… don’t worry about that. She’s going to be coming back to the loft with me, for tonight, so I can keep an eye on her, you know, just in case. But, if she’s feeling up to it, we’ll see you at Granny’s tomorrow, for the Friendsgiving. Oh, I gotta go, it looks like we’re ready to leave. Talk to you soon.”

Without so much as a chance to say another word, Mary Margaret ended the call. Killian tossed his phone onto the seat next to him, cursing under his breath. The past forty-eight hours had been a gauntlet of emotional upheaval and plans caught a cinder until they were no more than ash. Emma no longer had access to her son, was injured, had no reinforcements willing to come to her aid, and was now pushing him away because he’d been too careless in keeping the depths of his feelings hidden from her. It was one thing to flirt with one another, to dance around their shared attraction with a sense of levity that didn’t place a burden of unrequited feelings upon it, and quite another to bare oneself in the raw edges of fear and vulnerability.

Much as he’d tried to hide them, Killian couldn’t deny his feelings. He was falling in love with Emma Swan. Hell, there was no falling about it. He loved her. Well and truly loved her, but he knew she was nowhere near sharing such a regard for him. A fact that was quite apparent given her unwillingness to face him now that he’d let his guard slip in the face of her near miss with calamity.

Killian rubbed his hands over his face and through his hair, the exhaustion hitting him with an indomitable force. There was nothing left for him to do but go home and wait. Wait and see if Graham would come to his senses. Wait and see what fresh hell Regina meant to unleash upon them all. Wait and see if things between he and Emma could resume on course, despite his lapse. A course he still felt he had no right to follow, but when had that ever stopped a pirate like him?

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No sooner had Emma and Mary Margaret set foot in the diner, than Granny was greeting them with a spiked cocoa, while muttering, “It’s about time you two showed up.” The somewhat cryptic greeting caused Emma and Mary Margaret to exchange a befuddled glance before looking back to Granny for clarification. “I much prefer those boys with smiles on their pretty faces, than the scowls they’ve been offering to anyone who gets within three feet of them.”

Emma’s stomach clenched at the sight of Killian brooding on a barstool next to David. She’d chastised herself for being a coward ever since being released from the hospital. When Mary Margaret had offered to call him to come take her home, Emma had panicked. She’d made the excuse that he didn’t need to be burdened with watching over her after having spent the entire night at the hospital, when she’d asked if Mary Margaret would let her crash at the loft. Emma knew that wasn’t the reason she wanted to avoid involving Jones any further in her recooperation.

It was because of the look he’d given her.
Just before he’d left, when he told her to *never do that to him again*, there had been a look in his eyes. A look that exposed all the fear he’d felt, all the devastation he would have experienced if the worst case scenario had happened, and all the things he might have come to feel for her since that first night at The Rabbit Hole. It was a look she had longed for all her life, but had never received, not even from Neal, yet Killian Jones had looked at her that way.

A look that had scared the living daylights out of her.

It scared her because she wasn’t sure *she* would ever be capable of looking at anyone that way. Scared that she was too broken to open herself to anyone like that. She still wasn’t completely ready to do that even with Henry. She’d been keeping her feelings for her own flesh and blood carefully guarded, not willing to risk her heart, in case it all went wrong.

But then it had gone wrong.

The very thing she had feared since deciding to stay in Storybrooke had occurred, and it was then that Emma had realized that the damage had already been done. She’d already become too invested, too close, too vulnerable, and it had hurt like hell when Regina had ripped Henry from her, but instead of crumpling under that pain, Emma found herself fueled by it. Albeit, not in the most sensible of ways. She’d been reckless with her behavior over Henry’s castle, and it had almost cost her everything.

Thank God for Killian.

Emma couldn’t bring herself to think what would have happened if he hadn’t come after her. What it would have done to Henry to lose her. Emma had imagined that look Killian had given her coming from a set of mournful brown eyes, rather than vivid blue, and it had brought a fresh wave of fear over her. Fear that those brown eyes wouldn’t have had the same look in them. That Henry might never look at her that way, because no one had ever looked at him that way.

Emma wanted to look at him that way, and maybe… someone else, too. Someday.

Before Emma could make her way over to the counter the bell sounded behind her, and she was stunned to see who walked through the diner’s door.

“Graham?” Emma acknowledged incredulously. “What are you doing here?”

“I’m, uh… I’m back,” Graham answered, shifting his weight uncomfortably before her. “I’m sorry I left like that, Emma. I shouldn’t have-”

“It’s okay,” Emma dismissed. “You had a lot to work through after everything with Regina. I get that you needed some time to get your head on straight.”

“Yeah. I did. And Ruby, Henry, and Jones all convinced me that I’ve had enough time to do that, so-”

“Wait,” Emma interrupted. “They all came to see you?”

“Well, Ruby’s been coming by every few days to make sure I don’t starve,” he admitted with a hint of pink blooming on his cheeks. “Jones and Henry came by yesterday. They were concerned that you were working too hard, and… uh… suggested that I should get back to work.”

Emma glanced over to where Killian still sat at the bar, his eyes met hers and by the tick in his jaw Emma could imagine just how that *suggestion* had gone down. She wanted to be angry about it, to tell Killian he had no right to interfere like that. She wanted to remind him that she was a big girl
who could take care of herself, but the truth was, that even though she could take care of herself, she hadn’t. Killian had tried to get her to slow down and rest for weeks, and she’d ignored him. Ignored him to the point that she’d put herself in harm’s way, and he’d risked his own life to save her. She’d always thought that no one needed to save her except her, but now she knew that sometimes she needed saving from herself.

“I called the mayor on my way here,” Graham continued. “I told her that I was returning to duty as Sheriff and that you’d be taking the weekend off.” He raised his hand to stave off her protest and continued. “You deserve it Emma, and you need rest in order to heal before I’ll consider you fit for duty, so no arguments. I don’t want to see you until Monday at the earliest.”

Graham didn’t give her a chance to argue as he made his way through the crowd towards a certain brunette in red at the other end of the counter.

Emma sought out Mary Margaret, not quite ready to face Killian, and found her seated in a booth with a direct view of the couple sitting next to Jones at the bar. Katherine Nolan had the appearance of one who had long since become bored with her surroundings, and it was clear that she was ready to leave. David, on the other hand, seemed to have finally broken out of the scowl Granny had hinted at when they’d first walked in, and was talking rather animatedly to the man next to him. The man who had his gaze fixed on her as she took a seat across from Mary Margaret.

Killian threw back the rest of his drink, clapped David on the back, and the two made their way over to the booth Emma and Mary Margaret were occupying.

“Swan. Mary Margaret,” Killian greeted, a guardedness lacing his tone.

Emma swallowed past the lump of nerves caught in her throat, but before she could reply David began unburdening himself of things he’d clearly been weighed down by.

“I am so sorry, Emma,” he began. “I never should have let the mayor talk me out of setting the bags. There was time enough to do it, and if I’d just stood up to her then you wouldn’t h-”

“David, it’s not your fault,” Emma protested. “No one blames you for Regina’s decision, and I’m sure she was just concerned for your safety.”

Killian attempted to cover a scathing sound with a cough and he shot her a cynical look.

“Even still. I feel responsible,” David continued. “I told Killian that I’m at his disposal in helping rebuild Henry’s castle.”

“You’re going to rebuild it?” Emma questioned Killian, a stunned expression encompassing her face.

“I told you I would, Swan,” Killian reminded. “Did you doubt my sincerity in the offer?”

“No,” Emma replied softly. “I never doubted you for a minute.”

Her words brought a soft smile to his lips, the kind that made the corners of his eyes crinkle, and Emma felt her breath catch.

“David, we need to go, or we’ll be late,” Katherine’s voice called out, and Emma shook herself from the moment.

“Right,” David said, “I’ve gotta get going. I’ll see you in the morning, Killian. We’re meeting Marco at nine, right?”
“Aye, mate. See you then.”

David offered Emma and Mary Margaret a farewell, and cast several looks back at them as he made his way toward the door, all of which were focused on Mary Margaret. Emma sighed at the obvious infatuation the two were desperately trying, and failing, to hide from one another. Hell, even Granny had caught on to the fact that something was going on between the two of them. Worrying her lip over her friend’s perilous situation, Emma didn’t hear her friend offer Jones an invitation to join them in the booth.

“Is that alright with you, Swan?”

“Hmm? Is what alright?” Emma questioned as she looked up at Jones still standing by their table.

“Ms. Blanchard asked if I’d like to join you for the meal,” Killian explained.

“Oh! Of course,” Emma replied, moving over to make room for him next to her in the booth. “Have a seat, Jones.”

Killian settled himself next to her, and Emma could practically feel the crackles of unspent energy coiling around them. Mary Margaret gave a calculating look between the two of them, and then announced her intention to make the rounds in order to say hi to everyone, before popping out of the booth, leaving the two of them quite alone.

Emma wet her lips and turned toward Killian just as he mirrored her action.

“Killian, I wanted to say tha-”

“Emma, I wanted to apolo-”

They both chuckled, and Emma could feel the boiling tension that had been building between them subside into the simmer she was more accustomed to when in Jones’ presence.

“Ladies first, love,” Killian insisted.

“I wanted to thank you, Killian,” she began, and then grabbed his hand to stay the response he’d opened his mouth to give. “Not just for what you did at the castle, but for everything else, too.”

Killian cocked his head to the side and said, “I don’t know to what else you’re referring, Swan.”

“You went to see Graham,” she stated.

“Aye.”

“And you’re going to rebuild Henry’s castle.”

“Well, I can’t very well leave the thing in ruins. It means too much to the lad.” Emma became distinctly aware of the brush of Killian’s thumb over her knuckles. “And to you,” he murmured before taking in a deep breath. “I owe you an apology, Emma.”

“For what?”

“For not realizing how important the castle was to you both,” he stated, holding her gaze with an intensity that nearly stole her breath. “It’s the place where you and Henry really connected with one another, and I should have known that Regina would seek to destroy it. There isn’t a doubt in my mind she was behind the sandbag removal.”
“Nor mine,” Emma agreed, and her pulse began to race when she saw that look again in his eyes. “Remember what you said? About how my legal status concerning Henry could change?”

Killian furrowed his brows and answered. “Aye.”

“I’d like to start looking into how I can change it.”
Chapter Nineteen

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out! And @flipperbrain made a lovely pic for our belated Christmas presents, both the banner and the pic can be found on Tumblr.

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

The first week of December was doing its damnedest to remind the residents of Storybrooke that winter was underway. The two weeks since Thanksgiving had ushered in biting winds and frigid temperatures most days, but it wasn’t enough to delay Killian’s resolve to see the project of Henry’s castle through to completion. Nor had it diminished the enthusiasm of others who had expressed their willingness to help, be it taking up a hammer alongside him, or helping with any necessary supply runs. It had been like captaining a crew again.

Despite the bluster Jack Frost had attempted to beset upon them as they worked, Killian couldn’t help the warm feelings of camaraderie laboring with other men gave him. He and David had taken the opportunity numerous times to grab that beer the prince had once offered, and they were often joined by the likes of Marco, Graham, and even Michael Tillman. A toast in his honor usually occurred during these proceedings, and although having a crew bestow such respect upon him was nothing new to Captain Hook, this cursed persona and the man behind both facades, Killian Jones, had been taken aback by the gesture.

Word of his involvement in both the Acting Sheriff’s rescue from certain death, and the return of the town’s beloved Sheriff Humbert had spread quickly. That, coupled with his continued determination to do right by the young lad many had a soft spot for, despite his adoptive mother, had propelled Killian into something of a hero status amongst the townspeople.

Killian Jones. Storybrooke’s favorite son. Who would have thought it? Certainly not he.

Warmed, and touched, and grateful as Killian was over the change in reception he was receiving from the denizen, he knew it was not likely to last. Once the curse broke, and people knew him for who he truly was, what he was, the smiles, waves, and handshakes would surely end. Wouldn’t they?

“We’re going to have to set up a standing guys night out now that the castle is all done,” David commented, loading his tools into the bed of his truck next to Killian’s.

“Pardon?”
“A guy’s night out,” David reiterated. “It’s been easy to just take off from the job site to go grab a beer, but now that the castle is finished we’ll have to make a point of hanging out.”

Killian smiled to himself, Emma’s words about his and David’s bromance that she’d teased him with a few nights ago came to mind.

“Aye,” Killian agreed with a smirk, “and it will give you the perfect cover to not be at home with your wife, so you can skip out on me after a pint or two in order to meet up with a certain school teacher.”

“I only did that once!” David’s face turned a bright red, and Killian knew it had nothing to do with the winter wind whipping off the ocean. “And I told you it would never happen again.”

“And I told you I don’t mind covering for you and Miss Blanchard,” Killian replied.

The prince and princess’ clandestine meetings had continued over the past fortnight. Killian knew that Emma did not approve, concerned for her friend and former roommate when the inevitable backlash came. Killian, however, in addition to knowing the truth of who David and Mary Margaret truly were, also held to Henry’s belief that their happy ending could hold the key to breaking the curse that was originally cast to strip such happiness from them. Therefore, he had no qualms in providing a screen to their occasional interludes, or a reason for them to be seen in one another’s company. Just as he was today.

After two weeks of work, Henry’s castle was finished, and Killian had asked Mary Margaret to bring Henry by after school so the final result could be unveiled. As he watched the princess pull into the parking lot, a stab of guilt and sadness pierced him at the thought of Emma not being there to witness the joy the restored castle would put on Henry’s face.

Regina had not relented in her decree that Emma stay away from Henry. She’d even gone so far as to enlist Sydney to serve as her informant, seeing as Her Majesty seemed to be busy with other matters lately. Matters that, according to Henry, were keeping her locked away in her vault for hours at a time, day and night. A fact that unsettled Killian much more than Regina’s inept spy, as the man’s presence had not gone unnoticed by Killian, though Sydney attempted to keep a low profile.

Even now, Killian was aware that the man had taken up residence on a park bench some yards away, binoculars pressed against his face as he pretended to observe the boats out on the waters, or the birds that had taken flight around him. Emma had admitted to seeing him as well, and the knowledge that Regina was having them all watched heightened her resolve to gain some legal ground in Henry’s life.

Though Killian’s days had been occupied with the rebuilding of Henry’s castle, most of his evenings had been spent in Emma’s company as they brainstormed and researched her options. It had surprised Emma to learn that he was the owner of the building that housed the clock tower, and that a library actually took up the first floor. They’d set up a base of operations within the space, taking advantage of the various legal references, and the privacy the boarded up exterior afforded them. The more centralized location within the town allowed others to assist in their endeavor; David, Mary Margaret, Graham, Ruby, Dr. Hopper, and even Killian’s editor at the paper, Lacey, had all spent a number of evenings pouring over texts and articles that might lead to a loophole in the closed adoption Emma had originally agreed to.

So far they hadn’t come up with anything of use, but that didn’t concern Killian too much. Once Emma broke the curse, it wouldn’t matter what the law of this land said. Henry was her son, and once the truth was made known, the entire town would rally in support of her, the Saviour, over the rights of the Evil Queen. Unfortunately, Emma did not possess that assurance, and with each passing
day her separation from Henry weighed heavier on her. On all of them, actually.

“Killian!” Henry called out as he raced from Mary Margaret’s car, throwing his arms around the pirate’s middle when he reached him.

“Oof” Killian stumbled back a bit before righting himself. He wrapped his arms around the lad and gave him a tight squeeze. “Hello, my boy. Ready to see your new castle?”

Henry pulled away and nodded vigorously. Killian turned them toward the beach and the small crowd that had gathered. Henry’s eyes went wide as the structure came into view, and he paused to throw his arms around Killian once more, murmuring a thank you into his side.

“You are very welcome, lad.” Killian ruffled Henry’s hair to distract himself from the pin prick of tears he felt collecting at the corners of his eyes at the boy’s show of affection. “Well, go on then,” Killian encouraged after clearing his throat. “Go and inspect your new fortress.”

Henry rushed off towards the structure and was greeted by several of the volunteers who’d all put in many hours of work leading up to this moment. Killian looked on with a smile as he watched Henry take in all the details being pointed out to him with gratitude and enthusiasm, but his expression soured as he considered again the absence of Emma, and how much the moment would have meant to her.

“You did a good thing here, Killian,” Mary Margaret commended as she came up to stand beside him.

Killian rubbed the patch of skin behind his ear and tried to wave off the princess’ praise.

“Deny it all you want,” she continued, undeterred, “but I know the truth about you.” She turned and gave Killian a pointed look. His heart slammed against his sternum and anticipation coursed through his veins. **Which truth?** “You, Killian Jones, are a good man.”

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By the time Killian returned to the pawn shop later that afternoon the sky had already begun to darken. A few patrons were perusing the cases within the showroom, and after hearing William’s report of the day’s activity Killian dismissed his first mate for the day, choosing to stay and close up the shop himself. He’d be meeting Emma at the library soon after closing, so there was no use in going home now.

Killian straightened from his bent position over the counter, having spent the past several minutes logging purchases in his ledger, and spotted a familiar face. Familiar, but not from his own recollections. This particular man was one he only recognized courtesy of the Dark One’s memories, though he’d seen him about town before his identity became known to him.


“Something I can help you find, mate?”

Jefferson startled, then turning his attention towards Killian, he gave a half shrug before muttering, “Just looking, thanks.”

Killian came around to the front of the counter and leaned back, arms and ankles crossed as he assessed the man before him.

“You’ve been in here quite a few times just looking.”
“Is that some sort of crime, Captain?” Jefferson quipped light-heartedly, a smirk pulled at his lips and amusement danced in his eyes.

For the second time that day apprehension prickled along Killian’s skin. “Pardon?”


“Aye, well. It seemed fitting.” Killian took in the way the man mirrored his stance, that sly smirk still affixed at his mouth, and the two stood there for a long moment sizing each other up.


“A hat,” Killian repeated. “Perhaps you’d be better off looking in one of Storybrooke’s clothing stores.”

“A specific hat,” Jefferson clarified. “One that used to belong to me. An old fashioned top hat kept in a large leather hat box. You wouldn’t happen to have seen it during your preparations in opening the store, would you?”

*I’ll be damned. The crazy son of a bitch is awake.*

“Can’t say that I have. Though, there is a lovely tea set in the back that might interest you.”

Killian quirked a brow and waited for Jefferson’s response. The man ran his tongue over his teeth before giving a non committal hum as he pushed himself away from the counter he’d taken up residence against.

“That’s alright,” he responded flippantly. “Never really was a fan of tea.”

He bid Killian good day and exited the store. Killian watched as Jefferson made his way past the front windows, casting one last glance at him through the glass.

*So, The Hatter is awake… how? As far as he knew, Emma had never come into contact with the man.*

Killian tabled that thought for another time. Perhaps Henry’s book might shed some light on the matter. Killian made a mental note to ask the lad about Jefferson’s story the next time he saw him, and began the process of locking up for the night. With his mind now focused on the evening ahead, Killian was too distracted by thoughts of spending time in his Swan’s presence to register the movement within the alleyway until there was nothing but darkness surrounding his consciousness.

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It wasn’t like Killian to be late. The man was infuriatingly punctual, always touting that tardiness was bad form. After half an hour of waiting, and three unanswered calls, Emma went in search of Killian, stopping to check in at Granny’s before heading over to the pawn shop.

Graham sat perched on one of the bar stools at the counter, a dopey look about him as he chatted with Ruby who smiled coyly and flirted with light touches to his arm. *What was that Granny said about getting a room upstairs?*

“Oh! Evening, Emma,” Ruby greeted. “I thought you and Killian were going to be doing some research tonight.”
“We were, but he never showed at the library, and he isn’t answering his phone. I came by to see if maybe he got delayed waiting on food or something.”

Ruby and Graham exchanged a puzzled looked before Ruby responded, “No. He hasn’t been in since this morning.”

“It’s not like Jones to be late, or not call,” Graham echoed Emma’s concern, and a pit of unease began to churn in her gut.

_Something isn’t right_, Emma’s instincts protested. “I’m gonna head over to the pawn shop and take a look.”

“I’ll come with you,” Graham offered.

Ruby waved off Graham’s intention of settling his bill, and asked them to keep her informed before he and Emma headed out. Everything at the front of the pawn shop seemed to be in order. The lights were off, door was locked, and the closed sign displayed, but when they made their way to the back entrance Emma’s heart seized within her chest. Killian’s keys were dangling from the lock in the backdoor, his phone lay on the ground of the alleyway, the screen cracked from being dropped or having fallen out of his pocket.

“Looks like there was a struggle,” Graham commented with a gesture to the overturned trash can.


“Well, until recent months, Jones wasn’t too popular a figure around town. He had some enemies. Still does apparently. Did he mention anyone making threats or lurking about?”

“No. No one other than Sydney, and I don’t see him getting one up on Jones, or having the balls to even try. You don’t think Regina had anything to do with this do you?”

“I would put nothing past that woman at this point,” Graham muttered even as he shook his head, “but no. What could she have to gain? Her fight over Henry is with you, not him.”

“It’s not even a fight she’s fully aware of yet, I don’t think,” Emma reasoned. “We’ve been discreet with our research and inquiries about Henry’s adoption, and like you said… what would she have to gain by going after Killian?”

“Then we look at other possible suspects before knocking down Regina’s door.”

“Like who?” Emma asked, her voice catching as panic began to set in. She didn’t have the slightest idea of where to even begin looking.

“Let’s go talk to David.” Graham placed a calming hand on Emma’s shoulder. “Maybe something happened at the castle site today.”

“Yeah, okay.” Emma’s mind cleared as she willed herself to focus on the case and not the man whose fate she was fearing for. “Actually. You go talk to David, and I’ll go talk to Killian’s assistant, William. Maybe something happened at the shop, or with a customer.”

“Alright,” Graham agreed. “Keep me posted on what William says, and I’ll call you after I’ve talked with David.”
Killian groaned from the pounding in his head. The wry thought of wishing the citizens of Storybrooke would stop rendering him unconscious flitted through his mind as he pried his eyes open and assessed his surroundings. He was secured to a chair, his arms fastened behind its back with what felt like duct tape, if the uncomfortable pull at the hairs on his wrists was any indication. His feet were free, but when he attempted to shift his weight onto them the chair moved. Rollers. Like an office chair.

Killian scanned the room. It appeared to be some sort of elegant sewing room. A large table took up the bulk of the space, littered with scraps of fabric, patterns, scissors, needles and thread, and other instruments Killian could make neither hide nor hair of. Brightly lit shelves displayed a number of hats, and a tea service in the corner bespoke of who it was that had attacked him moments before the man entered the room.

“Good Evening, Hatter,” Killian acknowledged mockingly as he fixed the man with a glare.

“No pretense this time? Good. I was afraid you’d want to go another round of Guess Which Literary Character, or Villain in your case, I Am,” Jefferson quipped while he circled around Killian.

“So you know who I am then?”

“Oh, I know who you are… Captain. All of Wonderland knows the assassin who murdered the Queen of Hearts. But I also know something else about you.”

“Pray tell. What is it you think you know?”

Jefferson stopped in front of Killian and leaned in to whisper over his ear, “Captain Hook is also The Dark One.”

Killian’s adrenaline spiked at The Hatter’s pronouncement making his heart race, but he kept his features neutral as he scoffed, “You are mad.”

“Oh, they don’t call me the Mad Hatter for nothing, but that doesn’t mean I’m wrong about you.”

“What on earth would give you cause to believe that I am the Dark One?”

“The lack of the former Dark One’s presence for one.”

Killian rolled his eyes. “That’s hardly proof, mate.”

“How’s this for proof.” Jefferson settled himself into a chair across from Killian and tented his fingers. “I worked with Rumplestiltskin for years, acquiring things for him. Objects, people, information. Many of the objects I personally delivered into his hands, I have seen in your pawn shop. Now, why would Captain Hook be in possession of the Dark One’s things?” Jefferson pondered rhetorically with a mocking tap of his finger against his lips. “You think I don’t know about your feud with him? Do you know how much time I spent trying to track you down for him? You and his son? I was never able to find any information as to Baelfire’s whereabouts, but you popped up from time to time. Unfortunately, by the time I was able to get the news back to Rumplestiltskin you’d already vanished to whatever realm you were hiding in.”

“I wasn’t hiding,” Killian countered, hoping to keep the man dialoguing. He’d found a sharp point at the back of the chair and had begun working it against the tape in an attempt to free his hands. “I was in Neverland. Which, incidentally, is where you could have found Baelfire.”

“It is if Pan wishes to trap you into his service,” Killian groused.

“How did you get out of his service?”

“That’s my business, mate. Not yours. Let’s just say I made a deal and leave it at that.”

“Right,” Jefferson drawled with a wicked smirk. “A deal. I bet you’re really good at making those now that you’re the Dark One.” Killian opened his mouth to refute the claim, but Jefferson cut him off. “I know you came to Wonderland because Regina promised you a way to exact your revenge if you killed Cora. I also know that no one knew Rumplestiltskin better than the Queen of Hearts. Whether it was through Regina’s promise - though I doubt it, because the woman never keeps her word - or some bit of information you were able to charm from Cora before killing her, I’m not sure. What I am sure of… is that you, Killian Jones, Captain Hook, are the Dark One.”

Killian felt a jab at his wrist as the sharp edge made its way through the bindings. With one strong pull he’d be able to free his hands, but Killian chose to bide his time, curious as to what The Hatter’s game was.

“And what if I am?” Killian growled. “What bloody good do you think it’s going to do for you to kidnap the Dark One?”

Jefferson reached over, grabbed a hat off the table, and tossed it at Killian’s feet. “I need you to get it to work.”

Killian looked down, brow quirked at the strange request. “I know I’m not much for fashion, but I’m pretty sure you just have to put it on your head in order for it to serve its purpose, mate.”

“It needs magic. You’re the Dark One. You have magic. You can get it to work.”

“And then what?”

“Then I go home.”

“I don’t understand.” Killian shook his head at the sheer madness of the situation. “You’re awake, mate. You escaped the effects of the curse, why go back? There’s nothing left in the Enchanted Forest. You seem to have a good life here. Regina gave you a place almost as grand as my own.”

“Sure. Regina gave me luxury, but her curse ripped the only thing I truly care for away from me.”

Jefferson stood and wheeled Killian over to a telescope that was situated at one of the room’s many windows, and told him to have a look. Killian peered through the lens and saw a family seated around their dinner table, a young girl the center focus of the cozy image.

“Her name is Grace,” Jefferson stated. “Here its Paige, but her name is Grace. My Grace. Do you have any idea what it’s like? Seeing her day after day? Happy with a new family? A new father?”

“She’s your daughter,” Killian stated with a sigh as Jefferson pulled the chair away from the telescope.

“You think I escaped Regina’s curse because I remember?” Jefferson spat. “That is my curse. I remember, but Grace doesn’t know who I am. Doesn’t remember our life together, or where we come from. What good is this house, all this luxury, if I can’t share it with her?”

“If she truly is your daughter then why not reach out to her? Try and tell her the truth?”
“Who would ever believe it? She’ll think I’m crazy!” Jefferson shouted, his control slipping as it
gave over to a mania that had Killian eyeing The Hatter warily, especially after he pulled Killian’s
own gun out from the back of his waistband. He must have taken the weapon from Killian while he
was unconscious. “Her family will think I’m crazy and probably have me arrested by that deputy
friend of yours, Emma. No! No, I need her to remember me, and she can’t do that here. That’s why I
need you to get the hat to work.”

“As you said, mate, it needs magic to work, and they call this place the Land Without Magic for a
reason. I have no magic here!”

“Then how are you awake?” Jefferson accused, turning the gun on him. “Something must have
triggered your memories. Something brought magic here. It’s the only explanation for all the
changes.”

“What changes?”

“The clock for one. The day after it started moving, you deviated from your normal routine. That’s
when I first started to suspect you were awake. Then David Nolan woke up, that Ashley girl finally
had her baby, and the mine caved in. All occurrences that had you in common.”

“Well, I’m afraid to disappoint you mate, but none of those events actually had anything to do with
me.”

“Well, something is causing the curse to weaken! If it isn’t you, then who?”

Killian tensed. The Hatter was right. Something was causing the curse to weaken, or rather someone.
Someone who had been involved in each of the events he’d just listed. Killian’s jaw clenched, and
he averted his gaze as the truth he’d suspected all along settled over him. It was Emma. She wasn’t
just the Saviour, she had magic. Magic Jefferson thought he needed in order to get his bloody hat to
work.

“Oh!” Killian’s head snapped up and he could see understanding start to dawn in Jefferson’s eyes
“It’s her. I’m such a fool! I can’t believe I didn’t realize it before. It’s her, isn’t it?”

“Who?” Killian swallowed heavily.

“Emma,” he replied with a look of utter confidence. “No one comes to Storybrooke. But she did.
Right before all the changes started. It isn’t you. I don’t need the Dark One. I need her.”

“Stay away from Emma,” Killian growled. “I’m warning you. You don’t want me as your enemy,
mate.”

“Which you would that be?” Jefferson taunted. “The Dark One who’s just admitted to having no
power here, or the pirate captain I have tied to a chair?”

“Both.”

Killian launched himself from the chair and grabbed for the gun loosely held in Jefferson’s
unsuspecting hand. The two men struggled, and though Jefferson was able to land a blow against
Killian’s face, splitting his lip, it was Killian who came out the victor. His gun now trained on
Jefferson as fury continued to course through his veins at the risk the man before him posed to
everything Killian held dear.

_The man is a loose canon_, Killian’s mind hissed, and he added a slight pressure to the trigger as more
thoughts swirled through his consciousness. _He knows your secret. He’s a threat. He wants to hurt_
the woman you love. You must kill him to protect the ones you love. Killian released a startled breath when he realized the words permeating his mind weren’t truly his, but that revelation did not loosen his grip on the tenuously held trigger. A sickening delight of depraved hatred began to uncoil itself from within Killian’s chest at the look of sheer terror on Jefferson’s face. Soft pleas fell from the man’s lips, whispers of his daughter’s name fluttered between them, yet Killian couldn’t bring himself to lower the weapon. The hissing words still echoed in his ears.

He knows. Your secret isn’t safe. Kill him!

“Killian!”

Emma’s cry from the doorway had Killian recoiling. His head snapped toward her and his mind cleared. She stood with her weapon trained on Jefferson, giving Killian an encouraging nod to lower his as Graham made his way into the room. Slowly, Killian lowered his gun, then holstered it. Graham cuffed Jefferson and began reading him his rights. The Hatter’s gaze snapped to Killian’s when the Sheriff told him he had the right to remain silent and Killian answered with a look that told him he should heed those words.

“Killian? Are you alright?” Emma rushed to him, her eyes trained on the cut at his lip and the bruise he could feel blooming across his cheek.

He grabbed her wrist as she brought her hand up towards his face while the words I’m fine died on his tongue. She’d know that was a lie, even without that super power of hers.

“No. I’m not,” he admitted with a clipped tone.

Emma took a step closer to him which had him dropping her wrist and taking a step back. A look of confused hurt passed over her face, and Killian chastised himself, no longer capable of meeting her eyes.

“Come on,” she said. “Let’s get you checked out.”

The ride to the hospital and subsequent examination was a tense and quiet affair. Killian was too wrapped up in his thoughts to even put up any kind of fight over the fuss he was receiving from the doctors and nurses. The ride back to the station was just as silent, with Emma casting worried glances his way every few moments.

He didn’t deserve her worry. Didn’t deserve the care and concern of the doctors and nurses. He wasn’t the hero they all thought him to be, the good man Snow White professed him to be on the beach earlier.

He’d almost murdered a man in cold blood.

Sure, Captain Hook was already guilty of that particular sin a dozen times over, but there was something distinctly different from those atrocities and the one that had nearly occurred at his hand earlier. The fact that his previous dark deeds had been just that. His. Propelled by his darkness. Justified by his thoughts. Actions he alone was accountable for and could therefore shoulder the burden of, and though all the thoughts that had bombarded him while he held Jefferson’s life in his hand could have very well been his own, they weren’t.

It was that fine line that had Killian wanting to claw at something just under his skin. He’d almost believed those words to be his, had almost struck Jefferson down under the influence of something so familiar to his own darkness. Perhaps he hadn’t changed as much as he’d thought.

He hadn’t actually gone through with it though. He’d recognized it for what it was, The Dark One
toying with him, but it hadn’t been until he’d heard Emma’s voice that he’d been able to make his way out of the shroud. Not by his own power, but something within her. It seemed the Darkness was not as dormant as it had led him to believe, but with Emma close at hand it had slithered back into the confines of whatever dark corner it was shackled to.

Graham met them in the parking lot of the sheriff’s station. A call had come in about a suspicious person lurking about in one of the neighborhoods, and he asked Emma to go check it out.

“I’ll take Jones’ statement and finishing booking our... guest,” he reassured her.

Killian could see from Emma’s disgruntled look that she wasn’t too happy with his request, but she was the deputy, and Graham was the sheriff.

“You gonna be okay?” Emma asked Killian.

“Aye,” he replied with what he hoped was a convincing smile. “I will be. Go see to your duty, love.”

Emma gave him one last concerned look before turning back to the cruiser and setting off into the night.

Killian followed Graham into the station, Jefferson studying them from behind the bars of one of the cells.

“You want to tell me what the hell is going on, Jones? I can’t get a word out of... him.”

“Huntsman, Hatter. Hatter, Huntsman,” Killian introduced flippantly as he gestured between the two men.

“You’re awake, too?” Graham questioned incredulously.

“Nice to see you again, Huntsman.” Jefferson saluted.

“How are you awake?”

“It seems he’s been awake. This whole time,” Killian informed a still stunned Graham.

“And why, exactly, did he kidnap you this evening?” Graham asked, crossing his arms over his chest.

“That’s between The Hatter and I,” Killian stated. “Would you be so kind as to give us moment, Sheriff?” Graham shot Killian an accusatory look. “I give you my word. I only wish to talk with him.”

Graham looked over at Jefferson who gave a slight nod. “Two minutes,” he said before exiting the room.

“Guess I’m not going anywhere anytime soon, huh?” Jefferson commented. “How long are you going to keep me locked away for?”

“Until you are no longer a threat,” Killian replied.

“Yeah? A threat to who? To Emma? Or to you?”

“At some point the curse will be broken, Jefferson,” Killian continued, “and when it is I can guarantee that nothing will stand in the way of you reuniting with your daughter.”
Jefferson looked Killian over, gauging the sincerity of his words before pointedly asking, “What’s your price?”

“You tell no one what I truly am,” Killian threatened. “If you tell anyone that I am the Dark One, then I’ll personally ensure you never see your daughter again.”

“Deal.”
Emma sat slumped at the counter in Granny’s nursing a spiked cocoa, a double, thanks to the perceptive proprietor. She was supposed to be outside helping Graham with crowd control at The Annual Storybrooke Christmas Festival, which was in full swing with an offering of carolers, horse drawn carriage rides, and pictures with Santa. Emma, however, was not feeling the festive spirit, despite how the twinkling lights, wreaths, bows, and treacherous clusters of mistletoe seemed to have ensnared the citizenry of their quaint town.

Including the Mayor and her son.

Emma had watched as Henry stood in line waiting to see Santa, with Regina’s arm securely wrapped around his shoulders, and felt like her guts were being ripped out. The absence she felt was visceral; a gnawing ache that swelled within in her chest and turned in her belly. When he’d spotted her in the crowd his face had lit up, and an enthusiastic wave was sent her way before Regina had caught sight of the interaction. Though Emma couldn’t hear what was said, the sharp admonishment was clear from the wince on Henry’s face and the glare Her Majesty had thrown at her.

Hot tears of anger had threatened to spill over and Graham had witnessed the entire silent exchange. At first he’d urged her to go and take a break, but it became an order when Emma had stubbornly refused. Now she sat in Granny’s diner, which was acting as a hub for the Festival volunteers, wallowing in bah-humbugged-ness amidst the cheer and merriment she desperately wished to share with her son.

Four weeks. It had been four weeks since the fallout, and Emma was no closer in figuring out a way back into Henry’s life. Despite all the assistance she’d received in her endeavors to find a loophole in the closed adoption, none appeared to exist. She was quickly losing hope, and might have thrown in the towel already if it hadn’t been for Mary Margaret’s hope speeches and Killian’s steadfast belief that everything would work out in her favor in the end.

A steadfastness that had taken a brief hiatus after his harrowing experience with the mad man who’d kept him at gunpoint for several hours just a couple of weeks ago. Not that Emma could fault Killian for taking a few days for himself after such an ordeal, even if she still wasn’t quite sure what it had
all been about.

After she and Graham had discovered Killian’s abduction, Emma had gone to question Killian’s assistant, William, about any suspicious activity at the pawn shop recently. He had informed her that the shop was set up with video surveillance cameras that covered both the front and back rooms. The tapes had shown a tense looking exchange between Killian and a customer both William and Graham had identified as a man named Jefferson.

She and Graham had heard the sounds of a struggle before they’d even had a chance to knock at Jefferson’s door. Fortunately, this Jefferson character had not locked it, and Emma had wasted no time in following the sounds until she’d found Killian, bruised and bleeding with his gun trained on his attacker. For a brief moment Emma had thought Killian might pull the trigger. A rage she’d never witnessed before radiated from him, not with heated fury but a cold, uncaring menace that had the hairs on the back of her neck raising. Once she’d gotten him to lower the weapon though, a new expression took hold of his entire demeanor.

Shame.

He’d said little to her. Not that night, or in the days following. Graham had sent Jefferson off to Dr. Whale for a psych eval, and he’d been locked away in the psychiatric ward at the hospital ever since. She hadn’t been able to get a straight answer out of either Killian or Graham about the entire affair, and only decided to drop the issue (for now) because Killian had refused to leave his house for several days afterward. When he had emerged, she’d been so relieved to see him looking more like his old self, that she just couldn’t bring herself to dredge it all up again.

His determination to keep up her hopes and belief had nearly rivaled Mary Margaret’s over the past several days, and Emma was beginning to question whether or not it was some sort of deflection, so he wouldn’t have to face his own feelings about what he’d gone through. Again, not that she blamed him. All the positivity was starting to get under her skin, though. How could they all be so infuriatingly optimistic? She was no closer to having Henry back in her life, and by all accounts, things seemed pretty damned hopeless.

Killian flipped up the collar of his coat and stuck his hands in his pockets as he surveyed the merriment of Main Street. The atmosphere of peace and good will towards men was a stark contrast to the disposition his soul had carried a little more than a week ago.

Many torment filled days had plagued him after his encounter with Jefferson. The awareness of the Darkness and how it had been present all this time weighed heavily on him. Killian had spent many hours analyzing his thoughts, impulses, decisions, and behaviors since waking, and had a new found understanding of the hell Graham must have been in all those weeks sequestered in his cabin after regaining his heart.

The irony was not lost on him that it had taken a visit from Graham and Henry to get him to lay aside his broodings and refocus his attention to more important matters. Despite its ability to manipulate its way into Killian’s mind, the Darkness was still powerless in this realm without magic. He’d simply have to be more vigilant in recognizing its tricks, and find ways to safeguard his mind from the corrosive thoughts and influence. One such way was already apparent to him: Emma.
Killian had shared his suspicions with Graham and Henry that Emma most likely had magic, an admission that earned him a volley of questions from the pair. *How? What kind of magic? Did she know? How could she not know? Is that how she’ll break the curse? With magic? How do we get her to use it?* All questions for which Killian had no answers.

Further study of Henry’s storybook, and a few more unlocked memories, did reveal two key components that seemed to be necessary in order for one to wield magic. The channeling of focused emotion and belief. Thinking back on all those times Killian had sensed or experienced something unique simmering beneath Emma’s tough exterior, he realized they were usually accompanied by an outburst of emotion, or an acknowledgement of a previously disregarded truth, a belief, about herself.

Belief. That was the key.

In order for Emma to break the curse she would need to use her magic, and she would only be able to do that if she believed in it, in herself, in the truth of who she truly was. Unfortunately, belief in magic or the curse was still a long way off, and Emma’s emotional state of mind wasn’t faring so well either. This business with Henry, and Regina’s last stronghold to wield any kind of power over the woman that, unbeknownst to the queen, was destined to break her curse, had Emma on the edge of despair. Despite all his efforts to try and keep her spirits up, Killian knew Swan was losing hope, and without that… all their hopes might be lost.

“Hey, Killian!” Henry greeted enthusiastically, though Killian could see a hint of sadness in his eyes.

“Hello, my boy. Having a good time?”

Henry shrugged before flipping up the collar of his coat and shoving his hands in his pockets. Killian suppressed a grin at the mimicry, something he’d noticed Henry doing more and more of late. A swell of pride swept through his chest, but he didn’t let it deter him from his inquiry.

“You seem vexed, lad. Has something happened?”

“It’s… her,” Henry replied. “Emma and I waved at each other earlier, and she saw…”

Killian didn’t need Henry to finish. He had a pretty good idea how Regina must have reacted. Biting back a few choice expletives Killian asked, “Where is Emma now?”

“Graham sent her to Granny’s to take a break. Thirty minutes ago.” Henry looked up at Killian, his anxious eyes wide with concern furrowed brows. “I’m worried about her, Killian. You need to do something. Cheer her up.”

Killian ran a frustrated hand through his hair. “How do you propose I go about doing that?”

Anxiety made way for a mischievous glint in the boy’s eyes, and an all too familiar quirked brow and smirk appeared on Henry’s face. “You should take her on a carriage ride.”

It was Killian’s turn to mirror the boy’s expression. “A carriage ride?”

“Yeah,” Henry replied with the best nonchalance any scheming ten-year-old could muster. “I mean, it is Christmas after all, and carriage rides are… festive.”

Killian hummed suspiciously at the lad’s motives, but couldn’t deny that the idea had merit. He gave an affectionate ruffle to Henry’s hair, and told the lad he’d see him later, before making his way to the diner.

The bell sounded over the door as Killian walked in and several volunteers and patrons offered him a
greeting. Emma lifted her gaze from the mug before her and offered him a sad smile. She wasn’t even trying to mask her melancholy, a fact that tore at Killian’s insides and made him want to simply hold her until all her pains and burdens melted away.

“Jones, get over here and see if you can’t charm a smile out of our girl,” Granny barked in her firm but loving way.

“Granny, are you suggesting that you consider me charming?” Killian sauntered over to the counter, a flirtatious swagger swinging in his hips and twitching at his brows.

The typically stern woman actually gave him half a smile. “I’m suggesting you put those baby blues and dimples to good use before Deputy Swan here drinks me out of hot cocoa.”

“I’m sitting right here, you know,” Emma groused.

“Yes, and you’ve been wallowing on that barstool long enough. Get her out of here, Jones.”

“You heard Granny.” Killian turned to Emma and laid on the charm, per Widow Lucas’ request. “No more wallowing, Swan. It’s Christmas, a time for good cheer.”

“I wouldn’t have pegged you as a holiday cheer sort of guy, Jones,” Emma challenged petulantly.

“You forget, love. I carry my own brand of cheer with me,” Killian quipped as he pulled his flask from his back pocket and held it up in front of her.

Emma rolled her eyes, and Killian asked Granny for two hot chocolates to go.

“Where are we going?” Emma questioned warily.

“On a carriage ride.”

“Seriously?”

“I’m very serious, Swan.” Killian placed his hand at her elbow and encouraged her to stand. “Up you get. Your carriage awaits, milady. Shall we?”

“If you don’t, I will,” Granny cut in cheekily as she placed the hot chocolates on the counter before them, earning her an amused and slightly stunned expression from the pair.

“Why Granny,” Killian purred. “I’d no idea you felt this way.”

“I also provide my own type of holiday cheer,” Granny smirked as she pointed up.

Killian chuckled at the cluster of mistletoe suspended over the old woman’s head before he leaned over the counter and placed a quick peck at her cheek. Having collected their hot chocolates, Killian turned and offered his arm to Emma who was failing to suppress her grin behind a scowl. He intensified his expectant look and extended one of the cups towards her.

“Fine,” Emma sighed in feigned irritation, taking the cup from his hand and linking her arm with his. “Lead the way, Captain.”

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Emma sat snuggled next to Killian in the open top carriage, a plush blanket covered their legs to help
provide some warmth on the cold December night. Not that it was really needed. Between the hot chocolate spiked with rum from Killian’s flask, and the heat coming off the man next to her in welcomed waves, Emma was starting to feel a bit flushed. The feel of his thigh pressed against hers, and the light brushes of their pinkies against each other’s as the carriage bounced in rhythm couldn’t possibly have contributed to her present condition.

“Thank you,” Emma blurted out when the silence became too much. Too comfortable. “For the carriage ride. This is… it’s nice.”

Killian gave her a tender smile that started her pulse racing. “Actually, you’ve Henry to thank,” he informed her. “The carriage ride was his idea. I think he hoped it might lift your spirits. As do I.”

“I know I’ve been pretty moody lately,” she said softly, her gaze fixed on the folds of the blanket. “I just really miss him.”

“I know, love,” Killian replied gently. He lifted his hand, and a moment of hesitation passed before he placed it over hers. He gave it a gentle squeeze and waited for her to meet his eyes before he resolutely stated, “We’re going to find a way to get him back for you, Emma.”

She tried not to scoff, but it was useless. “At this point I think it’ll take a miracle.”

“Well, it is Christmas,” he reminded her jovially. “Perhaps we just need to believe for some of this season’s magic.”

Emma snorted, and Killian sighed heavily. “You know what the problem is with this world, Swan? Everyone wants a magical solution to their problem, and everyone refuses to believe in magic.”

Emma hitched a brow at him. “So, you believe in magic?”

“Sure.” He shrugged, taking a sip of his cocoa before asking, “Don’t you?”

“Uh, no. I live in this place called the real world.”

“I see,” he replied with a slight smirk ghosting over his features, “and you find nothing magical at all about the real world? What about sunsets, or the uniqueness of a snowflake? The calm after a sudden storm or the way the stars shine up in the heavens.”

“I thought you were a pirate, not a poet,” Emma teased.

“I am many things, darling.” His accompanying wink made her laugh, but then his tone became a bit more serious. “What about Henry?”

“What about him?”

“You made him, Swan,” Killian expressed with a hint of reverence. “You and the lad’s father created that amazing boy. If that’s not true magic, I’m not sure what is.” Killian slid his hand under hers and laced their fingers together. The air around them went still, and Emma didn’t think she could tear her eyes from his even if she wanted to. “Your boy believes in magic, Swan. When he looks around him he sees a world you don’t see. One filled with heroes and villains, where the good guys win and happily ever after is possible. Seems to me there are worse things to believe in, or worse… he could have no belief at all.”

They let his words settle between them. The clip clop of the horses’ hooves and rattle of the carriage wheels as they turned over the pavement became a soothing soundtrack as Emma replayed all that Killian had said over in her mind.
“Do you believe they’re possible?” she asked after several long minutes.

“What?”

“Happily Ever Afters?” Her question came out as little more than a whisper.

“I thought I had mine once.” The tight tone in his voice tugged at Emma’s heart, and she watched his Adam’s apple bob as he swallowed and took a breath. “Her name was Milah.”

“Where is she?” Emma asked with trepidation, fearing that she might already know.

“She’s gone,” he bit out. “Taken from me long ago. I spent many years thinking that my happy ending would be seeing justice served against the one who took my happiness from me. But once I got it… let’s just say it wasn’t the happy ending I’d been hoping for.” The smile he tried to give her didn’t reach his eyes, and there was something so devastating within them she almost had to look away.

“And now?”

“Now,” he murmured, the low dulcet tone of his voice caressing her the same way his thumb was over hers. “I think there might still be hope for me.”

Emma felt her pulse pick up speed at the change that came over him. The sad devastation from a moment ago was replaced with a raw vulnerability, and she had to force her braver self to ask, “What changed?”

“I never thought I’d be capable of letting go of my first love. My Milah. To believe that I could find someone else. That is… until I met you.”

Emma’s breath caught in her throat. She was only vaguely aware that the carriage had come to a stop in front of the diner. All of her focus was wrapped up in the man before her and the declarations that still rang in her ears. Until I met you. Had she moved in towards him, or had he leaned into her? Perhaps they were both responsible for the nearly nonexistent space between them, each studying the other with tentative glances. Killian’s eyes fluttered closed, his lashes lusciously spread across the apples of his cheeks. His breath whispered over her lips as he exhaled her name, and Emma closed her eyes in eager anticipation of his mouth finally seeking out hers.

“Emma! Killian!” Dr. Hopper’s excited shouts jarred them, and all at once the spell was broken. Killian jerked back, eyes wide and filled with something that might have been panic before he schooled his features and looked out the carriage to the approaching man. Emma’s stomach dropped, rejection stinging in each of her nerve endings, Killian’s reaction an abrasive scour over her already raw and frayed emotions. She blinked back the sting of tears and swallowed her disappointment, focusing on Archie’s beaming smile.

“I did it!” Dr. Hopper exclaimed breathlessly. “I found the loophole!”

Emma put the last of the reports she’d been working on away in the file cabinet, and went back to her desk to count down the remaining minutes of her last shift of the year. She planned to spend New Year’s Eve with the girls for a Ladies’ Night Out, as Mary Margaret had sold it, and after the past ten days, Emma was ready for a carefree evening out.
Immediately after the non-kiss moment she and Killian had shared in the carriage, Archie had informed them of his discovery as they all sat back in Granny’s diner. He told them that he’d heard back from the agency that had handled Henry’s adoption. After his initial call a few weeks prior, they looked further into the case file and discovered some discrepancies. Turned out Regina had planned to give Henry back. Another family had nearly completed the adoption process when she’d changed her mind.

Except she’d already signed the forms relinquishing her rights, and they’d ended up getting filed with the court by mistake. The second set of adoption papers from the other family had also been completed and filed, but never ruled upon in family court before a judge. Archie believed that this new information might be enough for Emma to have an attorney file a petition to set aside both adoptions in order for her to try and win back her parental rights.

The news had been almost too good to be true, and both she and Killian had been overjoyed at the prospect. All apprehension about their interrupted moment was forgotten in the face of what Emma had termed the best Christmas gift ever, and they’d wasted no time assembling their friends and cohorts to celebrate with a toast.

Unfortunately, their exuberance had not gone unnoticed.

Turned out that Sydney had overheard the news. Tucked away in the furthest booth, it wasn’t until Ruby had gone over to bus the table that she’d caught sight of him. He’d scampered off in a hurry, Killian’s jaw ticking as he’d made his exit, and they’d all braced themselves for the fallout that was sure to follow.

Only it hadn’t. Regina had been oddly absent in the days following. Emma still hadn’t seen her beyond a few glimpses around town, and Graham had told her she hadn’t been in her office all week. Though, given the holidays, no one found that detail to be too disconcerting, except perhaps Killian, who’d been adamant that she not wait until the new year to begin the legal proceedings.

He had immediately helped her find an attorney in the Boston area, where the adoption agency and all the records were located, who was willing to take her case. They hadn’t discussed the moment in the carriage, and nothing had really changed between them. Still, Emma couldn’t help but be frustrated.

What on earth was the man waiting on?

All that swagger and innuendo, flirty and tender moments of understanding, the until I met you declaration. They both knew there was something there. Something between them that they’d been dancing on the edge of since… well, since that first night at the Rabbit Hole, honestly. Emma knew he was most likely waiting on her. Waiting for her to decide whether or not she was willing to take the risk, but hadn’t the carriage ride made that rather clear? She hadn’t been the one to pull away, for once.

Emma let out a frustrated groan, a common response to her thoughts of Killian Jones lately.

“Oh, my. Did I come at bad time, Deputy Swan?”

Emma jerked her head toward the hallway and her jaw dropped to see Regina standing there.

“Madam Mayor,” Emma greeted warily. “What brings you here?”

“I came here to give you this.” She held out a plastic tupperware container, the contents of which Emma couldn’t quite make out.
“What’s that?”

“My attempt at a peace offering.” Emma’s brows shot up, but Regina paid her shocked expression no heed. “I’ve been doing a lot of thinking. My attorney has informed me of the irregularities that were discovered in Henry’s adoption file, and I-”

“And you’re afraid you’ll lose.” Emma crossed her arms over her chest and couldn’t help the smug, gloating smile that tugged at her lips.

“I’m afraid we might both lose,” Regina corrected. “There’s no guarantee that if a judge rules to set aside the adoption they’ll reinstate your parental rights. What if they remove Henry from us both and he goes into the system? Do you really want to risk that?”

Emma absolutely did not want to risk that. “So, what are you proposing?”

“That we find a way to work things out just between us. We’re both adults. I’m sure we can come to some sort of agreement.”

“Why the change of heart all of a sudden?” Emma asked suspiciously.

“I guess you could call it my New Year’s resolution,” Regina sassed before some semblance of sincerity took hold, and she admitted, “I don’t want Henry to ever find out that I almost gave him back. I had a moment of doubt, but that wasn’t Henry’s fault.” Regina shifted her tone once more, and Emma was having a hard time keeping up. “Have fun on your night out. In the morning you can enjoy this delicious pastry, and then maybe you could join Henry and I for lunch and we can begin talking things over.”

Regina set the tupperware container on the desk, where it remained until Emma collected her things to head back to her house to get ready for the night out. Before she left for the evening, she took a peek inside and was overwhelmed by the delicious fragrance of a homemade apple tart.

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“This is my first night out since I had the baby, and I’m going to make up for lost time.”

The four women toasted Ashley’s sentiment and threw back their drinks. Given that it was New Year’s Eve and a much-needed girls’ night out for all of them, Emma was willing to forego looking too closely at Ashley’s obviously bogus ID. She was off duty, and would be remaining so.

Those first few hours had actually been fun. Emma, Ruby, Mary Margaret, and Ashley spent the evening dancing and drinking, but soon the other women began dishing about their love lives. The latter subject caused Emma to do a bit more of the former activities in her effort to avoid having to discuss her personal romantic relationship, or lack thereof.

By eleven o’clock Emma had progressed from fun and carefree to sullen and broody. As much as she liked Ashley, the girl’s constant complaining about how much her boyfriend worked, while she was stuck with the baby all day, was beginning to grate. Didn’t she realize how lucky she was? How good she had it? Her baby’s daddy had been willing to stick around, step up, take care of them. She’d been able to keep her baby, and would be able to raise Alexandra in a home with both a mother and father.

It wasn’t just Ashley that had Emma hammering back shots like a college Freshman, though. Ruby’s habit of oversharing intimate details of her and Graham’s relationship was something Emma could
definitely have done without. She may not have been interested in Graham, and was relieved that there was no lingering awkwardness between them, but that didn’t mean his quick pursuit of Ruby after everything that had occurred between them didn’t bother her just a little bit. She was happy for them, though. Really, she was. But did Ruby have to be so damn happy? Did she have to be so obvious that she was getting it on the regular, while some people… well, let’s just say it had been a while for Emma.

“Well, ladies. I think I’m going to call it a night,” Mary Margaret announced.

“Now? It’s not even midnight yet.”

“Oh, well… I thought I’d get a jump on the traffic.”

“Yeah, cause the traffic in Storybrooke is such a bitch,” Ruby snickered.

Mary Margaret’s face flamed, and most likely not from the alcohol. Emma didn’t know who she thought she was fooling. They all knew about David, and the worry that the entire affair was only going to blow up in her face had Emma ordering another shot as her friend skittered away to her rendezvous.

“Emma, honey,” Ruby began, “don’t you think, maybe you’ve had enough?”

“I thought we were having a girl’s night out?” Emma slurred. “We’re out. It’s New Year’s Eve. I’m having another shot.”

“Girl’s night has been nice, but honestly, I think I need a be with my guy night,” Ashley moaned.

“Ashley?” a man’s voiced called out from behind them.

“Sean? I thought that you were working tonight.”

“I am. It's my break, but I had to see you. I want us to ring in the New Year together, and I need to ask you something.”

Emma watched as the young man got down on one knee and pulled a black velvet box from his pocket. You have got to be kidding me.

“Will you marry me?”

As the bar around them counted down to midnight, Ashley shouted her yes! and the happy couple left to spend the remainder of Sean’s break celebrating in his truck.

Emma signaled for another drink, and Ruby pulled her phone from her back pocket and began dialing. “I’m about to head out and meet Graham, but I’m not leaving you like this.”

“I’m fine,” Emma argued, but the pleasant thrum of alcohol passing through her blood stream was quickly giving way to lethargy and multiple Ruby Lucas’.

Emma had just laid her head on the table when she heard Ruby address the person she’d called.

“Hey, Killian?”
Killian walked through the Rabbit Hole parking lot toward the front entrance and heard heated voices just before he rounded the corner.

“You were supposed to meet me before midnight. We were going to ring in the New Year together.”

“I know. I’m sorry. Katherine just showed up at the animal shelter. I couldn’t just leave. I wanted to be here with you, though.”

“But you weren’t, David. You were with her.”

Killian fought back the rising guilt from overhearing yet another private conversation between the prince and princess. He didn’t much like the sound of how this one seemed to be playing out.

“I always thought that if two people were supposed to be together, they’d find a way, but, David, if this is our way, I think we should find another one.”

“Mary Margaret-”

“I think you should go home, to Katherine.”

“I know. You’re right. But it doesn’t mean I’m gonna give up. We’ll find a way.”

“I hope so. Happy New Year.”

“Happy New Year.”

Killian waited until he was sure David and Mary Margaret had both departed before continuing inside the bar. Ruby flagged him down from the table she, and a very drunk Emma Swan, were occupying.

“Thanks for coming, Killian,” Ruby greeted. “She’s in pretty rough shape.”

“Am not,” Emma mumbled against the table, pulling a chuckle from Killian.

“I’ll take it from here, Ruby. You go on and enjoy the rest of your New Year.”

Ruby offered up her thanks once more and headed out, leaving Killian to deal with a slumped over Swan who seemed to have no intentions of moving. He swept her golden curls away from her face and was met with a blurry, green eyed stare and half a smile.

“Hey you.”

“Swan,” Killian replied. “What say we get you home, love?”

Killian slung her arm over his shoulder and grabbed her around the waist, hauling her out of her seat. After giving her a moment to wait for the room to stop spinning, he led her out the door to his Jeep, and began the perilous journey back to their bluff, mindful of Emma’s drunken state.

He had to carry her inside once they’d gotten back to her house. Fairly certain she’d passed out, Killian laid her on the bed, removed her shoes, and began tucking her in.

She caught his wrist when he moved to leave. “M’stay.”

“I don’t think that would be a good idea, love.”

Emma opened one eye to look up at him, her hand still grasping his wrist, and asked, “Why haven’t
you ever made a move?”

“Why Swan, are you insinuating that you’d like me to make a move on you?” he teased.

“I’m saying the innuendo and swagger seems to be all bluster.” She had both eyes open now and propped herself up into a reclined position.

“Perhaps I’m just waiting for the right moment.” He reached over with his free hand and played with a strand of her silken hair before tucking it behind her ear.

“The right moment?” she questioned with a smirk. “One could argue that now is the right moment.”

Emma tugged him toward the bed and tried to wrap her other arm around his neck, but he stopped her slightly uncoordinated movements and managed to take both of her hands into his.

“No, Swan. It isn’t.”

“Why not?”

“Because there is still much you do not know about me.”

Emma pulled her hands out of his grasp, and groaned. “We all have our secrets, Killian. Things we don’t like to share. You don’t know everything about me, either.”

Killian sank down to sit on the edge of the bed and picked up her hand once more. “Aye,” he began earnestly, staring into beautiful green eyes and daring to speak what had been in his heart for months. “But when I win your heart, Emma, and I will win it, it won’t be because of any trickery. It will be because you want me. The true me.”

“The true you?” Emma swayed and started to lean back against the headboard. “Who is that, exactly?”

“Someone who is patient enough to wait.”

“Wait for what?”

“For the truth to be revealed,” he answered softly. “Because at some point it will be, and once it is… well, I’m hoping that’s when the fun begins.”

A soft smile curled at her lips as her eyes fluttered shut.

After getting Emma tucked in, and leaving her a few bottles of water and some aspirin on her nightstand, it took every measure of will power Killian possessed to leave and go back to his own home. Sleep did not come for him that night. Consumed with thoughts of Emma inviting him into her bed. The way she’d felt in his arms, how desperate he was to kiss her, to taste her lips and run his hands through her hair.

He had wanted to do this right. Wanted to wait until she knew the truth of who he was before truly pursuing her as he wished. Once the curse was broken he’d be free to do the very thing he’d confessed to her that night. Win her heart. Be with her because she wanted him. Wait until she could accept exactly who that was. Who he truly was.

He was tired of waiting.

Curse be damned, he was going to tell Emma the truth. She could go ahead and think him a madman, but he couldn’t go one more day like this. Maybe he’d been going about things all wrong.
Maybe his confession would be the very thing that caused her to take the curse seriously.

By the time dawn crested the horizon, Killian’s resolve was set. He was going to tell Emma the truth. Her parents really were Snow White and Prince Charming, Regina was the Evil Queen, and he… he would have to tell her *everything*.

Killian grabbed his hook before setting out. He knew it wasn’t much in the way of proof, but he would take what he could in the hopes that it might make Emma believe. His heart hammered in his chest, its pace increasing with each step he took towards Emma’s.

He’d only made it about halfway there when he saw the flashing lights of the ambulance parked out front of her house.
Killian sprinted towards Emma’s house, his heart hammered in his chest while his mind began to swirl with all manner of torments. A sigh of relief escaped his lips when he saw Emma emerge from the house next to a gurney, but his heart stopped at the sight of who it was being wheeled to the awaiting ambulance.

“No,” Killian despaired. *Not Henry, please no…* “Swan! What happened?”

Emma’s gaze tore away from her son and landed on Killian. Tears cascaded down her pale face, and Killian could see the tremble that threatened to take over her entire body.

“Killian,” she choked, a sob caught in the back of her throat. “He just collapsed. We were arguing about the curse, and Regina, and the tart, and… he took a bite of it and just collapsed.”

Clutched in Emma’s hand, along with Henry’s backpack, was a plastic bag that looked to contain some form of pastry. A tart, she’d said. Apple, by the looks of it. Cold dread swept over Killian, a knot of fury tightening in his gut as he waited for his suspicions to be confirmed.

“Swan… where did that come from?” he asked gesturing toward the bag.

“Regina,” she replied, and white hot, murderous rage ignited within Killian. “She said it was a peace offering. She wants to work out a custody agreement without risking the court’s involvement. I was supposed to go over there for lunch today, but Henry showed up this morning and-”

“Ma’am,” the paramedic interrupted. “We’ve got to go.”

“Go be with your boy, Swan.” Killian urged her towards the back of the ambulance and helped her climb in. “I’ll be right behind you,” he promised, giving her hand a reassuring squeeze before stepping back so the other paramedic could close the doors.

Rage continued to simmer in Killian’s veins as he watched the ambulance speed away with lights flashing and sirens blaring. Once out of sight he pulled his phone from his back pocket and dialed as
he stormed back to his house.

“Happy New Year, Captain,” Regina answered smugly, her taunt rang out clearly between them. She’d been expecting his call.

“Do you have any idea what you’ve done?” Killian seethed.

“I know exactly what I’ve done,” she continued with triumph oiling through her words. “I’ve won. With Miss Swan out of the way my curse remains in tact and now I hold all the cards. Did you really think I wouldn’t figure it out? You never should have told Miss Blanchard that Emma was Snow White’s child. Sydney overheard her talking to that fleabag at the diner. The woman never could keep a secret... I should know. So now there’s no Saviour, no birth mother to contend with, and, oh! No chance of a happily ever after for Captain Hoo-”

“Emma isn’t the one who ate it!” Killian roared, a fresh wash of wrath cresting over him at the vile woman’s gloating.

“What? Well, who else would have-?” The silence that followed was deafening before Regina exhaled in horred understanding. “No.”

“Yes,” Killian hissed. “You better get to the hospital Regina and pray that you can fix this, because if that boy dies... then so do you.”

Killian ended the call, climbed into his Jeep, and tossed the phone onto the seat next to him before following after the ambulance. A torrent of panic threatened to overtake him, and the fury that had ignited at the realization that Henry had been cursed was at near combustible levels. Killian fought to maintain control over the war raging within him, to silence the murmuring darkness that was whispering in his ear.

Killian could hear the chaos even before he entered the Emergency Room. Helpless, he watched as Emma tried to get Dr. Whale to listen to her about the apple tart, knowing that no manner of tests they could run would be able to tell the doctor what was truly wrong with the boy.

Killian paced the hallway just outside the room where they had Henry lying prone in a hospital bed until he heard the distinct clacking of heels quickly making their way down the linoleum corridor.

“Where is he? Where’s my son?”

Killian barred her from getting to the door. “He’s inside. Emma’s with him.”

“Well, then. Get out of my way,” she demanded. “I want to see my son.”

“Not yet, Your Majesty,” Killian challenged darkly. “It’s time to come clean.”

“What are you talking about?”

“The curse, Regina,” Killian barked. “We have to tell them what they are really dealing with!”

“What are you talking about?” Emma questioned from behind them, her accusatory gaze fixed squarely on Regina. “What exactly are we dealing with? You poisoned it didn’t you? Tell them what you used! Tell them what kind of poison-”

“Regina didn’t poison the apple tart, Swan,” Killian said, cutting her off. He took a deep breath at the moment of truth before him and looked his Swan squarely in the eyes. “The Evil Queen cursed it. Much like she cursed your mother, Snow White.”
Emma’s faced flushed red with anger, her fists balled at her sides. “The Evil Queen? Snow White? What are you talking about?! Henry’s life is at stake and you’re spouting his curse nonsense?!”

“It isn’t nonsense, Emma. It’s true,” Killian affirmed with a tone of pleading as he pulled the hook out from his inside jacket pocket and held it up in front of her. “It’s all true. Regina is the Evil Queen and I am Captain Hook.” Killian reached out and removed Henry’s storybook from the backpack she still had clutched in her hands. “Every story in this book is real, Swan. I need you to believe that. Henry needs you to believe it.”

Killian held the book out to her, and her eyes flickered between it and Killian’s gaze. With trembling fingers, she took the book from him, and he watched as Emma’s eyes went wide and seemed to unfocus from her surroundings before falling shut. After a long moment her eyes snapped open, her gaze landing on the hook still clutched in his hand. She let out a stuttered exhale as she met his anxious stare.

“Hook?”

“Aye,” he affirmed gently, bracing himself for whatever response this shattering revelation might have on her.

Emma’s eyes flicked over to the woman beside him, her gaze turned cold and hard. She lunged forward and grabbed Regina by the arm and hauled her towards a storage room off to the side of the hallway. Killian followed the women through the door, but was stopped in his tracks, too stunned to move as he watched Emma toss the Evil Queen around like a rag doll, slamming her against the shelving. The two women grappled with one another for a moment more before Killian snapped himself out his shock, wrapped his arms around Emma’s waist, and tore her off of Regina.

“As much as I would love to see you tear the Evil Queen apart with your bare hands love, we unfortunately, need her if we have any hope of undoing her magic in order to save Henry.”

“I can’t undo this!” Regina cried.

“What do you mean you can’t? Don’t you have magic?!”

“Of course she does,” Killian confirmed with contempt. “She would have needed magic in order to curse the apple tart.”

“That was the last of it,” Regina admitted before turning her panic and frenzy onto Emma. “It was suppose to put you to sleep.”

Killian felt all the oxygen rush out of his lungs. No more magic?! Terrifying images devastated his mind, and he was only partially aware that the two woman had continued on.

“What’s it gonna do to him?” Emma questioned fearfully.

“I don’t know. Magic here is unpredictable.”

“So… he could… Henry could… “

“Yes.”

“So what do we do?“

“I warned you, Regina,” Killian reminded menacingly as he raised his hook and stretched it out threateningly before her. “You had better fix this unless you like the feeling of hook piercing flesh.”
“Killian don’t!” Emma grabbed his arm and pulled him back when he began advancing on the woman.

“It isn’t that simple, Hook! We need magic to fix this!”

Killian’s hook clattered against the floor after slipping from his grasp. He reached out wildly for Emma’s hand and clasped it tightly in his as a tempest of visions began to whorl with more ferocity than he’d yet to experience.

“Killian? Are you ok-”

“I might know of a way to get our hands on some magic,” he blurted out, earning him two stunned expressions.


“The Crocodile.”

“The what?” Emma snapped.

“He means Rumplestiltskin,” Regina dismissed off-handedly. “He was the Dark One before-”

“He placed many a fail safe within the curse, and even planned on a way of bringing magic to this land after it was broken,” Killian interrupted with an edge of panic in his voice. “Perhaps we can access it now.”

Regina shot him an assessing look before the understanding that no one else knew that particular secret, awakened behind her eyes. “Wait,” Regina chimed in, her smirk of understanding falling away and replaced with intrigue. “Rumple found a way to bring magic here? How?”

The words poured from him without thought, as if he were compelled to say them. “True Love. The only magic powerful enough to transcend realms and break any curse. The Dark One bottled some back in the Enchanted Forest.”

“How?”

“He used hair from Emma’s parents to create the most powerful potion in all the realms. So powerful that when he transcribed The Dark Curse he placed a single drop on the parchment, acting as a safety valve.”

“That’s why I’m the Saviour?” Emma was doing her best to follow along, but Killian could see the trepidation and panic that was threatening to overwhelm her. “That’s why I can break the curse?”

“Indeed, love.” Killian gave her hand a light squeeze, but the action only seemed to set her off.

“I don’t care about breaking the curse! I only care about saving Henry!”

“Aye, well it’s our lucky day then,” he said in an attempt to pacify his now irate Swan. “The Crocodile didn’t use all the potion. He had your father take it to someone for safekeeping. Tucking it away for a rainy day.”

“Well, it’s storming like a bitch, where is it?” Emma demanded.

“Where it is isn’t the issue… how to retrieve it, is.”

“Enough riddles, Hook,” Regina snapped. “You’re starting to sound just like-”
“Don’t.” Killian warned, and couldn’t help the flash of fear within his eyes that Regina seemed to take notice of.

“Fine,” the Queen relented. “So, how do we retrieve it? Who did Rumplestiltskin leave it with?”

“Tell me something, Your Majesty. Where does one keep a dragon in Storybrooke?”

“He gave it to her?! That twisted little imp!”

“Would someone please tell me where this magic is, and how we can get it so we can save Henry?!” Emma shouted impatiently.

“The magic was hidden inside of Maleficent while she was in her dragon form. You’ll need to get it from her, love.”

“Me?” Emma’s eyes went wide.

“You are the product of that magic, Emma,” Killian reminded. “You are the one that has to retrieve it.”

“Right. Sure,” Emma processed. “Just slay a dragon and retrieve the magic love potion from inside her… this is insane.”

“Maybe, but it’s our best option if we’re going to save Henry,” Regina sighed.

“Okay.” Emma squared her shoulders and set her resolve, and Killian couldn’t help the swell of pride he felt for his tough lass in that moment. “Just let me go talk to Whale. I’ll tell him we’re heading back to our homes to see if we can find what might have caused Henry to collapse, or something. Then we’ll go get the magic potion… thing.”

After Emma exited the storage room Regina stepped towards Killian, a rare look of concern beset her features.

“Hook. If we do this… if we release magic here in Storybrooke, it could awaken the Dar-”

“Henry,” he interrupted firmly. “It could awaken Henry, and that’s all that matters right now.”

Regina gave Hook an appreciative look and nodded. The door swung open to reveal Emma, and Killian couldn’t help the swell of pride he felt for his tough lass in that moment. “Just let me go talk to Whale. I’ll tell him we’re heading back to our homes to see if we can find what might have caused Henry to collapse, or something. Then we’ll go get the magic potion… thing.”

“Right, let’s go then.” He only got about two paces out the door before Emma caught his hand.

“Wait… Killian. I need you to stay here.”

Killian balked. “And let you go off and fight a dragon on your own? Are you daft?”

“I need you to stay here with Henry, Killian. Please, I don’t want him to be alone.” Her gaze fell to the floor, and her voice shook, catching over her next words. “I want someone to be with him in case he… in case I don’t…”

“Don’t worry, Swan,” he soothed with small caresses over the back of her hand. “I’ll watch over him until you’ve returned with the magic in hand.”

“You really think I can do this?” she asked, doubt filled eyes peering up at him through her lashes.
“Aye, love. I’ve yet to see you fail.” She let out the breath she’d been holding and gave him a grateful smile, making his heart swell painfully in his chest. “Just one last thing… you’ll need to stop at the pawn shop before you go see Maleficent. There’s something there you’ll need.”

“What’s that?” She cocked her head, brows furrowed in interest.

“Your father’s sword,” Killian smirked.

After Emma and the Queen departed, Killian called ahead to the shop to inform Smee that Deputy Swan would be by to collect a particular item that was stored in the backroom. He then forced himself to finally face that which he had been dreading.

Seeing Henry lying still and pale on the hospital bed nearly felled him. Killian choked back tears and worry and brought a chair over to Henry’s bedside, lowering himself into it to take up vigil over the lad. He pulled his hook from the pocket he’d returned it to after he’d collected it from the storage room floor, and pressed it into Henry’s hand, covering it with his own.

“Hold on, lad,” Killian whispered in strained bursts. “Your mother’s off to find a way to break this curse. We did it, Henry. Emma believes. She knows the truth. You have to hang in there so you can tell her you told her so.”

As Killian sat at Henry’s bedside he was only partially aware of the frenzied activity still going on around him, more consumed with the mania that stirred anarchy within him. All through his explanation of Rumplestiltskin’s plan he’d known that was what the Darkness wanted. It wanted magic to be released, wanted to be free from its prison of suppression. Killian knew full well what Emma’s success would cost him, but the price of her failure was much too high for him to bear. Henry’s life was worth any sacrifice, any payment. Killian’s revenge had cost him everything, and the Darkness was poised to collect.

He’d have to leave town. Go somewhere the magic wouldn’t reach, a place where he wouldn’t be able to hurt the people he loved. Killian cursed under his breath as he remembered the restriction at the town line. As long as the curse remained, he wouldn’t be able to leave, and there was no guarantee the barrier would be lifted once the curse did break.

Desperate for a distraction from his thoughts and the dread churning in his gut, Killian focused his attentions back to Henry. The boy’s breathing was shallow and labored, his pulse weak. A deathly pallor shrouded his face and Killian took in a shuddering breath at the familiar helplessness he felt. The feeling of being utterly powerless as the life of a loved one slipped away, as it had with Liam and with Milah. He wished now he’d told Henry more about them, had shared more of himself with the boy he’d come to think of as his own. A realization that threatened to devastate him once more.

Attempting to blink away the prickling tears that were gathering in the corner of his eyes, Killian spotted Henry’s storybook at the end of the bed. The book had always been the boy’s source of hope, and they needed that now more than ever. Reverently, Killian retrieved it from where it rested and opened the tome, the pages falling open to the story of a bandit and imposter prince. As Killian read he noted a number of pages missing, pages that had contained the truth of Emma’s identity. An identity Henry had attempted to conceal from the Evil Queen by removing and destroying them. A part of Killian wished the pages could be returned, restored to their rightful place. A hope he wished for Emma as well.

Killian glanced at the clock and wondered how much longer it might take, even as he tried not to think about Emma battling a dragon perhaps at that very moment.
Alarms began to sound from the equipment next to him, and he was commanded to stand back so the doctors and nurses could do their work.

Killian’s heart seized as he heard Whale state, “We’re losing him, call Mayor Mills.”

With shaking hands Killian pulled out his phone and dialed.

“Killian! We got it!” Emma answered overjoyed, and Killian broke as the piercing tone of a flat line filled the room.

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Killian didn’t think he could take anymore despair or anguish. The sight of Emma as she made her way into the room made him want to rip his own heart out in order to remove the wailing ache that pulsed from its origin. Slowly, she made her way to the side of the bed, her eyes never leaving Henry’s face.

“I’m sorry, Emma,” Killian wept. “I’m so, so sorry.”

Emma took hold of Henry’s free hand, her chin quivering as fresh tears spilled down her cheeks in quiet anguish. Her fingers ran across her boy’s forehead, sweeping his bangs to the side. Killian could see the restrained lamentations shuddering in her chest as she bent forward. Killian shut his eyes in resigned sorrow, but then opened them as he heard Emma whisper, “I love you, Henry” and placed a kiss to his brow.

A radiance of incandescent heat propelled itself from the origins of the kiss, traveling on a ripple of rainbow light that nearly stole the breath from Killian’s lungs. Henry gasped, eyes opened wide, and smiled at a stunned Emma.

“I love you, too.” Emma cupped Henry’s cheek at his return of the sentiment, a fresh flow of tears cascaded down her face, but these were altogether different. “You saved me.”

“You did it, Swan,” Killian elated through his own fresh tears.

Killian, Emma, and Henry took in the stunned expressions of all those present within the room, a palpable shift filled the space and looks of understanding began to dawn on everyone’s faces.

“Killian? Henry? What’s going on?” Emma questioned with trepidation.

“The curse,” Killian offered in answer, with an assist from Henry.

“I think you broke it.”

“True Love’s Kiss, Swan,” Killian murmured in awe. “That was True Love’s Kiss.”

“No. No!” Regina cried, pulling all their attention to her.

“If I were you, Your Majesty,” Killian gloated, “I’d find a place to hide.”

Regina rushed toward Henry, but both Killian and Emma blocked her from getting too close.

“Henry,” she pleaded. “No matter what you think. No matter what anyone tells you.” Regina turned her head and gave Killian a scathing look, which earned her an eyebrow lift before she looked back at the boy. “I do love you.”

Killian didn’t relax his stance until the queen had departed, seemingly taking heed of his warning that
she find some hole to crawl into. He startled at the feel of arms wrapping around his waist and looked down to see Henry tucking himself into his chest.

“I heard you,” the boy muffled into Killian’s shirt. “I heard you reading to me.”

“Glad to hear it, my boy,” Killian choked out as he wrapped his arms around him the boy to return the embrace.

“Thank you, Killian.” Emma reached across the bed to take his hand, and Killian allowed the peace of the moment wash over him. Henry was alive and well, the curse was broken, and the Darkness remained bound within him.

“So, what now?” Henry asked.

“Now… I think it’s time for the two of you to go find your family.”

Emma’s eyes snapped up to meet his. “Family,” she exhaled with a mixture of emotions.

“Yeah!” Henry exclaimed, trying to extricate himself from the various wires secured to him. “Let’s go find Snow White and Prince Charming!”

Killian could see the uncertainty and panic laying claim over Emma’s demeanor. He walked around the bed to her as Henry clamoured out the other side and began to get dressed.

“It’s alright, Swan.” Killian placed his hands on her upper arms and began running his palms soothingly up and down the buttery leather of her jacket. “I know this has all come as a bit of a shock, but I promise, you won’t have to face it alone.”

“Okay! I’m ready,” Henry announced and practically sprinted for the door.

“Hey wait up, kid!”

As they followed an exuberant Henry out the door, Killian watched as Emma veered off toward the storage closet they had occupied earlier to retrieve her father’s broadsword. Reminded of her quest, he was prompted to ask, “Where is the magic, Swan? We should put it somewhere for safekeeping before we reunite you with your parents.”

A look of foreboding came over her as she replied, “Regina has it. I gave it to her since she’s the one that knows how to use magic.”

A prickling of alarm erupted over his skin, and from the dredges of his being, a deep rooted satisfaction cackled with glee over the certainty of what the Evil Queen would do with a vial of the most powerful magic within her grasp.

“Come on,” Emma commanded. “We have to go after her.”

“Emma, wait,” Killian replied, unwilling to see her delay that which she’d longed for her entire life. “You’ve waited twenty-eight years for this moment, and I know you are the first person your parents are going to want to find. Go to them, love. I’ll take care of Regina.”

“Are you sure?”

“Aye. Fret not. I can handle the Evil Queen.”
Killian approached the well cautiously, hoping against hope that it would have taken Regina time to work out the correct place to enact the magic within the vial, which would have allowed him to beat her to the location. A hope that was dashed as he crested the hill and saw her standing over it’s opening.

“Regina, stop!” he called out. “You don’t have to do this.”

“You think you’re so clever, don’t you, Captain? You think you’ve won? That you have the whole town eating out of the palm of your hand? You’ve turned them all against me. Even Henry.”

“You did that yourself, Your Majesty. It’s your villainy that brought us all here.”

“Once I release magic into this town, it’s your villainy everyone will fear. Once you succumb to that darker part of yourself, the one we both know is just below the surface, and the Dark One fully takes over, everyone will turn to me for protection.”

“You can’t really believe that, Regina,” Killian implored. “Do you really want to risk freeing the Dark One just so you can gain your power back? Think of Henry. What would the lad think of your plan?”

“Don’t you dare speak to me about my son, Hook!” Regina screeched, losing her cool facade. “You think I don’t know how you’ve poisoned him against me all these years? You aren’t worried about what he’ll think of me when I release this magic, you’re worried about what he’ll think of you... Dark One.”

“Regina,” Killian began, and without thinking begged, “please, don’t do this.”

The Evil Queen stiffened momentarily before a menacing smirk graced her lips, “Well, how about that? Your pleases have lost their punch.”

Killian rushed at her in desperation, but it was to no avail. A taunting, *Oops!* fell from Regina’s lips as she let the vial slip from her grasp, down into the darkness of the well.
There was a distinct difference in the air as Emma and Henry made their way down Main Street. The burst of rainbow energy that had swept away Regina’s curse seemed to have taken the oppressive, melancholy feel Emma had associated with the town along with it. All around them joyous reunions were taking place and Henry excitedly chattered his run down of Who’s Who next to her, though Emma was only half listening.

It had all been true. She had slayed a dragon and awoken her son with True Love’s Kiss, yet Emma still couldn’t quite believe it. They’d been cursed, all of them, by a vengeful queen, and now they were awake, because of her. She was the Saviour. Saviour. She had saved them all, but in that moment, Emma felt utterly lost.

She watched as Ashley and Thomas embraced Mr. Herman, hard feelings set aside now that they remembered they were Cinderella and her prince. Already married and ready to live out their happily ever after with their daughter. Marco and Archie, the best of friends, even under the curse, stood gesturing animatedly as they marveled at Jiminy Cricket’s human form. With each block there were new reunions, new displays of happiness and togetherness. With each new block Emma felt more and more like an outsider.

She wished Killian were there.

“Henry! Emma!”

Emma turned to see Graham jogging up to them.

“Operation Cobra!” he exclaimed. “You did it! You broke the curse!”

“Uh, yeah,” Emma responded, still a bit dazed from all that was happening around her.

“Does Killian know? Where is he? He’s waited months for you to know the truth about us.”

“He, uh… he went after—"
“Sheriff!” shouted Marco as he made his way across the street. “Or are you still sheriff?”


“What is it, Marco?” Emma questioned, seeing the man’s obvious distress.

“Gepetto,” Henry reminded.

“Right. Gepetto.”

“Either will do,” the elderly man stated. “It’s my boy. I am not sure he is here.” Emma thought she caught a glimmer of something in his eyes as he cast a furtive glance her way, but couldn’t identify the look. “How can I know if he’s here. How will I find him?”

“Your son?” Emma clarified. “Pinocchio?”

“Yes! You know him?”

“Um, no. Not as an actual person. Just from the story,” Emma replied apologetically. “Marco makes a good point though,” she said to Graham. Her need for action kicked in as she pushed aside the emotional upheaval she’d been experiencing. “Not everyone is going to be able to reunite with their loved ones on their own. We should set up some kind of base camp. A place people can go if they’re looking for someone. Somewhere we can give out information and address people’s concerns.”

“Town Hall,” Graham offered. “I’ll head over and start setting things up. Marco, can you help spread the word?”

“Of course,” the man agreed, then hurried off with his task.

“Okay, let’s go,” Emma said to Graham, intending to accompany him to Town Hall.

“Wait! What about Snow White and Prince Charming?” Henry exclaimed. “Don’t you want to find your parents?”

Emma stopped in her tracks, the turmoil of her emotions slamming back into her.

“Your parents! Oh my god, Emma. I’m so sorry I- I wasn’t thinking,” Graham stammered. “Of course! You should go find them. I’ll call if I need you.” Graham started toward Town Hall, then turned back to add, “And if you see Red will you tell her where I am?”

“Red?”

“Ruby,” Graham supplied. “She’s really Little-”

“Red Riding Hood,” Emma finished. Her head was going to explode. She just knew it. “Sure,” she replied and headed off in the opposite direction with Henry. Before they went much further, Graham’s comment about Killian waiting months for the truth to come out finally registered.

“Henry? How long has Graham been awake?”

“Since he kissed you and got his heart back.”

“What?!”

Before Emma could press him for further clarification, Henry proclaimed, “There they are!”

Standing in front of Granny’s were Mary Margaret and David. Snow White and Prince Charming.
Her parents. Somehow she managed to keep putting one foot in front of the other as she watched them embrace Ruby and Granny, but stopped short when Leroy, Mr. Clark, and five others approached them, calling out *Your Highness*. The seven men bowed and Mary Margaret rushed to hug them, that’s when it hit Emma - Snow White and the Seven Dwarves.

How? How could this possibly be her life? How could Mary Margaret and David *actually* be Snow White and Prince Charming? How could they *actually* be her parents?

“The curse?” She heard Leroy question. “It’s broken?”

“It appears so,” David replied.

“So what do we do now?” Ruby called out.

“Now?” Mary Margaret resolved. “Now we find our daughter.”

“So it’s true.” The words tumbled from Emma’s lips and suddenly all eyes were on her.

Eyes that were filled with awe and wonder and pooling tears, leaving Emma feeling exposed and raw under their scrutiny. Mary Margaret stepped forward hesitantly, fighting against her emotions as she cupped Emma’s face. Her breath caught at the affection, longing, and joy shimmering in Mary Margaret’s eyes as she was pulled into the woman’s embrace.

“You found us,” Mary Margaret declared on a sob, and before Emma could respond she felt David join their embrace, his hand coming around to cup the back of her head like she sometimes did with Henry.

“Grandpa?”

Henry’s half questioned declaration drew out a chuckle from all those present, and Emma huffed out the breath she’d been holding at the moment’s levity.

“Yeah, kid. I suppose so.”

David drew Henry into his side, a beaming smile on his ten-year-old face as he stated, “She did it. She saved you.”

“She saved all of us,” Mary Margaret added with pride.

“Well, then why are we still here?” Leroy questioned in a surly manner.

“That, my friend, is an excellent question.” David walked over and clapped a hand on Leroy’s shoulder, his tone and bearing a stark contrast to the insecure, wishy-washy man she’d come to know.

Did she really even know them? Any of them?

“Well then let’s go get some answers from the person responsible for it all.” Leroy suggested, his words igniting the other men to spark into action.

“Yeah, the queen!”

“Yeah, let’s get her!”

“Killian has already gone after her,” Emma stated firmly, shutting down their mini riot before it could begin. The mention of Regina and Killian caused something unpleasant to churn in her gut. “In
fact… I should go. Find him. He might need my help, and I—"

“Emma, wait!” David reached out and grasped her elbow to stop her. “There’s something you need to know about Killian. He’s…”

“What?”

“He’s not someone I’m sure you can trust,” David said, weighing his words carefully. “Someone that any of us can trust now that the curse is broken.”

“Why?” Emma pulled her elbow from David’s grasp and crossed her arms over her chest. “Because he’s Captain Hook?”

“H-he told you?” David stammered in surprised.

“Yeah. Weeks ago.”

“What? When?” Mary Margaret inquired.

“The morning I had to throw Whale out of the loft,” Emma said. She felt a blush sweep across her face and her eyes widened with realization in the face of Mary Margaret’s mortified expression.

“Why did you throw Whale out of the loft?” David asked in confusion. He glanced between the two women and when understanding finally hit him he thundered, “Whale?!”

“We were cursed. That is neither here nor there,” Mary Margaret dismissed quickly before turning back to Emma. “The important matter is, Hook has been awake all this time? How?”

“Emma’s name woke him up,” Henry chimed in. “He’s been awake since she came to town, and has been helping to find a way for her to break the curse.”

“Okay, but,” David hedged, “he’s still a pirate. And a villain. How do we know we can trust him?”

“Are you for real, right now?” Emma gawked. “He’s your friend. He saved my life, he helped save Henry’s life, and right now he’s the only person in this town I do trust because he’s the only one I actually know!”

“You’re right,” Mary Margaret soothed as she lightly chastised… her husband. “David, this is not the time. She’s our daughter, and although we’ve known one another for months, we did not know that we were a family. Now we do, so let’s all just… talk. Get to know one another. Why don’t we go back to the loft and have some tea?”

“Got anything stronger?” Emma mumbled, eliciting a few chuckles from their audience (which she’d forgotten about), and alleviating some of the tension.

Before heading back to the loft, Emma passed along Graham’s message to Ruby and told David and Mary Margaret about the plan to set up a base of operations at Town Hall. Once again, Mary Margaret dismissed the idea that they should be concerned with anything other than talking as a family, and asked Leroy and the others to go help Graham until they could join them later. Emma sent off a quick text to Killian letting him know where they’d be and asked whether or not he’d been able to locate Regina yet. Her text went unanswered, but before she could dwell on that concern too much, her… parents began peppering her with questions about how she’d managed to break the curse.

They made her start at the very beginning, with Henry finding her in Boston.
When they finally reached that day’s events - Henry eating the apple tart, Killian confessing everything in the hallway at the hospital, she and Regina going after the magic, waking Henry with True Love’s Kiss - Emma once again grew concerned about Killian. Why hadn’t she heard from him yet? What was happening with Regina? Emma pulled out her phone and excused herself, letting them know she was going to try and get a hold of Killian. She stood and started for the door in order to gain some privacy, and a much needed break, but was intercepted by an impatient Mary Margaret.

“Emma, Killian can wait. This can’t.”

“What? What can’t?”

“We’re together, finally,” Mary Margaret began as David came up beside them, “but I can’t help but think you’re not happy about it.”

“Oh, I am,” Emma tried to reassure. She didn’t want them to think she wasn’t happy, it was just, well, complicated. “Here’s the thing, though. No matter what the circumstances, for twenty-eight years, I only knew one thing... my parents sent me away.”

“We did that to give you your best chance,” Mary Margaret explained. As if such an explanation could simply settle the matter.

“You did it for everyone,” Emma corrected, “because that's who you are. Leaders, heroes, princes and princesses, and that's great and amazing and wonderful, but it doesn't change the fact that for my entire life, I've been alone.”

“But if we hadn't sent you away, you would have been cursed, too.”

“But we would've been together,” Emma said softly. “Which curse is worse?”

“The one that’s on it’s way, I’m afraid,” Killian declared after bursting through the door.

“Killian?” Despite his dire warning a sense of relief swept through Emma. “Is everything okay?”

“No. Regina enacted the magic you retrieved. It’s only a matter of time before it spreads through the whole town.”

“That means she’ll have her power back,” David deduced.

“Aye,” Killian confirmed, “but she’s the least of our concerns at the moment.”

“What could be more concerning than the Evil Queen getting her magic back?” Mary Margaret questioned.

“Me.” Killian slowly revealed something he’d been hiding behind his back. A dagger with a scalloped edge and something Emma couldn’t quite make out inscribed along the blade.

“That’s the Dark One’s dagger,” David said with an accusatory tone. Killian’s jaw clenched and he hung his head as David asked, “Why do you have the Dark One’s dagger?”

“Because he is the Dark One.”

Killian whipped his head around at the lad’s declaration, his heart seizing in his chest. After Regina had dropped the vial into the well he’d rushed to retrieve the dagger from the *Jolly Roger*. A plan of action half formed in his mind of what to do about the curse that was about to awaken within him.
He knew he had to get to Emma, to warn her. Her text had notified him of her whereabouts, and Killian wasted no time in making his way to the loft. Along the way he’d fortified himself for the shock the truth would bring. He never expected the shock to be his own.

“You knew? This whole time? How?”

“What do you mean he’s the Dark One?!” David thundered. “How is that even possible? We had Rumplestiltskin imprisoned in our dungeon!”

Henry pulled a folded piece of paper out of his pocket. “It was the day my mom cast the curse,” he began. “Hook snuck into the castle, found the dagger, and got his revenge. It’s all right here.”

As he told the tale, Henry unfolded the paper to reveal a page from his storybook. On one side was the narrative of what had transpired that day between Captain Hook and the Crocodile, on the other was an illustration. An illustration of Killian Jones emerging from the Dark One Vault.

“You tore this out of the book?” Killian questioned. “Why?”

“For the same reason I tore out Emma’s pages,” Henry shrugged. “To make sure it didn’t fall into the wrong hands. To protect you.”

Killian’s knees gave out and slammed against the floor at the boy’s confession. Henry passed the page off to Emma then rushed to throw his arms around him. Unworthiness washed over Killian. Regina’s words, which had plagued him all the way there, rang once more in his head. You aren’t worried about what he’ll think of me when I release this magic, you’re worried about what he’ll think of you… Dark One. But the lad had known all along. Had known and protected his secret without fear or judgement.

What had he ever done to deserve this boy’s affection?

“Killian?” Emma’s voice shook with uncertainty, her gaze fixed on something out the window.

Henry released Killian and took a step back, his eyes also focused on the sight barreling towards them. “Is that it? Is that the magic?”

“Aye,” Killian answered as the purple swirling cloud rolled over the building, seeping into each crack and crevice, flooding the room.

Killian stood and braced himself. He expected the anguished fury that assaulted him when he’d first become the Dark One. The chaos, the rage, the madness. But none of it came. As the smoke dissipated he was left with only a warm numbing sensation sweeping through his body as if he’d taken a large swallow of liquor. He breathed out a sigh of relief, but then a voice called out, stealing what little breath remained in his lungs.

“Hello, Dearie.”

“No.” Killian’s eyes snapped over to the stairs leading to the second floor of the loft. Seated upon them was the Crocodile, the manifestation of Rumplestiltskin, though Killian knew he could not actually be there.

“Killian? What is it? Are you okay?” Emma took a few steps towards him, but halted when her father called out a warning.

The prince was obviously on guard, unwilling to trust his daughter with the newly unleashed Dark One. Killian bristled. He knew this would happen. Now that the truth was out he was no longer seen
as a friend, as a confidant. The Dark One wasn’t to be trusted. Henry might have been able to look past his curse, but it seemed the prince and princess wouldn’t be as forgiving.

*How dare they,* he seethed.

They were supposed to be heroes. They were supposed to see the good in people, offer second chances, believe that people, villains, could be redeemed. Apparently that courtesy did not extend to him. How many second chances had they given to Regina only to find themselves ripped away from their child, from each other, and cursed for twenty-eight years? He had brought them together. Done everything he could to ensure Emma broke the curse to give them all back their happy endings, and this was his thanks?

Perhaps they needed reminding. Maybe he should simply take away that which they had unknowingly longed for all these years. He could whisk Emma and Henry away and make sure the *Charmings* never had the chance to see-

Killian jolted out of his thoughts with the realization that they weren’t really his and gave the Crocodile a hardened glare. “Get out of my head,” he snarled at the demonic imp still sitting on the steps.

“Oh, I’m afraid I can’t do that, Dearie. You’re stuck with me now. With all of us.” Killian felt his skin crawl, the awareness of the collective presence of the Darkness coiling and undulating within him. “Fight us all you want, but there are more of us than there are of you.”

Killian swallowed tightly and closed his eyes. The old Crocodile was right. He wouldn’t be able to fight against the Darkness, he wasn’t strong enough. Eventually he would lose control, succumb, and when that happened… Killian grasped the dagger tighter within his grip.

“Ah, ah, ah, Dearie. I know what you’re thinking, and that’s not a good idea.”

“Which means it’s exactly what I *should* do,” Killian growled, only vaguely aware of the wary and perplexed expressions of Emma and the others. “Say whatever you want demon, I know you’re lying.”

“Am I? You’ve been enslaved before, Dearie. Controlled, commanded. Are you really fool enough to hand over your freedom once more?”

“I’ve never been free!” Killian roared causing everyone to take a step back from him. “I have only ever known dark masters. Indentured in servitude, commissioned to a treacherous king, bound by my own vows of vengeance, and bartered into villainy by a demon boy only to finally be cursed as one of Regina’s puppets the same day I became the newest pawn of the Darkness.” Killian could feel his control slipping, his anger creating cracks for the Darkness to seep further into. “If I am to be enslaved again then at least let it be at the hands of a merciful master.” Killian held the dagger out towards Emma and declared, “You have to take it.”

“What?” Emma questioned in confusion as she stared at the blade.

“The dagger,” Killian explained. “The Darkness is tethered to it. It controls me. I need you to take it.”

Emma’s eyes widened and her lips parted as she shook her head. “Killian, no. I can’t.”

“You have to help me, Swan,” Killian begged. His fear spiked, another undulating ripple crept along his skin and he could feel the chaos unfurling deeper within him. “I’m not a strong man. I’m weak. I’ve succumbed to darkness before, *please.*”
A desperate sob caught in his throat and Emma stepped forward. With only the slightest hint of trepidation she reached out and cupped his face. Killian felt a surge spread through him at her touch. Not one of desire or attraction like he had felt other times Emma had touched him, but one of power. It felt like… magic, but not the corrosive, dark magic he felt coursing through his veins. No. This was a pure, almost luminescent energy - light magic, and it was repelling the darkness within him, calming the maelstrom and clearing his mind. He glanced over at the stairs again, relieved to see the Crocodile no longer occupied them.

“You can fight this, Killian,” she insisted. Killian let out a shaky breath as he met her fierce gaze and tried to grab hold of the conviction in her words. “You're not alone. We are going to help you fight this. Together.”

“Aye. But until then,” he swallowed thickly as she removed her hands, “until I can figure out how to fight and control it, I need to know that I won’t be able to harm anyone, that I won’t fall prey to the temptation of dark magic and its power. So please, Swan. Take the dagger.” He thrust it towards her once more. “This will be the favor you owe me. Take it, and command me to not use magic. I won’t see the innocent suffer because of me.” Emma opened her mouth to protest, but Killian curtly cut her off with a growl. “We had a deal! You owe me a favor.” He closed his eyes and tried once more to gain control over his spiraling emotions, then exhaled one last desperate plea of warning. “Please, love. Don’t break a deal with Dark One. I couldn’t bear to see you pay that price.”

Emma stared at the blade held out before her, wetting her lips she looked back at her parents. For a moment it seemed the princess was prepared to argue against his request, but the prince simply placed a hand on her shoulder before giving Emma an encouraging nod. David then turned his gaze to him and offered him the same assurance, which both surprised and comforted Killian. Perhaps his willingness to hand over his power had convinced the prince that he truly wished them no harm.

With trembling fingers Emma reached out to take the dagger. Killian could feel the Darkness hissing and spitting beneath the surface, but it quieted when her hand brushed against his in the exchange.

“What do I need to do, exactly?” Emma asked. She set her shoulders with purpose, but there was an apologetic resolve in her eyes.

“You have to command me,” Killian instructed even as every fiber of his being warred against it, “Say, I command you Dark One, then make your demand.”

“I command you, Dark One,” Emma’s voice shook and caught over his new moniker, and Killian felt his heart break. *What hope was there for them now?* “to not use magic, to not harm the innocent, or anyone you care about.”

A restraint, the likes of which Killian had never felt, and he’d had his fair share of experiences being restrained in one manner or another, clamped down over him. Fortified as strongly as any chain, the restriction settled over him and rooted itself within. Though it didn’t bind the Darkness entirely, it did alleviate Killian of some of the fear and panic he’d possessed when the dark swirl of its thoughts had almost caused him to tear Emma and Henry away from their family for his own selfish purposes.

“Thank you,” he exhaled. “I think that did the trick for now. Just… promise me you won’t let that dagger out of your sight, Swan. I shudder to think what I could do if it fell into the wrong hands.”

“I promise,” Emma vowed. She reached out to squeeze his hand reassuringly and Killian couldn’t stop himself from lacing his fingers with hers, desperate for the calming effect her touch seemed to have over him. It hadn’t escaped his notice that the crocodile had yet to return.

“Well, that takes care of one threat of magic, but what about the other?” David questioned. “What
about Regina? Where did she go after she enacted the magic?”

“I… I don’t know,” Killian confessed. “As soon as she dropped the vial down the well I went after
the dagger and came straight here.”

“Well, we better find her,” Emma asserted, her hand still held in Killian’s. “With the initial shock of
the curse being broken wearing off, and the panic that purple cloud is bound to incite, people are
going to be calling for her head.”

“And if they go after her, not realizing that purple cloud was actually magic being released upon the
town…” the princess began.

“They’ll be walking into a slaughter,” Killian finished gravely.

Emma removed her hand from Killian’s grasp to pull her ringing phone from her pocket, and he
nearly whimpered at the loss of contact.

“Graham? Everything okay?”

“You need to get down here, Emma.”

“Why? What’s happening?”

“It’s Whale. He’s whipping everyone into a frenzy to go after Regina. Blue, uh, Mother Superior,
said that cloud was magic. Is that true? Is there magic here now?”

“Yes. It’s true,” Emma confirmed. “Listen, Graham. You need to keep everyone there. I’m on my
way. Just don’t let anyone leave.”

“I’ll do my best. Just hurry.”

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Emma could hear angry voices as they entered Town Hall. Rounding the corner to the main hall she
could see Graham desperately trying to convince the crowd to remain where they were. Whale was
front and center of the mob, arguing that if they wanted to take out the Evil Queen, now was their
chance.

“The Blue Fairy already said that magic works differently here. She said Regina might not even have
the ability to use her magic yet. I say we go hunt down the Evil Queen and make her pay for what
she’s done!”

A chorus of agreement rang out from the mob, drowning out Graham’s protests against their actions.

“Let’s go!” Whale called out. “Let’s go get the Evil Queen!”

“That’s not going to happen!” Emma shouted over the cacophony of the mob. “Like Graham said,
no one is going after Regina!”

“Why should we listen to you? To either of you?” Whale sneered.

“Because he’s still the sheriff, and I’m still the deputy,” Emma reminded him, getting into the man’s
face until he backed down.

“And because she saved you, all of you,” David declared as he came to stand next to her with Mary
Margaret flanking her other side.
“And because no matter what Regina did, it does not justify this.”

“We are not murderers here,” Emma stated emphatically.

“Well, we're not from this world,” Whale reminded smugly, stepping back into her space.

“Yeah, well, you're in it now,” Emma growled.

“Okay, Whale, we're done.” David pushed Whale back from Emma and towered over the man.

Emma was again taken aback by the change in David. Authority and confidence radiated off him, his presence alone calmed the crowd, and as he and Whale continued their back and forth, Emma further internalized her new reality.

“Back off. You're not my prince.”

“Who are you, Whale?”

“That's my business.”

“Well, my business is making sure this town doesn't go to hell, so whether or not I'm your prince isn't the issue.”

A prince. David was a prince. Their prince. He was Prince Charming, royalty, a ruler. Their ruler. And Mary Margaret was a princess. A prince and princess were her parents. They were all... royalty. At least in the eyes of those who’d come over from the Enchanted Forest. She was...

This day had flipped Emma completely on her head. The more the people around her found and reunited with their loved ones, the more isolated and alone she felt. The more David was able to exert control over the masses, the more out of control she felt in her surroundings. She looked about for something to anchor to, something that made sense in this sea of fantastical fairy tale characters, and locked on to the pair of blue eyes next to her. Eyes that reflected the same lost and out of control feeling raging within her.

For all the turmoil Emma was experiencing, she knew the day’s events had knocked Killian completely off kilter, too. She might be feeling a lack of control over her new reality, but Killian had literally given up any vestiges of control he had over his. To her. The amount of trust such an act represented, the vulnerability expressed in his action, and the weight of power she literally held over him crashed over her. Emma no longer felt in need of an anchor. Now she felt compelled to provide one.

Emma reached over and took Killian’s hand. She could feel tension melt off of him in equal measure to hers and he caught her eyes, offering a soft smile of gratitude. They both exhaled deeply, and for a moment Emma felt like something made sense.

“We have a lot to figure out,” David said, still addressing the crowd, “and this isn't the way to do it.”

“And Regina's death won't provide any answers,” Mary Margaret interjected. “She needs to be found and locked up for her safety, and more importantly, for ours.”

“Yeah? And what about him?”

Emma looked past David and saw Lacey, The Mirror’s editor, step forward from the crowd gesturing towards Killian, a murmuring began to rumble through the crowd.
“Do you even know who he is? He’s Captain Hook. A villain!”

Killian tensed, his jaw ticking in response to the gasps and murmurs that accompanied the fearful and distrustful glares from the crowd.

“I know exactly who he is,” Emma responded sharply, holding firm to Killian’s hand. “He was a victim of Regina’s curse, just like the rest of you, only he and Graham have been awake longer.”

“What?” Archie stepped forward. “He and the Sheriff have been awake? How?”

“It doesn’t matter,” David declared as he made his way over to Killian’s other side. “What matters is that the Killian Jones you have all known for the past few months, ever since Emma came to this town, is the same person that stands before you now.” David placed his hand on Killian’s shoulder and Emma’s throat grew tight. “This man has done a lot to protect my family, and I believe he’s changed.”

“So you trust him?” Archie questioned, and the entire room grew silent as they awaited their prince’s response.

“I do,” David affirmed.

“So do I,” Mary Margaret agreed as she took her place next Emma, her arm slung around Henry’s shoulders.

“Snow White and the prince have never steered us wrong,” Archie expressed to the crowd. “Their assessment of how to handle Regina and their assurances about Captain Hook are good enough for me.”

In typical fickle mob fashion, the crowd began to call out their agreement, and David instructed everyone to go about their business. Ruby, Granny, and some of the nuns began directing people back to the tasks they were engaged in before Whale and the mob mentality had taken over their good sense.

After the crowd had mostly dispersed, Lacey stepped forward. “Well, forgive me if I don’t put my trust in the man who tried to kill me while I was locked up in the Evil Queen’s castle.” Killian flinched, his fingers squeezing almost painfully against Emma’s.

“Laceys words echoed in her head as she watched the woman approach Graham. “I want to add someone to the list of people that may be missing.”

“Um, sure,” Graham replied uncomfortably. “Who are you looking for?”

“Rumplestiltskin.”

Killian drew in a hissing breath, and Emma could practically feel the pounding of his pulse through the palm of his hand. Graham must have sensed the collective reaction of their group, his head snapping up to give them all a quizzical look before Mary Margaret stepped forward.

“Lacey-”

“It’s Belle,” the woman corrected curtly. “My name is Belle.”

“Belle,” Mary Margaret began again. “Why don’t we step out into the hallway. We have some… information about Rumplestiltskin.”

“Why can’t you just tell me right here?”
“I really think it best if we move this conversation to a more private location, given who you’re looking for. Mentioning the Dark One might, well it might upset some people.”

Belle took a moment to chew on Mary Margaret’s words before agreeing.

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Killian’s gut churned, bile rising up in his throat despite the amount of times he tried swallowing it back down. He’d known he would have to face her sooner or later, the girl in the tower he had assaulted and nearly killed when she wouldn’t, couldn’t, provide the answers he sought. He knew he’d have much to atone for from that night in the Queen’s castle, but he only now realized how deeply his actions had wounded her.

She loved Rumplestiltskin. Despite the beast that he was, she loved him, truly, and had found happiness with him. A happiness Killian had ripped from her, just as the Dark One had once done to him.

Killian could hear Emma and the princess struggling to get the words out, their voices softly echoing from the hallway. David had suggested they let Emma and Snow deliver the news of the former Dark One’s demise, but the two women seemed unable to find the necessary words that would offer Belle the answer she sought, knowing it would be the most heartbreaking truth she’d ever receive. A truth she ought to receive from him.

“Just show her the dagger, Swan,” Killian prompted as he stepped around the corner, flanked by David, Graham, and Henry, and into the alcove the women had gathered in.

He gave a nod of certainty to Emma’s searching gaze, and held his breath as she pulled out the dagger from the back of her jeans, where it had been tucked into the waistband and hidden by her jacket. She held out the blade for Belle to examine. Confusion knitted the woman’s brow until understanding began to unfurl upon her expression. Her eyes snapped to his, tears pooling in her angry and despair filled gaze.

“This is the weapon? The one you said had the power to kill the Dark One?”

“Aye,” he choked out on a strangled breath.

“You killed him? You killed Rumple?” Belle moved to stand before him and he couldn’t meet her eye. “Say it,” she demanded quietly.

“Aye. I killed Rumplestiltskin.”

The crack of her slap against his cheek reverberated through the hallway and down into the deepest dredges of his soul.

“You’re a monster,” she sobbed before she sprinted off leaving them all in stunned silence.

Killian could feel the others’ eyes on him as burning shame smoldered in his stomach. They had stood up for him, vouched for him, and were surely regretting that outpouring of support now that the truth of his villainy, a villainy he couldn’t even blame the Darkness for, sat stinging upon his cheek.

He kept his eyes trained at the floor as he heard Emma task Graham with finding Regina, and her parents with overseeing the tasks being performed in the hall. After they departed he waited. For what he wasn’t quite sure, but he braced himself regardless.
“Did you really try to kill her?”

Killian winced, Emma’s words like a lash against his skin even though her tone held no hint of malice.

“I told you, Swan. I’ve succumbed to darkness before. I’m not a good man.”

Before Emma could respond Ruby came around the corner asking for her assistance. She gave Killian a look, clearly uncertain as to whether or not she should leave him, but knowing he wasn’t ready to face the crowded hall of wary townsfolk.

“It’s alright, Swan,” he assured. “Tend to your duty.”

“I’ll stay with Killian,” Henry offered, and with one last uncertain look Emma followed Ruby back into the hall.

“You are, you know,” Henry said, his voice echoing softly in the corridor.

“What?”

“A good man.” Henry pierced Killian with a firm gaze, his belief radiating from his innocent brown eyes. “Sure, you did some bad things, but you’re a pirate. You’ve been one for a long time, it only makes sense that old habits die hard. But even before you got your memories back, you were my friend, and look at all the good things you’ve done since you woke up from the curse. You aren’t that villain anymore.”

“You’re right,” Killian groused petulantly as he ran a frustrated hand through his hair. “I’m worse. I’m the bloody Dark One now.”

Killian felt Henry take his hand and he looked down. “I know that being the Dark One scares you,” Henry sympathized, “so here.” Turning Killian’s palm up, the boy placed a length of chain into his hand and Killian nearly crumpled when he realized what it was. Liam’s ring. Henry had held onto it all this time. Ever since the mine collapse.

“You don’t need to be afraid,” Henry said. “I believe in you.”

Killian pulled Henry into a hug, marveling again at the boy’s unwavering belief and devotion.

Footfalls coming down the hall from the building’s main entrance grabbed both of their attentions. A young girl was being led by two adults, presumably her parents, and as they got closer Henry called out.

“Paige! What are you doing here?”

“Henry! Hi,” the young girl answered back. “It’s Grace, actually. I’m here looking for my Papa. We were told this was where people were coming to try and find one another.”

As soon as the young girl identified herself, Killian knew who her Papa was. Jefferson. The Hatter. Henry directed Grace and the two people she’d thought to be her parents to the hall. When they entered the room, Killian saw Whale pass them as he headed off toward the exit and inspiration struck.

“Henry, lad. I’ll be right back,” Killian called out over his shoulder as he pursued Whale, catching him before he left the building.
“Doctor, a word, if you please.”

“I’m not interested in any words you might have for me, Captain.”

Whale’s smug expression and mocking tone stirred Killian’s ire. He closed the distance between them, his voice dark and menacing as he said, “Well, doctor, unless you’d like the whole of Storybrooke to know which infamous literary physician you really are, I’m going to need you to do something for me.

Whale scoffed, “You can’t possibly know who I am, and there’s no telling what someone like you would have me do. You can forget it.”

Whale brushed past Killian, but only took a few steps before the pirate said, “Not to worry, Victor. It isn’t anything so unsavory as digging up graves for spare parts.”


After Killian instructed Whale to go back to the hospital to retrieve Jefferson, he made his way back into the hall. Keeping a low profile, he found himself a corner where he could observe the goings-on while he tried to ignore the bloody Crocodile who’d appeared once again. His nerves were frayed, and he felt raw and exhausted from the emotional upheaval he’d experienced since early that morning. Looking over at Emma, Killian could see a similar weariness weighing on her shoulders.

It had been quite a day for them both.

He longed to go to her, to wrap his arms around her and provide her the solace she’d given to him several times already that day. She didn’t know the affect her touch had on him, and he wasn’t about to tell her. Too many demands and expectations were being placed upon her as it was, and he had no wish to add to her burden. Things were complicated enough between them, and after what she’d learned about Belle, about what he’d done and had meant to do, would she even be willing to allow his continued presence around her? Around Henry? She could command him to stay away and he’d be powerless to do anything but obey, and not just because she had his dagger.

Killian was pulled from his thoughts by Whale and Jefferson who were attempting to gain his attention from the doorway into the hall. He signalled for the men to remain there, then made his way through the throng of people to where Grace and Henry were, now joined by Emma and her parents.

“Thank you,” The Hatter said, offering his hand to Killian.

“Don’t mention it, mate,” Killian replied as he shook Jefferson’s hand.

As the Hatter took his leave, Emma leaned over to whisper, “You didn’t happen to have anything to do with that, did you?” Killian reached up to scratch behind his ear, a grin appearing on his face for

—
the first time since she’d woken Henry with True Love’s Kiss. Emma matched his smile and murmured, “You might have been Captain Hook, but you’re a good man, Killian Jones,” before heading back to address citizens’ concerns and help facilitate some sort of order to the chaos the aftermath of the curse had wrought.

Killian’s heart swelled at her declaration and for a moment he held out hope that her words just might be true. Until a cold voice sneered from behind him.

“Don’t kid yourself, Dearie. You and the Hatter had a deal. You were simply living up to your end of the bargain.”

Killian wrestled with the imp’s words, questioning each motive and compulsion that had come over him the moment he’d recognized Jefferson’s daughter. Had it only been because of the deal they’d made? Before he could thoroughly process a response, Leroy came barreling into the hall.

“Terrible news!!”

*Bloody hell, what now.*
Chapter Twenty-Three

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out! And @flipperbrain made a lovely pic for our belated Christmas presents, both the banner and the pic can be found on Tumblr.

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

***We’ve taken some creative license when it comes to how a certain dagger works in reference to exerting control over the Dark One. We realize that it is slightly different in canon, but felt it a necessary tweak for our story. Just go with us...***

Killian stood at the town line with Emma, David, Mary Margaret, and Henry, silently cursing to himself. It wasn’t as if he’d truly wanted to leave Storybrooke, but he’d hoped it would be an option should the Darkness prove too much for him to overcome. Now it would only serve as a last resort, seeing as the dwarves had discovered that once one crossed the town line they would revert back to their cursed self.

Terrible news, indeed.

When Leroy and the others had run into town hall with their dire warning, it had taken some time to calm the masses once again. Graham returned with news that he’d been unable to locate Regina, speculating that she may be hiding out in her vault. Cooking up all manner of nightmarish hell for them, no doubt. They’d left the sheriff in charge, and had proceeded to the town line to assess what needed to be done to ensure no one crossed it unwittingly.

Killian smiled ruefully at their little party. Mary Margaret and David had insisted on accompanying Emma, and she in turn refused to let Henry out of her sight while Regina was in the wind. Henry and Emma had both insisted that he join them, so there they were. Five people doing a job that would otherwise only require two at most.

Emma extended a can of bright orange spray paint towards Killian. “We should mark the boundary,” she told him, as the prince and princess continued to discuss how best to announce this news to the town without starting a panic.

Killian nodded and took the can from her, shaking it as he walked over to the welcome sign. Another smile crept over his face as he saw the patch Marco had done all those months ago, after Emma had
crashed into it. Before her, no one had ever come to Storybrooke, except Henry, so the fact that they had a sign in the first place seemed absurd now.

With the sign as his point of origin, Killian began to spray a visible line to designate the point of no return. Hunched over and thoroughly engrossed in his task, he was oblivious to the car coming straight for him until it was too late. Killian heard Emma cry out his name as he braced for the impact, but the one he felt did not come from the vehicle. A flash of light blinded him before he was propelled backward, landing hard on his back against the pavement.

Slowly, he sat up and took in several things all at once. The car that had been barreling toward him now rested against one of the forest’s trees, its front end smashed in from the impact. David and Mary Margaret stood paralyzed with stunned expressions on their face as they stared at Emma who was staring at her hands with the same expression.

“Are you okay, Killian?” Henry called out from David’s truck, where he’d been told to wait.

“Aye, lad,” he responded as he stood, not taking his eyes off Emma.

Emma’s eyes snapped up from her hands and met his with wide astonishment. “What the hell was that?”

“That, Swan,” he replied softly as he made his way to her, taking her hands in his once he got close enough, “was magic.”


Killian cupped the side of her face in an effort to calm her as he spoke, “Those are all good questions love, but I’m afraid they’ll have to wait. We’ve another, more urgent matter to attend to.”

Dropping his hand from her face, he looked back over his shoulder at the wrecked vehicle, then made eye contact with the prince. “Best call for an ambulance. Looks like the outside world just came to Storybrooke.”

Magic. I have magic. Magic that wrecked a car. I didn’t mean to wreck the car, I was trying to save Killian. Wait. No. I didn’t know I could save him, I just…

Emma hadn’t moved from where she’d stood when a blast of something indescribable had shot from her hands when she saw Killian about to be run down by the red convertible. She’d thrown her hands out with some kind of innate instinct, and the force of that action had launched Killian backward as a blast of white light struck the car and forced it into the tree line. An action that had stunned them all. Except for Killian. Somehow, he’d known.

“The ambulances are on their way, love,” Killian said, startling her from her thoughts.

Ambulances?

It took a minute for Emma to register the fact that there had to actually be people in the vehicle she’d sent careening into the tree.

“Oh, god. Are they… Did I-” Emma panicked.

“Emma, look at me,” Killian commanded, his hands resting atop each of her shoulders as he waited for her to meet his gaze. “They’re unconscious, but alive. The paramedics will be here soon. They’ll
be okay.”

“You don’t know that!” she argued. She tried to pull away from him, but he kept a firm grip on her as he tried to calm her down. “Let go!”

An angry and pained expression crossed his face, and his hands seemed to involuntarily fall away. His jaw clenched, his hands balled at his sides, and it was then she realized what she’d done.

“Killian, I didn’t mean… I’m sorry, I wasn’t think-”

“It’s alright, Swan.”

“No. No it isn’t.” Emma now had her hands balled at her sides. The day’s events crashed over her in waves of frustration, and worry, and the last vestiges of her adrenaline were waning. “Very little about this day is okay, Killian. Henry was cursed and almost died! I had to slay a dragon! I just wrecked a car! I made you do something against your will. No wonder you didn’t want to be able to use magic. Look what I just did! I hurt people!”

“No, Emma.” The vehemence in Killian’s voice was palpable. “Your magic is nothing like mine. You saved Henry. You were trying to save me. You didn’t mean to harm anyone, and I know you didn’t mean to control me just now.” A smirk appeared at his lips as he cheekily added, “but, perhaps you could choose your words a bit more carefully? Given this world’s more colorful sayings, I could find myself doing all manner of unintended acts.”

Emma released an amused breath, and felt some of the tension within her drain away. The man always did know just what to say or do to ease her burdens, even temporarily.

Their attentions were pulled from one another at the sound of the ambulances making their way toward them. As Mary Margaret directed the paramedics to the convertible, David jogged over to them.

“I just spoke with Graham.” David stopped before them, his hands on his hips in an authoritative stance that Emma still couldn’t quite wrap her mind around. “He’s going to meet our new arrivals at the hospital. He’ll stay with them and keep us posted on their condition.”

“Any idea who they are?” Emma questioned.

“No. I didn’t want to check for ID and risk further injury by moving them.” Emma winced at the mention of their injuries, and David was quick to pick up on it. “Hey. Emma, this is not your fault. You didn’t know. None of us did. You didn’t mean for it to happen.”

“But it did happen,” Emma retorted. “How are we going to explain it?”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean… what are we going to tell those two men when they regain consciousness? How are we going to explain the accident? What if they remember seeing this bright white light shooting out of some woman’s hands?”

“She’s got a point, David,” Killian stated. “What do we do if they remember seeing magic?”

“Well, let’s cross that bridge if we come to it,” David said. “We don’t know what they’ll remember, but just to be safe, let’s have Graham be the one to talk with them. Minimize the chance that seeing you triggers the memory.”
Emma nodded, her teeth worrying at her lip. She suddenly felt exhausted, and her shoulders slumped as she exhaled a heavy breath.

“Why don’t you go home,” David suggested, tentatively placing a hand on her shoulder. “Snow and I will head back to Town Hall and finish things up there. You and Henry should head home. You’ve both had a hell of a day.”

“We all have,” Emma grumbled. She’d love nothing more than to go back to her house, and pretend the day hadn’t happened, but she hated the idea that she was being sidelined.

“True,” David acknowledged, “but I’ve battled a dragon before, I know how taxing it can be.” His attempt at levity was almost as successful as Killian’s had been. “Go get some rest. We’ll all meet at Granny’s in the morning, and I’ll call you if anything urgent comes up before then.” David turned his attention to Killian and requested, “Look after them for me, Jones.”

Killian visibly startled at David’s words and subsequent clap to his shoulder, but managed to express an *Aye, mate,* before David headed back over to Mary Margaret and the two men being treated by paramedics.

“What say you, Swan?” Killian asked with raised brows, clearly deferring to her wishes over David’s.

Emma sighed and closed her eyes momentarily, her weariness weighing heavier upon her. Opening her eyes she met Killian’s expectant gaze. “Let’s go home, Captain.”

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Killian sat in Emma’s living room watching the last embers from the fireplace slowly die. The house was quiet. Emma and Henry had retired some hours ago, and after the day they’d all had, a silent understanding that he would remain at the house passed between he and Swan when she’d turned in for the night.

It had been too early for bed when they’d first arrived back at the house. Not that any of them would have been able to sleep with the upheaval in their lives still so fresh. At first, none of them seemed to know what to do with themselves until Emma mentioned something about eating. Killian couldn’t remember the last time he’d had a bite, and he was certain the same could be said for Emma and Henry as well. He’d insisted on cooking, telling Emma to go sit with Henry by the fire and just enjoy having her boy back. In truth, Killian needed something to keep himself from being idle.

The Crocodile had been stalking him throughout the afternoon. After the loft, the demon had appeared again at Town Hall and briefly out at the town line, before Emma’s magic had been revealed. Killian had hoped that being at Emma’s home, the Saviour’s home would provide him a sanctuary from the manifestation of the Darkness, but the imp was there waiting for him.

It was easier to ignore him if Killian stayed busy, so he’d thrown himself into the task of preparing their evening meal after he’d gotten a fire started in Emma’s living room. As he chopped, stirred, and sampled the provisions, he found himself watching Emma and Henry fondly as they looked through Henry’s storybook. Emma had confessed that she’d never really read much of it before, only looking at the odd pages Henry pointed out over the past few months as it related to the fairy tale character she was assisting at the time.

They’d only just settled before the fire to read over her parent’s story when Henry called out excitedly for Killian to come have a look. He’d been astonished to see all the pages that had once been removed, including his own, had now been restored to their rightful place within the book.
“It must be because there’s magic here now,” Henry had deduced. A deduction Killian felt sure must be correct, as he recognized the vibrations of magic within the book’s pages.

Had it not been for Henry’s never ending exuberance, dinner would most likely have been a quiet affair. As it was, Emma kept encouraging Henry to just eat so they could go to bed, the weariness of the day was etched on her brow and set in her slumped posture. Killian was glad for the lad’s constant chatter, though. Focusing on the boy allowed him to turn a deaf ear to the Darkness, which seemed to have as much to say about the day’s events as Henry did.

Now alone in the quiet house with little to occupy his thoughts, and sleep no longer a means of escape, Killian could no longer ignore the murmurings. Nor could he ignore the quiet whisper singing to him from upstairs. The dagger was calling to him, and the Darkness was urging him to go take it back.

“No,” Killian grit out through clenched teeth as he willed himself to remain on the sofa.

*But without the dagger, how will you protect Emma from those two men? Surely they saw her use magic. What will happen to her, to the town, once that secret is exposed?*

“We don’t know that they saw anything,” Killian countered aloud to the darkness of the room. “And even if they did, I won’t hurt the innocent. We’ll find another way.”

*Can’t hurt the innocent, you mean,* his mind hissed. *No matter. You don’t need the dagger to stop the other threat in town… Regina, it drawled. The Evil Queen. This is all her fault, anyway. She released the magic. She wants to set the whole town against you, set Emma and Henry against you. Why… if she’d been honest about what would happen when you used the dagger for your revenge, you wouldn’t have become the Dark One in the first place. She’s no innocent. The Saviour’s command does not apply to her. You should go find her. Track her down and make her pay for what she’s done to you. Stop her before she has a chance to use her magic to hurt those you love. You won’t need magic to end her. You’ve killed dozens without it. What’s one more?*

“Enough!” Killian spat. His heart pounded in his chest and a cold sweat came over him as he realized he’d moved from the sofa to the door. The knob held firmly in his hand, the intent to turn it and walk out into the night still rooted in his subconscious.

“Killian?”

Emma tossed and punched at her pillow. For the eightieth time. Despite how exhausted she felt, how fried her mind and nerves were, she couldn’t bring herself to actually fall asleep. Not with the Dark One downstairs.

Emma hadn’t truly understood what it meant. Being the Dark One. When Regina had mentioned it earlier in the storage room, the title had held no meaning to her. She knew, based on David’s reaction and Killian’s behavior in the loft that it couldn’t be anything good, but she trusted Killian. He was a good man, and clearly the fact that he was the Dark One hadn’t put Henry off of befriending or trusting him all this time.

She’d seen the fear in Killian’s eyes, the earnest pleading for her to help him try and control whatever sinister affect this *Darkness* was having on him. With just the quick rant about never being his own master, Emma knew what it had cost him to ask her to take the dagger. Using the favor he held over her was telltale in just how important her compliance was to him.
She knew he was Captain Hook. That realization hit her in the hallway of the hospital as Henry lay cursed, and really settled into her in the Town Hall when she saw the reaction of the town’s people when Belle had outed him. When she’d heard what he’d done to her, that he’d almost killed her and had murdered Rumplestiltskin, she’d had a moment’s difficulty reconciling the villain with the man she knew.

Then he’d reunited Jefferson with his daughter, and that good man was evident right there in front of her once more. He might have been Captain Hook, but Killian Jones was a good man. Except, he wasn’t just Killian Jones now. He was also the Dark One.

After she and Henry turned in for the night, Emma spent hours reading through the storybook. She found it served as a suitable distraction to the things her mind wasn’t ready to address or process just yet. Henry had taken her through her parent’s story, her story, but with the long night before her, there were other stories she was interested in.

*The story of Killian Jones. Captain Hook and his Crocodile. Rumplestiltskin. The Dark One.*

She’d poured over the pages. Stories of cowardice and betrayal were juxtaposed against loyalty and good form. Heartbreak that fueled villainy as both men quested to right a wrong, by whatever means necessary. Means, Emma knew, the stories only scratched the surface of; a chilling darkness running much deeper in acts too grievous to display upon the page. Acts that had spanned centuries.

David had been right to be wary, Captain Hook was not to be trusted. Neither was the Dark One.

Killian Jones, however… he was another matter altogether.

The sound of voices from downstairs pulled Emma from her thoughts. Had Henry gotten up and gone downstairs, waking Killian up in the process? Emma crawled out of bed with the intentions of getting Henry back into his, but when she passed by her son’s room he was in bed fast asleep. *Then who is Killian talking to?*

“Killian?” she called out as she made her way down the stairs, finding him stopped in the middle of the living room. “I thought I heard voices. Who were you talking to?”

“Just talking to myself,” he replied, clearly on edge about something. “Old habit from many nights on the lonely seas.”

“Hmm,” Emma hummed. It wasn’t an all out lie, but his words didn’t ring true either. “What are you doing up so late?”

“I could ask the same thing of you, love,” Killian deflected.

“I asked you first.” *Really, Emma? What is this, third grade?*

Killian made his way to the sofa and sank down into the cushions with a heavy sigh. “The Darkness does not require sleep, so as the Dark One, it seems neither do I.” He played with his rings as he spoke, but stopped when he turned his attention to her. “Your turn, Swan. What’s keeping you up at this hour?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” Emma scoffed sarcastically. “Maybe the fact that my parents are Snow White and Prince Charming, and my son was raised by the Evil Queen. Or the fact that I helped Cinderella keep her baby, and her best friend is both Little Red Riding Hood *and* the Big Bad Wolf.” She was pacing now, the reality she’d suppressed all night now flowing out of her like a tidal wave. “Not to mention that the person I am closest to in this entire town, or the whole world for that matter, is Captain freaking Hook, whom I saved from getting hit by a car. With. Magic.” Killian stared at her
from over the back of the sofa, and Emma suddenly felt self-conscious about her rant. Moving to sit with him, she added, “I may have been reading Henry’s book.”

Killian’s slightly stunned expression became one of panic before it slowly transformed into something softer, with a wisp of smugness as he recounted, “Closer to than anyone else in the world?”

“Of course that’s what you would get out of all that.” Emma rolled her eyes as he chuckled, and for a moment everything felt so… normal. It felt like them. Emma and Killian, not the Saviour and Captain Hook. It could have been any other night, with easy banter and over-the-top flirty overtures. Any other night when Emma might get lost in Killian’s forget-me-not eyes and wonder if things would ever move past the stage of longing.

Emma felt a blush creep across her face as she remembered her efforts to try and push them past that stage. Had it really only been last night when she’d drunkenly tried to pull him into her bed?

“Killian, about last night.”

“Swan, you don’t have to-”

“No. I want to thank you.” She cut him off and took his hand in hers, causing that stunned look to settle on his face again. “I want you to know that I appreciate you being honest with me. Wanting to wait until I really knew. And now that I do… now that I know you’re actually Captain Hook, and the…”

“The Dark One,” he supplied despondently, his eyes cast down with a hint of resignation.

“I want you to know that it doesn’t change the way I feel about the Killian Jones I’ve come to know.”

Killian’s eyes snapped up to meet hers, wide with a small spark of hope as he tentatively pressed, “But?”

“But,” she continued, intertwining her fingers with his in an effort to kindle that hope. “I’m going to need some time to process all this. I mean, my parents are Snow White and Prince Charming, and you are actually Captain Hook.”

“Without the perm and waxed mustache,” Killian teased, a smile pulling at his lips.

“Or the hook.”

“The one benefit of the curse, love,” Killian responded, both of them now smiling fondly at the memory of having the same conversation all those weeks ago.

“Just… be patient?” Emma asked.

“I seem to remember you saying that to me once before, too,” Killian reminded.

Emma shuddered slightly at the memory of her being suspended in the mine shaft, attempting to rescue Henry and the dashing rapscallion before her. “Yeah. Just before you nearly plummeted to your death.”

“Well, the one upside to being the Dark One is that I’m immortal now, so I quite literally have all the time in the world. Even if another car appears out of nowhere and tries to kill me.” He stared at her pointedly with raised brows, and Emma’s nerves spiked at the reminder of the car, and the two men, and the fact that she had magic.
“Hey,” Killian soothed, rubbing small circles over her wrist, perceptive as ever. “Everything’s going to be okay. No use worrying yourself until we know more about what those men remember, and we won’t know that until we meet everyone in the morning.”

Emma took a deep breath and nodded, offering him a small smile before she stood to head back upstairs. “You going to be okay?”

“Aye, love. You don’t need to worry about me.” Emma’s superpower wasn’t too sure about that statement. “Go get some rest, Swan. I’ve a feeling you’ll be needing it. Just know that whatever tomorrow throws at us, we’ll face it together.”

That statement, however… nothing had ever rang more true.

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“Captain! Captain!”

Killian turned to see Smee crossing the street, approaching them just as they’d made their way to Granny’s the next morning. He told Emma and Henry to go on ahead and that he’d meet them inside shortly, then greeted his first mate.

“Ah, Mr. Smee. It’s good to see that you’re your old self again.”

“You too, Sir. I’ve been looking for you since the curse broke. Where have you been?”

“I’ve had things to attend to, Mr. Smee,” Killian replied sharply, not caring for his first mate’s impertinence.

“Of course, Sir,” Smee said apologetically. “I was just wondering if I ought to be rounding up the crew. If you planned for us to set sail soon.”

“Not quite, Mr. Smee. It seems there is no safe passage out of Storybrooke.”

“What do you mean?”

“Anyone who crosses over the town line reverts back to their cursed self. I’m not willing to test whether or not the same holds true if we stray too far out to sea, are you Mr. Smee?”

“Oh. Well... no, of course not.” Smee’s face fell at the news. “So what do we do now?”

“Now,” Killian replied. “We bide our time and wait. I’ve business to attend to this morning and have no plans to open the shop today. Carry on as you wish, but stay at the ready. I may have need of you.”

“Aye, Captain.” With his orders received Killian made his way into the diner as Smee set off to do… whatever it was Smee did in his free time.

Settled in one of the booths next to Emma, Killian listened to the various reports of the happenings from the previous evening and overnight. The prince and princess relayed all that had happened when they’d returned to Town Hall, including the reunion of David’s wife Katherine, really Princess Abigail, with her love Frederick. It had been decided that the fairies would oversee the continued task of helping people reunite with their loved ones, while also compiling a list of cursed personas to real identities. Killian couldn’t be sure, but he thought he saw an astonishingly rare expression of happiness and possibly a slight blush on Leroy’s face at the mention of one of the fairies.
The expression lasted only a moment though, as he was then tasked to give an account of the dwarves’ overnight stake-out on the Queen’s home. There had still been no sign of Regina, her house remained dark and quiet all throughout the night, leading all those present to believe she must be holed up in her vault. Emma and Graham agreed to go and check it out after they adjourned, which left Graham to give his report on the two men from the town line.

“How are they?” Emma inquired, wringing her hands beneath the table, which Killian stilled as he took one of them in his.

“Whale says they’ll be fine. They’re both conscious, but are being held for observation just to be on the safe side.”

“Who are they?” Mary Margaret pressed. “What did they say when you questioned them about the accident?”

It felt as though their entire assembly held their breath as they awaited the sheriff’s answer.

“They’re brothers by the names of John and Michael Banks. They were just on a drive up the coast and got distracted referencing their map when they saw the sign for Storybrooke. They said the last thing they remembered was double checking the route on their GPS then waking up at the hospital.”

“So they didn’t see the magic?” David clarified.

“No,” Graham assured them. “In fact they were worried I was going to cite them for driving while distracted.”

Killian let out a sigh of relief. “So how long are we going to have to endure their presence in town?”

“Whale said barring any complications, they’ll be released tomorrow morning.”

“And Tillman thinks it’ll take three or four days to get their car running well enough to leave town,” Ruby chimed in as she sidled up next to Graham.

“Tell him the sooner the better.” Killian squeezed Emma’s hand as he spoke, and she responded with a grateful smile that had his heart fluttering.

“Right,” David announced as he stood. “I think it’s time we all get to work, then. Snow and I will check in with Blue at Town Hall. Emma, Killian, and Graham will be on Regina patrol.”

The prince and princess took their leave, with Leroy hot on their heels expressing his desire to assist the fairies.

“Does that mean I get to come with you guys?” Henry asked excitedly as Killian and Emma made their way out of the booth.

“Sorry, kid,” Emma responded, dropping Killian’s hand as she pulled her coat back on. “But you’re staying with Ruby. She’s gonna watch after you while we look for Regina.”

“Actually,” Ruby hedged apologetically, “there’s something I need to take care of this morning.” She and Graham shared a significant look before she turned and inquired, “Killian, you haven’t, by chance, seen a red cloak at the pawn shop, have you?”

“Not that I recall. Why?”

Graham wrapped an arm around Ruby’s shoulder and gave her an encouraging nod, prompting her
to continue. “The full moon is in a couple of days, and with magic being back there’s a chance that
I’ll… you know.” Killian could see the fear in Ruby’s eyes. Compassion sparked within him, but the
Darkness was quick to try and snuff it out. Greedy for a desperate soul to entice and entrap. “In our
realm, the cloak kept me from transforming. I have no memory of ever seeing it in town, and if I
can’t find it before the full moon I’ll need a place where I can transform without hurting anyone. 
Graham’s offered to let me make... modifications to a room in his cabin. I need to get started so
everything will be ready in time. Just in case.”

Killian could see the Crocodile’s gleeful expression out of the corner of his eye and had to fight back
the instinct, both as the Dark One and a pirate, to work Ruby’s anxiety to his advantage. There was a
wardrobe of cloaks in the back room of the shop. Believing they’d be of no use or interest to anyone
in town while under the curse, he hadn’t bothered to really look them over. If Ruby’s cloak was
among them, what would she be willing to offer to get it back? What might he wish to extract from
her in exchange?

Killian clenched his jaw and shook the thought from his head, throwing a glare at the Crocodile as a
growl rumbled low in his chest.

“All right, what is it?” Emma said softly, her hand coming to rest on his forearm. “What is it?”

Killian snapped back and hurriedly assured, “Nothing. Everything’s fine.” The confused and wary
expressions staring back at him attested to their disbelief, and Killian let go a long suffering sigh
before confessing, “The cloak may be at the shop. There’s a wardrobe in the back room containing
garments, but I haven’t taken a good enough look before to assess what all it contains. I can go by
there later and check, and if it is there… you are welcome to it.” He had to force out the last part of
his statement, an itching desire crawled under his skin that not even Emma’s touch could alleviate,
and flared at Graham’s question.

“What’s your price?”

Killian swallowed and steadied himself. “I’m no longer in the business of making deals. I won’t give
in so easily.” Killian couldn’t help but direct that comment to the figment seated at the bar, even if it
caused the others to cast glances that way as well. “Go and make whatever provisions you feel might
be necessary, just in case the cloak isn’t there.”

“What about Henry?” Emma reminded.

“I’ll stay here with the lad,” Killian offered. “Might be best if I stay back anyway. Her Majesty has a
way of bringing out the worst in me, and right now,” Killian faced them all with a self-deprecating
smile and an attempt of levity rolling off his tongue, “I think we can all agree that’s something we
ought to avoid.”

They stood assessing him for a moment. Ruby was the first to respond, surprising them all as she
wrapped her arms around to hug him.

“Thank you,” she murmured. “I knew you were still the same old Jones.”

Killian balked at her words, his eyes met Graham’s whose reflected Ruby’s sentiment in the way he
now took in the pirate before him. Ruby kissed Graham goodbye, ruffled Henry’s hair, and called
out a farewell to them all before heading out of the diner, but not before reminding Killian to let her
know what he discovered about her cloak.

Killian felt Emma take his hand, her eyes searching his as she asked, “Are you sure you and Henry
are going to be okay here?”
“Aye, love,” Killian assured. “The diner’s the safest place we could be right now. I doubt Regina would come after Henry in such a public place. Besides, I’d like to see her get past Granny’s crossbow,” he added cheekily, throwing a smirk at Granny who was stowing said weapon behind the counter. “Besides, I wouldn’t feel comfortable taking him out in town, let alone to the pawn shop just yet. There’s no telling how the newly released magic is affecting some of the items there. Best for him to avoid the shop until we can have the fairies give it the all clear.”

“Okay, then,” Emma relented. “We’ll see you at the sheriff station later with David and Mary Margaret. Just… be careful. Regina is still out there somewhere.”

“I promise you, Swan. No harm will come to your boy whilst he’s in my charge,” Killian vowed earnestly, and he noticed some of the tension she’d been carrying leave her shoulders as she squeezed his hand one last time before turning her attention to Henry.

“Alright, kid. Be good for Killian, and I’ll see you later.” Emma wrapped her arms around her son as he said see you later, then watched him scramble onto the barstool Granny had just set a cup of hot cocoa down at. “Ready to go?” Emma turned to Graham, but a look of hesitation sat heavily upon the man’s face.

“Actually, before we head out... Jones, can I talk to you for a second?” Graham gestured them toward the back hallway and the three made their way out of earshot of the diner’s patrons.

“What’s up, mate?”

“I was wondering,” Graham began nervously, “since there’s magic here now, if you would put this back where it’s supposed to be.”

Killian drew in a sharp breath as Graham pulled his heart from the inside pocket of his jacket, and heard Emma gasp next to him causing him to meet her wide eyes.

Killian swallowed and remorsefully replied, “I would if I could mate, but I-I’m afraid I can’t.”

“You’re the Dark One, don’t you have magic?”

“Aye, but it’s complicated.” Graham had seen the dagger the day before, had heard Belle say that it was the only weapon that could kill the Dark One, but Killian wasn’t sure how much the man might know about its controlling affects, and as much as he may have come to trust the sheriff, Killian wasn’t ready for that secret to be shared by too many people within town. Besides, he didn’t need Killian’s magic. “Not to worry though. I might not be able to put your heart back, but Emma can.”

“Emma can what now?! his Swan hissed next to him.

“You have magic Swan, you can do this.”

“Killian!” She stared at him incredulously. “That’s Graham’s heart.”

“Aye.”

“That Regina ripped out of his chest.”

“Aye.”

“And you expect me to put it back?”

“Aye.”
“Stop saying that!”

Killian winced at the unintended command, and Emma’s eyes screwed shut, “Damn it! Killian, I’m sorry. Say… say whatever you want,” she affirmed apologetically.


“Do you want that heart back in your chest or not?” Killian interjected curtly.

“Aye,” Graham replied, earning him glares from Killian and Emma both. “Sorry,” he muttered before handing his heart to Emma.

Emma stared down at the heart in her hand, shaking her head as her voice nearly betrayed her in its denial. “I-I can’t do this.”

“Yes, Swan. You can.”

Killian glanced past Graham and saw the Crocodile looking on. Emma may have commanded him to not use magic, but that didn’t mean he couldn’t share the inherent knowledge he now possessed in how to wield it. Something in the demon’s eyes gave him a moment’s pause, but Killian brushed it aside. He wasn’t asking Emma to do anything dark with her magic, and despite her doubts, he knew that she would want to do whatever she could to help Graham.

“How?”


Emma closed her eyes and took a deep breath. When she opened them, Killian saw a flash of resolve in her eyes just before a quick burst of magic allowed her to place Graham’s heart back into his chest. The sheriff gasped at the sensation, eyes blinking wildly before they fixed themselves on Emma’s astonished face.

“I did it,” Emma stated, her stunned tone matching her expression.

“You did it,” Graham astonished back.

“I knew you could do it, Swan,” Killian affirmed. A sense of pride welled in his chest at her accomplishment, and perhaps at the part he’d played in it. A part that was met with the greatest reward he could have imagined when Emma threw her arms around him and whispered an earnest thank you into his ear.
Killian kept Henry occupied at the diner with several rounds of darts, dice, and daring tales of pirate adventures; slightly modified for his young audience, especially the ones from his Neverland days. The prince and princess arrived around midday and placed an order to go so they could all meet Emma and Graham at the station with lunch. Henry was eager to hear how the morning had gone at Town Hall, and David had just finished catching the lad up when Granny handed them their order. After settling the bill, they began to head out when the princess noticed Killian wasn’t following.

“Aren’t you coming?”

“I’ve got something to check on at the pawn shop first, but I’ll be along shortly,” he assured her as he began to settle his own bill.

“We’ll see you soon, then,” the princess replied, then followed her husband and grandson out the door.

A moment later the door chimed and Killian was startled to see Belle walk in. Abandoning the to-go coffee he’d been waiting on, Killian turned with the intention of exiting out the back so he wouldn’t have to put Belle in an uncomfortable position with his presence.

“Killian, wait,” she called out, and he stopped in his tracks.

He turned to face her, surprised and wary that she would wish to engage with him at all.

“Can we… can we talk?”

Killian cocked his head and raised his brows in astonishment before gesturing to the booth next to them. He took a moment to collect himself as she slid into the seat before he followed, bracing
himself for what she might have to say to him. Nothing could have prepared him for the continued
surprise of her retrieving Henry’s storybook from her bag and setting it between them on the table.

“Where did you-?”

“Henry gave it to me,” she answered quickly. “This morning while you were outside with your
shop’s assistant. I tried to leave out the back, but Henry caught me before I could. He gave me the
book and asked me to read it. Said he wanted me to have the whole story.” Belle brushed her fingers
over the cover, no longer able to meet Killian’s gaze. “I knew who he was. I knew he’d done terrible
things, but I also believed that deep down there was a good man behind the beast.” Her eyes flicked
up and she took a deep breath. “I understand now why you hated him so. I’m sorry for what he did
to you.”

“Belle, you don’t have to-”

“No, please,” she cut him off again. “Let me get this out.” Killian nodded and sat back to hear her
out completely. “I’m not saying I’m ready to forgive you, but I was reminded by someone last night
that you’ve been awake for months. That your actions since Emma came to town have truly been
your own, and even though you were a villain, and are now the Dark One, there might... there might
just be a good man buried deep down inside you, too.”

“What are you saying, lass?” Killian prompted when Belle paused.

“I’m saying, I’m willing to give you a second chance. I had hoped that I could provide a way for
Rumple to escape the Darkness, and he almost did once, so now my hope is that you might find a
way to do the same.”

Killian’s brows furrowed in confusion. He had no memory of the Dark One finding a way out of his
curse. Casting a look at the Crocodile he could see the demon seething. Killian focused his efforts to
try and find the memory, but found it shut tight against him. It seemed he was not privy to all the
Dark One’s memories after all. The Darkness apparently did not trust him any more than he did it.


“True Love’s Kiss,” Belle replied, as if the answer were quite obvious.

Killian exhaled painfully. Of course! True Love. The rarest and most powerful magic of all. Magic
powerful enough to transcend realms and break any curse. No wonder the Darkness had wanted to
keep that particular memory locked away.

“How?” Killian repeated, gaining back his attention. “There might come a time when the same
opportunity will be before you, and when that time comes you have to be ready to let go of the
Darkness completely.” The sadness in Belle’s eyes told Killian all he needed to know of why the
kiss had not worked for her and the Crocodile. He’d been unwilling to let go of the power. “Don’t
make the same mistake Rumple did.”

“I won’t,” Killian responded emphatically.

“I hope so.” Belle offered a small smile before standing. “Will you make sure this gets back to
Henry?” she asked, gesturing to the storybook.

“Aye,” he replied, then called out to her once more after she’d turned to leave. “Belle? You said
someone reminded you that I’d been awake for months. Who was it?”

“Oh!” A blush crept along her cheeks as she answered. “The owner of the Rabbit Hole. His real
name’s Will Scarlet. He thought I could use a drink after what had happened at Town Hall, and we talked for a while.” She gave him one last soft smile before exiting, leaving Killian with the bombshell she’d dropped earlier.

There was a way to escape the Darkness.

True Love’s Kiss.

It had almost worked for the Crocodile, could it work for Captain Hook?

Before Killian could travel that road any further his phone buzzed with a text from Ruby. Any news on my cloak?

Right. Little Red Riding Hood’s cloak.

Killian left the diner and headed towards the pawn shop, the prospect of being rid of the Darkness hummed under his skin. The Crocodile was strangely absent during his trek, allowing him to consider the question staring him in the face.

Could Emma be his true love?

His mind raced back to a time when he’d pondered whether she had shared a True Love’s Kiss with Graham. If that had been the reason he’d acquired his memories back. Killian remembered the inequity he’d felt over fate’s interference to protect a man from the vestiges of time, staying the aging process, and even death, so that he might find his one true love regardless of the distances such a love may have had to span. It was clear now that the fates had not done so in regards to Graham, but had they done that for him? Had all of his years of villainy in Neverland, his time trapped under the curse, served a greater purpose?

Killian didn’t want to waste another moment to find out. He’d quickly look for Ruby’s cloak then head to the sheriff station. To Emma. She’d saved the entire town with a kiss. Might she be his salvation as well?

Distracted by the swirling thoughts invading his mind, Killian wasn’t immediately aware of anything amiss within the pawn shop. He entered through the back door and had just located a bright red, intricately embroidered cloak from the wardrobe when a rustle in the front room caught his attention. Laying the cloak aside, he cautiously made his way to the curtain that separated the front from the back of the store and peered through to the other side. Rifling through some books on one of the shelves was Regina.

Killian sent off a quick text to Emma letting her know the Evil Queen was there, before sauntering into the front room. “Good afternoon, Your Majesty. Perhaps it has escaped your notice, but I’m closed at present. Though, if it’s reading material you’re in search of, well… the library is beneath the clock tower.”

Regina startled then glared at him. “Save it, Hook.”

“What are you doing here, Regina?”

“I’m looking for something.”

“That much is obvious. The question is, what?”

Killian took in her somewhat ragged appearance. It didn’t appear that she’d slept, and her hands kept clenching and unclenching at her sides. Realization finally dawned on him.
“Ah. I see. Having a bit of trouble with your magic then? The Blue Fairy was right. Magic works differently in this realm. You’re here looking for a shortcut, aren’t you dearie?” Killian’s jaw clenched and he side-eyed the Crocodile now perched upon one of the counters.

“And you’re not?” Regina accused. “If I’m having trouble wielding mine, you must be experiencing the same with yours.”

“I wouldn’t know,” Killian replied flippantly. “I haven’t attempted any.”

“You what?!” Regina stared incredulously.

“Oh, I’m sorry,” Killian sneered. “Not what you were hoping to hear? Not what you were expecting when you dropped that vial down the well in order to make me the new Big Bad? I’m sorry to disappoint you Regina, but your plan failed.”

“Well, it’s only been one day,” Regina said coyly, having regained some of her composure. “We both know it’s only a matter of time before your darker nature gives in.”

“Well, it’s a good thing I don’t plan on being the Dark One for much longer then, isn’t it?” Killian rocked back on his heels and placed his hand on his belt as he smugly raised his brows at her.

“Oh? Going to do us all a favor and stab yourself with the dagger, are you?” Regina snarked before narrowing her eyes at him. “Just how do you plan to rid yourself of the Darkness?”

“Wouldn’t you like to know?” Killian taunted with a smirk. “I’ll tell you what, Your Majesty. You tell me what you’re looking for, and I’ll answer that question.”

Regina gave his proposal a moment’s consideration before responding. “My mother’s spellbook.”

Killian chortled, “So it’s come down to that, eh? Need your mummy’s help?”

“I’ve managed to do a few things,” Regina snapped before confessing. “But you’re right. I need a shortcut in order to get the rest working. Now… your turn. What do you have planned?”

“Why, True Love’s Kiss, of course.”

“You can’t be serious?” Regina laughed.

“Oh, I’m very much serious,” Killian replied. “You see, I’ve just had an interesting chat with Belle, and she told me that True Love’s Kiss almost worked on the Crocodile. He was too much of a coward to let go of his power, but I won’t make the same mistake. There’s nothing the Darkness has that I want.”

“Is that so?” Regina questioned dubiously.

“Aye,” Killian grit out through clenched teeth. “That’s so.”

“Well, I hate to break it to you Captain, but the reason that kiss didn’t work isn’t because Rumple chose the Darkness over Belle. It’s because they weren’t True Love in the first place. The Dark One can’t find true love.”

Dread pricked along Killian’s skin. “You’re lying.”

“Am I? True love is the rarest magic of all. Do you really think such magic, such light magic, would ever be afforded to the Dark One? Belle and Rumplestiltskin weren’t true love. I have proof of that.”
“What proof?” Killian demanded. He took a step forward to close the gap between them and loomed over her, ready to throttle the answer from her if necessary.

“I’ll tell you what, Captain,” she smirked. “You tell me what you know about my mother’s spellbook and I’ll answer your question.”

“You first.”

“When I cast the curse certain provisions were made for specific people.”

“Like Jefferson’s real memories staying intact?”

“Exactly,” she boasted. “So, I made a provision that Belle, as Rumplestiltskin's true love, would be locked up once under the curse, that way I could ensure they were kept away from one another even in this new land. That provision would have held even after Rumple’s death, and as you well know, Belle’s been free as a bird this entire time.”

Killian weighed Regina’s words against what she’d confessed about provisions she’d made in the curse regarding the Dark One that day she’d discovered the dagger, and pointedly asked, “You stipulated Rumplestiltskin’s true love, or the Dark One’s?”

Killian saw a spark of uncertainty flash in Regina’s eyes, though she tried to smother it.

“It was the Dark One’s true love, wasn’t it? That’s why Belle was allowed her get out of jail free card, because Rumplestiltskin wasn’t the Dark One that got caught up in the curse. I was.”

“Nevertheless,” Regina brushed off his words, “Mark my words, Captain. True Love’s Kiss isn’t going to work for you, and not just because you’re the Dark One.”

“Oh?” Killian challenged. “Why then?”

“Because you’re a villain, and villains don’t get happy endings.”

Killian quirked a brow. “And yet, here you are. Looking for your mother’s spellbook. Still trying to get your happy ending by exacting revenge over those you think wronged you. You are every bit as much of a villain as I ever was Regina, so if there is no hope for me, then what does that say about you?”

“It says,” Regina sassed back, “that I’m not relying on some false hope that the fates will save me. I make my own fate. Now, I held up my end of the bargain. Where’s my mother’s spellbook?”

“Oh, that,” Killian drawled slyly. “Well, if I remember correctly, the deal wasn’t for me to tell you where it is. You said I would have to tell you what I know about it. So here’s what I know.” A cheeky glint shone from his eye even as his tone became menacing. “I have it, and I’m not about to give it to you. You’ll have to find another way of getting the magic flowing again, Your Majesty.”

“You’re going about this all wrong, Captain,” Regina replied sweetly.

“Am I?”

Regina lowered her lashes and peeked up at him, a coy and seductive smirk set on her painted lips. “We could make a great team, you and I,” she purred as she reached out to run her hand up his arm. “The two of us combined could rule this town. Take anything we wanted. Any one we wanted. Together we could have everything: revenge, power, our own brand of happy endings. What do you say, Captain?” Regina had moved in closer to him, her lips now a breath away from his.
“I’d say,” Killian replied huskily, “that desperation doesn’t become you, Regina.” Killian grabbed her hand off his arm and flung it away, forcing her to stumble backward.

“Killian?” Emma’s voice rang out from the backroom, making Regina’s eyes go wide.

“Aye. Out here.”

Emma and Graham rushed through the curtain with guns drawn. Killian stepped back so they could train their sights on the Evil Queen.

“It’s over, Regina,” Emma declared. “Hands in the air.”

“Well, if you insist,” the queen smirked. She raised her hand, flicked her wrist, and was enveloped in a plume of smoke, poofing herself from the pawn shop.

“What the hell?” Emma exclaimed. “Does that mean she got her magic working?”

“Not exactly, love,” Killian assured her. “She said she’d been able to accomplish a few things, but it seems the darkest of her magic isn’t functioning. That’s why she was here, she was looking for something to help kick start it.”

“What?” Graham questioned.

Killian walked behind the counter and pulled a hinged frame from the wall revealing a hidden safe. Opening it, he pulled Cora’s spellbook from its depths and held it up for Emma and Graham to see.

“This. Her mother’s spellbook. Quite dark and quite dangerous. We do not want her getting her hands on it.”

“You should probably lock it back in the safe then,” Emma suggested.

“I’ve a better place,” Killian replied. “This safe isn’t impervious. I’ve another that is.”

Killian fixed his attention on Emma and his breath caught in his throat. She truly was stunning. His heart swelled painfully in his chest as he marveled at the tough lass before him. Emma holstered her weapon then met his gaze as she automatically moved towards him. With a questioning look of curiosity on her face, Emma placed a comforting hand on his arm as she asked, “You okay?”

Killian shook himself from his besotted thoughts, how could what I feel for her not be true love?, and replied, “Aye, love.”

They stood there for a moment, caught up in one another’s gaze before Graham cleared his throat uncomfortably. “You didn’t happen to find Red’s cloak, did you?”

“Oh, um, yeah. It’s still in the backroom. I’d just located it when I heard Regina.” Killian led Emma and Graham back through the curtain and picked the cloak up from where he’d set it down on the work table. Tossing it to Graham Killian said, “Here you are Huntsman, go get that to your girl, so she can stop worrying.” With barely more than a quick, grateful nod of his head Graham made his way out the still open back door.

Graham had barely cleared the door, when Killian and Emma made their way to follow. After exiting Emma stuffed both hands into her back pockets, and shifted her weight from foot to foot. Nodding her head towards the book still clutched in his hand, she asked, “So, do you want me to come with you to the Jolly? After you get the book locked away we could go to Mary Margaret’s loft together. I had them take Henry there when I got your text, just to be safe. They invited us to...
spend the afternoon, and they want all of us to have dinner together.”

“I appreciate the offer, love. I can pop over to the Jolly quickly and meet you over there once the book has been dealt with. I’m sure your parents would like to have some time with just you and Henry. You go spend time with them and your boy.” Killian didn’t see the way Emma’s face fell at his words as he made sure the back door was locked tight.

“Oh, okay. Well, we’ll see you later then.” Emma turned and headed in the direction of the loft.

Killian called out to her before she could get too far, “Swan.”

She stopped and turned to look back. “Yeah?”

“I-I was wondering, if maybe we could talk later, you know, just the two of us?” There was a look in her eye that he couldn’t seem to place with the distance between them. She nodded in acquiescence before she turned back around and headed on her way. Killian watched her go until she rounded the corner. Determined to get this errand taken care of before Regina could get the chance to find the book out in the open, and get back to Emma and Henry, Killian headed off to his ship.

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Killian made his way to the Jolly Roger with quick and purposeful steps. During his encounter with Regina he hadn’t realized how clouded his mind and disposition had become with urgings of his darker nature. It wasn’t until Emma had arrived, banishing the Crocodile once more with simple contact between them, that Killian had felt the oppressive weight of the Darkness lighten. He was eager to get the matter of Cora’s spellbook dealt with so he could return to Emma once more, especially upon seeing the Crocodile on deck as he made his way onto the ship.

“She was right, you know,” the demon stated.

Killian ignored the imp and made his way down to his cabin. He scowled at Rumplestiltskin’s presence waiting for him in his quarters.

“You can ignore me all you like dearie, but it doesn’t change the fact that Regina was correct in her assessment of True Love’s Kiss.”

“You’ll forgive me if I don’t trust the word of the Evil Queen or the evil trying to take over my soul,” Killian gruffed as he dug his hook from his jacket pocket.

“You don’t need to take my word about the power that book contains,” the Crocodile redirected, causing Killian to glance down at the book in his hand. “Our memories can tell you all you need to know. Why, if you took the dagger back, that book could afford you the opportunity to jump start your dark magic. No one in this realm would be able to equal your power.”

“Yeah, well,” Killian scoffed as he inserted his hook into the safe’s lock. “I don’t have the dagger, and you can keep your dark magic. I don’t want it.” With the book safely stowed away, Killian closed the door and locked it tight.

“It would be easy enough to get it back, though,” the Crocodile mused.

“And why would I do that? Having it in Emma’s possession has served me very well thus far.”

“Except those times she’s commanded you against your will,” the demon reminded with a sneer.

“Those were accidents,” Killian asserted. “Emma would never intentionally control me against my
“Right,” the imp drawled. “Because you believe she’s your Twue Wuv. You heard what Regina said, The Dark One can’t-

“Aye, I heard what she said,” Killian interrupted, unsure as to why he felt it necessary to argue with the figment before him, but compelled to make his case nonetheless. “She said she made a provision that the Dark One’s true love would be locked up once they were under the curse. Do you remember what happened the very night Emma came into town? Into this cursed town?” he questioned the Darkness, a tone of triumph underscoring his words. “She hit the welcome sign and ended up in a cell at the sheriff station. Locked up. Under the curse.”

“Ah! But she was never under the curse,” the crocodile countered shrewdly.

“Perhaps not in the same way the rest of the town was, but make no mistake, as the Saviour she was every bit as affected by the curse as any of us.”

His point made, Killian started for the door.

“So what do you intend to do now? Confess all this to Emma and place the burden of your salvation on her shoulders? Don’t you think she has enough expectations weighing her down? Do you really want to add to them?”

“Don’t pretend that you give a damn about Emma,” Killian seethed. “You don’t want me to say anything to her because you know I’m right. She is my true love. The provision in the curse proves it. Not to mention the connection I’ve felt towards her since the moment we met.”

“You really think you have some sort of fated connection? That you were destined for one another? That what you feel is evidence of true love? Fool,” the Crocodile spat. “It’s only ever been the magic. Dark Magic seeking out the light so that it can snuff it out. Light magic repelling the darkness back into the shadows. A war as old as time. You aren’t some destined love story guaranteed a happy ending. You are enemies. The Saviour and The Dark One. You must destroy her before she destroys you.”

“You have sorely underestimated me if you think I could ever be swayed to kill the woman I love. I won’t harm Emma. Ever.”

“Oh, you don’t need to kill her,” the Crocodile dismissed with a waggle of his fingers. “You simply need to make her like us.”

“Like us? What do you mean like us? There is no us,” Killian stated emphatically.

“A villain,” Rumplestiltskin continued undeterred. “Darken her heart and she’ll no longer be the Saviour.”

“You can’t just un-Saviour the Saviour,” Killian mocked.

“Well, not just anyone can,” the demon concurred, before fixing Killian with a chilling look, “but you can.”

“Right,” Killian clipped. “I’ve heard enough. We’re done here.”

Before he could make it out the door, the Crocodile questioned, “You don’t want to know how? Even if it means having the knowledge so you can prevent such a thing from happening?”
Killian let go a long suffering sigh, turned, and leaned against the door frame. “Fine. How?”

“Why… with that.”

The Crocodile gestured to the shelving that contained his safe and Killian was dumbfounded to see Cora’s spellbook. Impossible. He’d locked that away. Hadn’t he?

“How the devil? I locked that infernal book in the safe.” Killian crossed the cabin and picked up the book, verifying that it was real and not just some trick of the Darkness.

“Doesn’t appear that way to me, Dearie,” the imp taunted. “You simply made yourself believe that you did.”

“No.” Killian shook his head and brought out his hook once more. Unlocking the safe, his heart seized at the realization that the Crocodile was right. He’d never actually put the book in the safe. Cold dread swept over Killian as he spun to face the imp, “How? Why?”

“Don’t you remember, Dearie? It was when we were encouraging you to use the power of the book for yourself. I guess a part of you agreed with us.” Killian continued to shake his head frantically. “Probably that part of you that enjoyed instructing the Saviour in her magic earlier,” the demon pressed. “Imagine how easy it would be to give her instruction of a darker nature. She trusts you, they all do. If you insist on staying tethered, you’re going to need someone capable of taking on the Evil Queen once she gets her magic flowing again, and we both know it’s only a matter of time before she does. You’ll need someone who can fight fire with fire. Just a few spells from that book would do the trick. Rid the town of Regina, and turn the Saviour dark. Then you won’t have to worry about succumbing to us. Once your Emma has darkened her heart, you’ll gladly let us have yours.”

Killian covered his ears to try and drown out the words, to drown out the part of himself that was tempted by what the vile imp was saying. He’d had Emma command him to not use magic, fearing the pull it might have over him. He never considered the effect his instruction would have. The pride he’d felt had been intoxicating, and her response to his guidance was a high he would gladly chase again and again.

What if the old Crocodile was right? What if it had been the magic drawing him to Emma all along? He knew now that the Darkness hadn’t been completely dormant under the curse. What if it had used him to draw close to her? To gain her trust, so it could corrupt her as it had been corrupting him?

He wasn’t about to let that happen.

Knowing that the Darkness could manipulate him subconsciously to act without his full realization, Killian pulled out his flask and began taking liberal swallows. With magic unleashed upon the town, the enchantment that allowed it to never run dry was once again in effect. He couldn’t risk being in Emma’s presence now, not with the desire to tempt her into darkness so close to the surface. He had to remain where he was until the compulsion passed.

Killian sent off a quick text begging off the invitation for dinner, then ignored the buzzing of his phone as he took several more pulls of rum. Since escape through sleep wasn’t possible, Killian could only hope that he’d find solace when he passed out from the drink. A solace he wished to seek from his Swan, but couldn’t risk now that the Darkness was clawing its way closer to the surface.

Emma made her way along the dock early the next morning, hoping to find Killian aboard his ship.
She’d been disappointed when she’d received his text backing out of an afternoon and evening at the loft, but couldn’t find it in herself to be too upset with him. Knowing he was most likely excusing himself so she and Henry could have some alone time with her parents, Emma hadn’t thought much more about his text, or the fact that he hadn’t replied to hers, until she and Henry were on their way home later that evening.

Emma wouldn’t deny the pang of longing she’d felt when after several attempts to reach him by phone, she’d gone to bed without a word from him. The nagging pull in her gut that something might be wrong almost had her trekking the distance between their houses to check on him, but Emma rationalized that he might need some time to himself as well. She could admit that she’d come to rely on his presence a great deal, almost to the point of being clingy, and Emma was not clingy.

She knew Killian was reeling from the foundational shift in his reality every bit as much as she was. Those first few moments after magic had descended upon them not even forty-eight hours ago had unnerved her. Seeing Killian come unhinged before her eyes, with David’s warnings ringing in her ears, Emma had feared the man she knew was slipping away.

Until he had her command him with the dagger.

There were still moments when Emma could sense something off with him, something haunted peering around the corner of his expressions. On the whole, though, he’d seemed more himself since she’d taken possession of his dagger, another thing she found unnerving, but when Emma’s calls that morning had still gone unanswered the worry from the night before began to churn in her gut again.

After verifying that Killian wasn’t at home, Emma had dropped Henry off at the diner with David and Mary Margaret before making her way down to the docks. All was quiet as she made her way across the deck towards his quarters, and the hair on her arms rose in response to the eerie stillness. Calling out Killian’s name as she knocked on the cabin door, Emma could hear a groaning on the other side, causing her to rush in. Slumped against the wall, his flask clutched in his hand was Killian.

“Killian?” Emma crouched down beside him and gently tried to rouse him.

Killian mumbled incoherently as he stirred.

“Killian, you need to wake up,” Emma urged as she shook him a little harder. “What happened?”

“The Crocodile,” he muttered, “wants me to… but I can’t. I won’t use the book. I won’t hurt them.”

“Hurt who?” Emma questioned. Anxiety and guilt for not checking on him sooner gripped her as she heard the fear and anguish in his voice. “Killian!” She cupped his face in her hands, tapping lightly on one side to help bring him to full consciousness. “Killian, wake up!”

Killian’s eyes popped open and his body jerked as he took a startled breath. His eyes frantically swept the cabin before settling on her, wide with panic.

“Hey. Hey, it’s okay,” Emma soothed as she brushed his bangs off his forehead. “It’s just me.” A shaky breath stuttered from his lungs and Emma was hit with the remnants of the rum he’d consumed. “How much did you have to drink? Killian, what the hell is going on?”

“I’m sorry, Emma. I...” He shook his head roughly, trying to clear the cobwebs from it before making an attempt to stand. “I’m fine.”

Emma halted his movements by placing her hand firmly against his chest. “No. You’re not, and we’re not leaving here until you tell me what’s going on.”
She watched his Adam’s apple bob, fortifying himself for whatever he was about to tell her. Emma positioned herself on the floor in front of him and took his hand in hers, offering an encouraging squeeze as she waited.

“It’s the bloody Crocodile, Rumplestiltskin,” he began quietly. “He’s inside my head. I can’t get him out. He appears to me. Lying in wait to try and tempt me to fall into the darkness, and sometimes I… I do things without realizing I’ve done them.”

“What kinds of things?” His gaze flickered up to the shelves next to them and Emma’s followed, landing on the book he’d shown her at the pawn shop. “Isn’t that?”

“Aye.”

“I thought you were going to lock it up?”

“I did,” he insisted. “At least. I thought I had. The Darkness led me to believe I had, then proceeded to…”

“To what?” Killian wouldn’t meet her gaze, his body had gone tense, and he started shaking his head again. “To what, Killian?” she demanded.

His eyes met hers and Emma drew in a startled breath at his haunted expression.

“It told me what it wants me to do. What the darker part of me wants to do, and it all became too much. I was afraid I’d… I had to make it stop.”

“So you drank it away,” Emma deduced, taking the flask from his hand.

“I couldn’t trust myself,” he admitted with a healthy dose of self-loathing.

“Why? What does the Darkness want you to do?” He turned his head away from her again and Emma could see the muscle in his jaw ticking wildly. “You can tell me, Killian. Whatever it is, I know it isn’t you, and I can’t help you if I don’t know what we’re up against. So, tell me.”

Anguished blue eyes fixed themselves on her as he opened his mouth to respond, but Emma stop him with the press of her fingers against his lips.

“Wait,” she said, realizing that the phrasing of her words left him no choice in the matter. “I mean. I want to help you if you’ll let me. I want you to tell me what’s going on, but it’s your choice, Killian. I always want it to be your choice.”

Emma removed her fingers and watched as Killian wet his lips, drawing in a shaky breath before he confessed, “It wants me to darken your heart, love.”

Emma resisted the urge to scoff, and attempted to assuage him of his fear. “Well, if that’s its plan, then stop worrying. Dark One or not, I know you’d never do that. I’m not going dark.”

“But darkness is a funny thing,” he warned. “It creeps up in you. Like it crept up in me yesterday. I thought… I thought I was handling it. That I was in control. But he’s always there. Reminding me of the inevitable.”

“No, Killian,” Emma argued. “I don’t believe that. I told you we would help you, and I meant it.” It tore at her heart to see him so defeated. Didn’t he realize how strong he was? How steadfast? He hadn’t given up on her when she’d refused to believe, in the curse and herself, and she wasn’t going to give up on him either. “You said he appears to you. Do you see him now?” Killian swallowed
heavily and shook his head. “Okay, so maybe there’s something that triggers it. Maybe we can find a way to—”

Emma cut herself off when her phone buzzed. Pulling it from her pocket she stated, “It’s Henry. He wants to know if I found you. You had him pretty worried, you know.” And he’s not the only one.

“I’m sorry I caused the lad distress,” Killian said sincerely. Emma could see the affectionate yearning in his expression, the same she’d seen on Henry’s face last night and this morning when he’d asked about his pirate friend.

Enough wallowing, Emma decided as her need for action kicked in.

“Okay, here’s what we’re going to do. You’re going to get yourself cleaned up while I go get Henry from the diner. We’ll come back here and the three of us are going to figure this out.” She stood and then offered him a hand up. “Are you going to be okay until I get back?”

“Aye,” he replied firmly. “But there’s something I need you to do before you go.” She raised her brows expectantly then followed his gaze back over to the book. “I need you to lock that in my safe, and hold onto the key for me.”

“Sure,” she said with understanding. “Where’s the key?”

Emma’s eyes widened when he handed her his hook, but locked the book away without comment. Assuring him that she and Henry would be back soon, and that they would find a way to help him, Emma asked him one last time if he’d be okay while she was gone. With his reassurances barely triggering her super power, Emma set off to collect Henry, who’d probably consider helping Killian combat the Darkness a new mission to focus on. As she pulled out of the dock’s parking lot, Emma wondered what name Henry would give this Operation.

Operation Kraken was, apparently, the answer.

Henry had been relieved to hear that they were going back to Killian’s ship, and nearly vibrated with ten-year-old enthusiasm at the prospect of finding a way to help him with the Darkness.

“We should ask Belle,” Henry suggested as they headed towards the docks. “She knew Rumplestiltskin better than anyone. Maybe she has some advice.”

“I’m not too sure how willing she’s going to be to help Killian,” Emma reminded. “They don’t have the best history.”

“She said she’s willing to give him a second chance, though.”

“She did? When?”

“She told me so this morning at the diner,” Henry supplied. “She and Killian talked yesterday, and she told him that she wasn’t ready to forgive him, but she was willing to see if he truly had changed.”

Emma tucked away that startling development, and made a mental note to call Belle later. Even if she didn’t have any knowledge of what could be done to help Killian, she’d proven herself quite good at research when she’d helped with the loophole in Henry’s adoption. Maybe there was something at the library that could help them.

Emma pulled her bug into the parking lot and had just turned off the engine when her phone rang. “You go on ahead, kid,” she said when she saw that the call was from Dr. Whale. “I’ll be there as soon as I’m done with this call.
“Okay, mom,” Henry replied as he got out and rushed toward the Jolly Roger, leaving Emma almost too stunned to answer Whale’s call.

Mom. He’d called her mom. Henry had never called her that before, not to her face anyway, and the rightness of it brought tears to Emma’s eyes.

Tamping down the rising emotion within her, Emma answered her phone with a tightness in her throat. “Deputy Swan.”

“Hey, Emma,” Whale replied. “Graham wanted me to notify him when we discharged those men from the auto accident the other day at the town line. His phone is going straight to voicemail, and I’m already a few hours late in making this call, so I thought I’d call to let you know.”

“They were released a few hours ago?”

“Yep. So if you need them for any further questioning, you’ll probably wanna try Granny’s.”

Whale hung up before Emma could say anything more which pulled both an irritated sigh and an eye roll from her. She added checking in with Granny about whether or not the brothers had taken a room at the B&B, and asking Michael Tillman how much longer it would be before their vehicle was repaired to her ever growing list. At least their injuries hadn’t been severe. With any luck they’d be on their way in a day or two, and they wouldn’t have to worry about them any longer.
Chapter Twenty-Five

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out! And @flipperbrain made a lovely pic for our belated Christmas presents, both the banner and the pic can be found on Tumblr.

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

***We’ve taken some creative license when it comes to how a certain dagger works in reference to exerting control over the Dark One. We realize that it is slightly different in canon, but felt it a necessary tweak for our story. Just go with us...

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Killian stood on deck and breathed in the briny sea air as he waited for Emma to return with Henry. Steadfastly refusing to give the Crocodile any of his attention, Killian set his mind towards what he planned to say to Swan and the lad when they arrived.

It meant more to him than he could ever express that she was willing to stand by him and help find a way to dispel the Darkness. Little did she know that she was the remedy. Her touch always managed to banish the evil imp to the far reaches of his inner being, but was she ready to take on the burden of that knowledge? Killian knew that the Darkness didn’t give a damn about Emma, but he did. He knew he shouldn’t let the Crocodile get inside his head, but the fact of the matter was, the demon was already there, and he’d posed a question worth pondering.

Saviour or not, was it fair for him to put the burden of his salvation on her shoulders?

Emma had an entire town’s happy endings to see to. Expectations that accompanied her royal status, even if she had yet to claim it, would be set upon her in due course, to say nothing of the role and responsibility she now had as Henry’s true mother, and the prince and princess’ daughter. What right did he have to ask of her attentions and aid above anyone else? Attention he’d prefer to have because she’d want to devote such considerations upon him, not because she was compelled to do so for fear of him losing control to the Darkness.

Of course, there was still the prospect of True Love’s Kiss.

Regina and the Darkness’ words hadn’t completely stripped him of that hope, but Killian wasn’t sure he could bring himself to broach the topic of true love with Emma, anymore than he could the matter of how just her touch dispelled the Darkness.

What if it didn’t work? Would Emma refuse to be with him romantically because she’d always wonder if his true love was out there somewhere? The one who could break the curse?
But then…

What if it did work? How would Emma react to the universe telling her that she was once again a pawn to destiny? Shoehorned into another role she may not feel prepared for, or even want. True love did not always equate to a happy ending. Killian’s predecessor was proof of that.

Killian ran a frustrated hand through his hair. Perhaps he ought to just tell them to take him to the town line so they could all forget the entire bloody mess. An option he had considered more than once, and one he was fully prepared to act on should it appear he was going to lose the battle with the Darkness. He wouldn’t jeopardize Emma or Henry, even if it meant losing them and his true self.

Killian heard the sound of a car door slamming shut echo across the water and turned towards the parking lot in time to see Henry making his way towards the slip. Despite his brooding, Killian felt a smile tug at his lips at the sight of the boy, but it quickly morphed into a frown as he saw two men exit one of the warehouses after Henry passed by.

The taller of the two made purposeful strides towards Henry, sparking Killian into action. He’d just reached the end of the gangplank when the man grabbed Henry from behind and began hauling him towards the edge of the pier.

“Henry!” Killian shouted in a panic as he watched the other man throw something into the water.

“How do I open one?” Emma demanded, stepping out of his embrace so she could turn and face his confused look. “A portal!” she clarified frantically. “We have to go after them. How do I open one?”

“Then how did they open one?” Emma demanded. “How are we going to get him back? K-Killian…” she stuttered over her rising emotion, “we have to get him back.”

“Then how did they open one?” Emma demanded. “How are we going to get him back? K-Killian…” she stuttered over her rising emotion, “we have to get him back.”

Killian’s assurances were cut off as he spotted something laying on the docks; a black pouch that must have been left behind by the kidnappers. Emma’s phone rang out and as she pulled it from her pocket Killian snatched the pouch from the boards. A wide grin broke over his face and relief flooded his body at its contents.
“They just took him,” he heard Emma lament to the person on the other end of the call. “What are we going to do, Dad?”

Killian felt his heart constrict in his chest in much the same way he imagined the prince’s was doing just then. Emma’s resolve to remain strong was beginning to crumble. Killian took the phone from her and met her watery gaze with his unwavering certainty.

“They used a magic bean,” he informed them both. “Fortunately, they left one behind. We can go after them as soon as we figure out where they went.”

Emma and the prince released a similar relieved breath, and David asked, “How do we track them?”

“I hate to say it, but we may need the Evil Queen’s assistance on that regard.”

“We’re with her now. That’s why I called. The dwarves discovered her tied up in her house. Seems those men came here first looking for Henry.”

“We’re on our way,” Killian said, ending the call.

Leading Emma back down the dock, Killian’s eyes met the Crocodile’s and for the first time he was in full agreement with the Darkness. Whoever took Henry was going to pay. Dearly.

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Emma’s mind raced in rhythm with her pulse as Killian drove them to Regina’s house. Only barely following his explanations of how portals worked, and half listening when he called Smee and instructed him to get the Jolly Roger ready to set sail, she had to pull her thoughts into focus when they arrived at the Evil Queen’s austere home.

Mary Margaret pulled her into a tight hug as soon as they crossed the threshold. “Don’t worry, Emma. We will find him. That’s what our family does. We find each other. Just like you found us.”

“What happened here?” Emma asked, brushing aside Mary Margaret’s words for the moment. She needed action, not hope speeches. David seemed to understand and launched into the account of the morning. As he explained, Emma was struck with the notion that he might just understand that part of her because she got it from him.

“The dwarves were watching Regina’s house again overnight. From what we can gather, Regina returned here during Sleepy’s watch, and not long after that those two men arrived. When Grumpy arrived to take over the watch he noticed the front door wide open and called us. When we arrived with Graham we found Regina tied to a chair with some sort of magic restraining cuff on her wrist that she is unable to take off.”

“I can’t. But one of you can,” Regina informed snarkily.

“Right. Like that’s going to happen,” David snarked back.

“Wait. Hold a second,” Graham interjected. “You put Sleepy on guard duty. Whose bright idea was that?”

“Who cares!” Emma shouted before making her way into Regina’s dining room to question the queen herself. “What happened?”

“I came here early this morning to collect a few things when those ruffians showed up looking for Henry. They doused me with squid ink then went off in search of him. Once they discovered he
wasn’t here they slapped this… thing on to my wrist and tied me to the chair.”

“Squid ink?” Emma questioned.

“Aye, of course,” Killian replied making his way next to her. “It can immobilize the most magical of creatures. At least, for a little while. That must be how that one incapacitated me,” he mused. “He must have had remnants of it on his hands.”

“So what do we do now?” Mary Margaret asked. “How do we get Henry back?”

“We have a bean,” Killian told them as he pulled the opalescent item from the black pouch he’d collected off the docks. “All we need is a way to track them and we can open a portal to go after them.”

Emma turned to Regina and questioned, “Do you know a way to find out where they went?”

“Of course,” Regina sniped. “But it will be easier to accomplish without this.” She held out her arm indicating the cuff still firmly in place around her wrist.

Wary glances were traded amongst the group before Emma finally stepped forward and removed the cuff. Passing it off to Mary Margaret she prompted, “Okay. Now, how do we find Henry?”

“With this.” Regina flicked her wrist and an opaque globe appeared within a swirling purplish plume on the dining table. “This globe uses blood magic to track loved ones across realms.”

“So a drop of blood from either Emma, Mary Margaret, or David will reveal Henry’s location,” Killian confirmed.

“All three can bleed out on it for all I care,” Regina sassed. “We’ve wasted enough time. We need to go find my son.”

“And who said you’d be coming, Your Majesty?” Killian barked.

“You can’t keep me from coming,” Regina protested.

“You can’t keep me from coming,” Regina protested.

“Can’t I? I believe the Captain has the right to refuse passage to anyone he deems unfit to join his crew.”

“Well, I’m not looking to be a part of your crew. I’m getting my son back.”

As Emma watched two legendary villains bicker back and forth with one another like children a truth shifted into place within her. Before the curse broke, Emma had only known Regina as the mayor and Henry’s mother. She’d been the authority within the town and someone who held great power over everyone, including Emma. But not anymore. This woman had made Emma’s entire life a living hell, and despite the fact that she raised Henry for the first ten years of his life, Emma owed her nothing.

The queen’s crimes were on full display within this very room; the atrocities of what had been done to her parents, to Graham, to Killian, and herself could be multiplied a hundred fold in the way others had experienced the same offenses, or worse. Regina didn’t merit consideration, she didn’t deserve to have a say in what happened next, because she damn well was not Henry’s mother.

“No,” Emma declared, stepping up next to Killian. “You’re not going anywhere near Henry. Not now, not ever.”
Emma could feel the others flanking her and Killian in solidarity and Regina’s eyes went wide with indignation.

“No!” Regina snapped. “I will not allow any of you to poison Henry against me any further!”

“Interesting choice of words, considering you’ve already done just that,” Killian quipped.

“I’m going with you!” Regina asserted haughtily. “I deserve to go after him, too! He’s my son!”

“He is not! He’s mine!” Emma roared, stepping forward into Regina’s space which caused the queen to stumble back. “And after what you did, you’re not getting anywhere near him!”

“We’ll see about that.” Regina flexed her hand out in front of her and Emma saw sparks begin to form in her palm. Gasps echoed around Emma as flames bursts from the sparks, a contemptuous sneer set on Regina’s lips.

Without warning Killian advanced and took Regina by the throat, slamming her into the wall next to them. “Oh, no you don’t,” he growled through clenched teeth as he pressed his fingers deeper into the sides of her neck.

“Killian!” Emma gasped as she stepped forward, placing a hand on his arm. “You don’t have to do this, Killian. We’ll put the cuff back on her. She won’t be able to hurt anyone that way.”

Killian nodded, but didn’t release his grip. Emma felt the same hair-raising malevolence she’d sensed from him that night he’d held Jefferson at gunpoint. The Darkness, she realized. Emma hadn’t even considered what Henry’s abduction was doing to Killian, how the Darkness might be using his fear and panic to twist his thoughts and actions.

Snow snapped the cuff back onto Regina’s wrist, but Killian still held her by the throat. Emma placed a hand at his cheek and coaxed him to look at her.

“I don’t want to force you Killian, but I will if I have to,” she asserted. “Please, don’t make me use the dagger.”

Killian’s Adam’s apple bobbed and a startled look settled over his face before he released Regina. The queen gasped with a choking cough and rubbed a hand over her neck.

“I’m sorry, Swan. I—”

“It’s okay,” she affirmed. “It wasn’t you. It was the Darkness.”

Emma heard David instruct Graham to take Regina and find a place to hold her until they returned with Henry. As Graham slapped another type of cuffs on her wrists, Regina scowled at Killian in contempt. “Looks like the Saviour’s got you on a pretty tight leash, huh, Captain?”

“Better a leash than a cage… Your Majesty,” Killian sneered back as Graham escorted her from the house.

David collected the globe from the table and the four of them made their way back to the docks. When they arrived at the Jolly Roger they found Smee finishing his preparations with the assistance of Granny and Ruby.

“Thank you,” Mary Margaret expressed as she pulled the two women into a hug. “Work with Graham to oversee things here in town while we’re gone, won’t you?”
“Don’t worry about a thing,” Granny replied. “Just focus on bringing that boy home.”

Killian barked out a few orders to Smee as the women departed, and they quickly cast off. Once they were a significant distance from the harbor, David set the globe atop some crates, and all eyes landed on Emma.

“So, I just prick my finger on the pointy top and drop some blood onto the surface?” she recounted.

“Aye, love,” Killian confirmed.

A hiss escaped her lips at the sharp pain, a droplet of blood formed at her fingertip that she let drip onto the pristine, white globe. Emma watched in wide-eyed fascination as the blood began to swirl and form itself into what appeared to be a land mass.

Killian’s quick intake of breath had her assessing him briefly before asking, “Do you know where that is?”

“Aye,” he answered darkly before flicking his steely gaze her way. “Neverland.”

Before Emma or any of the others could respond, Killian spun on his heel and flung the bean over the railing into the previously calm waters, opening a portal for pursuit. Not even pausing his momentum, Killian rounded his way toward the helm and shouted, “Get ready to set sail, mates! There’s bumpy seas ahead!”

The force of the Jolly Roger slamming down onto the seas of Neverland as it emerged from the portal jarred Killian as he braced himself against the wheel. After confirming that the others had weathered the travel, Killian watched as Emma took sight of the accursed island he’d tried to escape for so long.

“Is that it?”

“Aye,” he grit out, turning the wheel to set their course before signaling to Smee to take over.

Killian pulled out his spyglass and set his sights on the beach. “There!” he called out. “I see him!”

He passed the spyglass to Emma and directed her gaze before collecting a few other lenses to pass along to the prince and princess while keeping one for himself. Sights trained on the beach, they watched as the two men who had grabbed Henry embraced a young girl before the three of them disappeared into a portal that opened along the shore. Killian only managed to observe that Henry appeared unharmed before the band of Lost Boys led him into the jungle and out of sight.

So it had been a trade. Henry for the lass. But to what end? What did Pan want with Henry?

“Where are they taking him?” Emma questioned, her voice laced with restrained urgency.

“Pan’s compound,” Killian replied. “He’ll have a camp further inland. Our best bet is to head to the far side of the island and link up with the widest part of the river. Then we can sail right through into the heart of the island. Maybe take them by surprise.”

“Are you sure?” David questioned. “Shouldn’t we just drop anchor closer to shore and follow them from here? Snow can track them through the jungle.”

Killian’s jaw clenched. He knew the prince was only trying to help, but Killian was not accustomed
to people second guessing him on his own ship.

“I’ve no doubt in the princess’ tracking abilities, but if they’re already aware of our arrival they’ll be expecting that. We’d be walking into an ambush.”

“Well, then maybe we sh-

“No,” Emma interrupted David impatiently. “Killian has lived here before. If he says sailing up the river is the best plan, then we listen.” The prince and princess exchanged stunned looks of pride before David offered Killian a relenting nod. “Right,” Emma continued. “Let’s go pack up supplies and whatever else we might need.”

After Swan and her parents disappeared below deck, Killian fixed his gaze to Neverland’s shores once more. The irony. He’d spent more time than he cared to remember trying to leave this place in order to kill Rumplestiltskin. He’d become the darkest version of himself while in Pan’s service, and now here he was, sailing right back into its heart while trying to keep the Crocodile from tempting him into an even darker iteration.

The demon had been egging him on since the docks, filling his mind with all the ways he could make those men pay for taking Henry. It had hissed at him in the Evil Queen’s home, goading him to simply put an end to the vile woman. Seeing her threaten Emma had been his breaking point, and much like it had with Jefferson, the Darkness had coiled itself so tightly within his mind that he couldn’t differentiate where its urges ended and his intentions began.

His fears from the night before came rushing back to the surface, and Killian was tormented by the thought that he might be losing himself again. Just as he had before. On this very island.

But he wasn’t going to go down that path again. Not with Henry’s life at stake.

It took some time to navigate the Jolly Roger inland, but eventually they made their way to the narrowest and shallowest point of the river they dared travel. Killian directed Smee to assist Emma and her parents with disembarking then made his way to his cabin to collect his own provisions and supplies. He was just closing his satchel at his bunk when he heard the familiar lilt of boyish mischief that had haunted him for more years than he’d ever admit to, drawl out from behind him.

“Fancy seeing you here, Captain.”

Killian affixed an unaffected expression of boredom upon his features before he turned to face his foe. “Pan,” he greeted. “What do you want?”

“Why, I want you to leave,” Pan answered pleasantly as he strutted across the cabin. “Neverland isn’t for grownups, you know that.”

“I’m not leaving without Henry.” Killian rocked back on his heels and rested his hand atop his belt buckle. Even after many decades, their dance had not much changed.

“Oh, well. We’ll see about that. What if I make you a deal?” Pan offered, and Killian flicked his gaze to the imp staring on from the corner. “You turn your ship around and I’ll help you with your Crocodile problem.”

“My Crocodile problem?” Killian questioned, curious as to how much Pan knew. Was his use of the word deal a jibe at his current affliction, or a mere coincidence?

“Your revenge against Rumplestiltskin,” Pan clarified, and Killian couldn’t help but smirk at the fact that the demon boy didn’t know as much as he thought.
“I no longer have a crocodile problem,” Killian replied, “and there’s no way in hell I’m leaving Henry behind.”

Pan seemed taken aback by that revelation, but quickly schooled his features as he assessed Killian anew. “You left behind a boy you cared for once before,” he taunted, understanding flashing within his eyes. “Turn back, Captain. Remember what happened the last time you didn’t listen to me. You lost someone you loved and yourself. I’d hate to see history repeat itself.”

“I have no intentions of losing myself again.”

“Really? Because that’s exactly what saving Henry will cost you.” Pan sauntered towards the door, and threw out over his shoulder before exiting, “Welcome back to Neverland, Captain Hook. Give my regards to the Darkness.”

A cold wash of dread swept over Killian at Pan’s words, and he rushed from the ship.

“Swan!” he called out as he grabbed onto one of the lines that allowed him to swing down from the deck. Landing hard on the shore, he was met with several pairs of wide, concerned eyes.

“Killian? What-”

“Pan just paid me a visit,” he interrupted, and the group before him balked.

“He did? What did he want?”

“He wanted to make a deal so that we would leave Neverland. I refused,” he assured them. “But we’ve a bigger problem. He knows I’m the Dark One, and I fear that means the dagger won’t be safe in your possession, love. In anyone’s possession.”

“Then what do we do with it?” Emma questioned.

Killian’s mind raced at the question. How were they to keep the dagger from falling into Pan’s hands? He could have Emma lock it in his safe aboard the *Jolly Roger*. The only way to open it was with the key at the end of his hook thanks to the blood magic charm that was placed over it when it was commissioned. With the key in her possession, Emma would still have claim over the dagger and control of him, but the hook could just as easily be taken from her as the blade. No. He needed to be able to hide it away where no Lost Boys would find it. Somewhere not even Pan or his bloody Shadow could-.

“Swan. I need you to give me the dagger.”

“What?” Emma stared at him incredulously.

“Killian, if Emma gives you the dagger she won’t be able to-”

“I know,” Killian interrupted David. “But I can use the dagger to cut away my shadow and send it off with the blade for safe keeping. It’s the best way to keep Pan from getting his hands on it.”

“Why can’t you cut away one of our shadows?” the princess asked. “If our shadow has it then we’d still be able to help you with controlling the Darkness.”

Killian took a deep breath and swallowed heavily. He couldn’t deny the desire that had started to spark under his skin at the mere thought of having the dagger in his possession again. A lust for power he tried to push aside so he could objectively consider the princess’ suggestion.
“Shadows are connected to your subconscious,” he explained. “My shadow knows this island as well as I do. Your shadow would wander around lost and vulnerable. You would feel that uncertainty every moment we’re here,” Killian asserted, then turned his full attention onto Emma. “It’s up to you, though. I leave the decision in your hands, love.”

Emma’s eyes flickered between his own. He wondered if she could see the war waging within him, where part of him was nearly giddy in anticipation that she might acquiesce, the other continued to think of any other way they could keep the dagger safe without it leaving her possession.

Taking a step forward, Emma reached out and brushed her fingers over the ring that hung around his neck. Liam’s ring. The one Henry had returned to him with his assurances that he still believed in his friend’s goodness.

“I believe in you, too,” Emma murmured softly before meeting his gaze. Removing her hand, she reached back and pulled the dagger from where she’d kept it holstered beneath her jacket. “I trust you, Killian. I trust you to control your own fate.” She extended the blade towards him. “It’s yours if you want it.”

Killian’s heart slammed in his chest as he reached out and took the dagger from her hand. The restraint her commands had placed over him fell away and he could feel the prickle of magic beneath his skin, reaching down to his toes and extending to his finger tips. He drew in a sharp breath clutching the dagger tighter in his grip, and chanced a look at the Crocodile as he rested against a nearby tree, a gloating smile stretched across its scaley face.

Resolved in what he must do, Killian bent down and began cutting his shadow away. “You know what to do,” he instructed, passing the blade to the umbral spectre as it hovered before him, free of its restrictions in much the same way Killian now found himself.

After watching his shadow disappear off in the distance Killian addressed the group, clinging to his authoritative role as Captain as a way to ground himself.

“Mr. Smee, I leave the Jolly Roger in your care. Ready a canon in case you need to signal us and stay alert. We may have to set sail at a moment’s notice.” His first mate bowed his head in acknowledgment of the orders and scampered back up the ladder. “There’s a look out point not far ahead. From there we’ll have a view of the entire island and with any luck we’ll be able to see where Pan is keeping Henry.”

“Then we better get going,” David said, drawing his sword so he could slice away the overgrowth that might get in their way.

“Hey,” Emma said quietly, allowing her parents to get a few paces ahead of them. “You okay?”

He knew what she was really asking. Was the Darkness lurking nearby? He fought the compulsion to lie to her.

“Do you remember when you asked me if there was something that triggered the Crocodile’s manifestations?” She looked at him with a furrowed brow as she nodded. “Nothing triggers the Darkness’ presence, but there is something that repels it.”

“What?”

Killian took her hand in his and exhaled, “This.”

Emma looked down at their joined hands then back up to meet his gaze. “I don’t understand.”
“Your touch, Swan. The light magic that lives in your very skin. It forces the Darkness to recoil back to the place it stayed suppressed during the curse.”

Emma’s eyes went wide, and she visibly swallowed. Killian held his breath at her frozen reaction, hating himself for putting such a burden on her. Then his Swan did something that truly surprised him. She laced her fingers with his and offered him a shy, soft smile. “Then let’s make sure our uninvited third wheel stays where he belongs while we rescue Henry.”

Killian didn’t think he’d ever wanted to kiss her more than in that moment, and perhaps he should’ve. What if his feelings and speculations were correct and they really were true love? Then the dagger wouldn’t matter. They wouldn’t have to worry about it falling into the wrong hands, or his inability to control the darkness. But then… what if they needed it in order to rescue Henry? Pan was a powerful foe and the very island itself was run on its own brand of magic. Emma was still so new to her power, could he really leave it all upon her shoulders?

Killian squeezed Emma’s hand and led them to follow her parents towards the ridge. If all went to plan, and they were able to rescue Henry without him having to use the power of the Darkness, then a time would come for he and Emma to try a True Love’s Kiss. Until then… just in case… he’d have to endure it a bit longer.

Chapter End Notes

From Hollye: Laura and I rotate answering comments with each chapter. I was suppose to reply to the comments from the last chapter, but I didn't get to them all. My husband came home from deployment, and... well... that kind of took all my focus. So, I'm sorry if I didn't reply to your comment last chapter, but please know that we truly appreciate each and every comment and the time you take to leave them.
Chapter Twenty-Six

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out! And @flipperbrain made a lovely pic for our belated Christmas presents, both the banner and the pic can be found on Tumblr.

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

***We've taken some creative license when it comes to how a certain dagger works in reference to exerting control over the Dark One. We realize that it is slightly different in canon, but felt it a necessary tweak for our story. Just go with us...

The trek to the lookout point had been long and arduous. Littered with various dangers which Killian had seamlessly guided them through, Neverland was proving to be more the stuff of nightmares than the dream like fantasyland Emma recalled from the stories. Not that it should have surprised her. Little from the nursery rhymes, fairy tales, or fables she’d had limited access to as a child was proving accurate, the man leading her by the hand as they made their way up to the ridge included.

The journey to the summit gave Emma time to come to terms with the most recent development between her and Killian. She’d meant it when she’d told him she trusted him, but that didn’t mean she wasn’t fearing for him every bit as much as he was for himself now that the dagger was back in his possession. When he’d confessed that her touch helped to keep the darkness at bay, Emma had been floored. Ever since she’d first met Killian in the Rabbit Hole that night she’d felt an inexplicable pull towards him. It hadn’t escaped her notice that they’d been sharing casual touches for weeks now, touches she typically shied away from with others. With Killian though, she found herself initiating them and now she wondered if her magic was the reason for it. That somehow the light magic inside her had sensed the Darkness within him, and had sought to drive it back.

The entire situation should make her want to dig in her heels. Mary Margaret had commented the day before at the loft that the entire town needed her - them - and she'd wanted to cry out, I don't want them to need me! She didn’t want to be responsible for everyone’s happiness. She’d never asked for this destiny that had been thrust upon her. A destiny concocted by the former Dark One who hadn’t even lived long enough to see his plan realized. Whatever his plan may have been.

David and Mary Margaret had sympathetically and supportively explained the expectations and burdens that might be placed on her shoulders now that the curse was broken, and the town recognized her for who she truly was. The Saviour, a princess, royalty. Although they had professed to have no such expectations other than simply getting to know her and becoming a family, Emma
had felt the weight of those burdens settle over her, and all she’d wanted to do was cast them off and run as far and as fast as she could.

She’d come to Storybrooke for Henry. Had stayed for Henry. The only person’s burdens she’d been concerned with were his…and now Killian’s. Emma knew that Killian would see his need for her touch as a burden to her, but it was one she was more than willing to bear, for in truth it was no burden at all. It was a relief to know she could help him. In this moment of chaos and uncertainty and panic over Henry and his well being, the fact that she could do something, anything, was a gift. Even if it was just holding Killian’s hand so she could help him keep the Darkness at bay. Because maybe Emma could finally admit that being with him helped keep her demons at bay, too.

“Well, we made it,” David said, a bit winded from their ascent. “But I don’t see much of anything other than jungle.”


*The Dark Jungle? Really? Why is everything Dark This or Dark That? Why can’t they have names like Sunshine Valley or Rainbow Cove?*

Killian pulled his spyglass from his pocket and opened it with his teeth, unwilling to break their contact. “It’s grown somewhat since I last stepped foot in Neverland.”

“How are we going to find Pan’s camp then?” Mary Margaret questioned.

“We’ll have to ask someone who knows,” Killian replied with a resigned sigh.

“Like who? I highly doubt any of the Lost Boys will be of help,” David said.


“A Fairy?” Emma looked up at him in confusion before realization struck her. “You mean Tinkerbell? Seriously?! She’s real, too?”

“Says the daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming,” Killian teased as he squeezed her hand. “And, aye. She’s real, and we just might be able to convince her to help us.”

“Well, where do we find her?”

“Say the daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming,” Killian teased as he squeezed her hand. “And, aye. She’s real, and we just might be able to convince her to help us.”

“Well, where do we find her?”

Emerging from the jungle was a slight, spritely looking blonde woman in a tattered outfit that looked as if it had once been a vivid green. She looked nothing like the Tinkerbell Emma remembered from various film adaptations, which once again shouldn’t have surprised her.

“Well, Look what the Neverland tides washed up,” the woman said with a plucky flirtatiousness. “Hello, Hook.”

“Lady Bell,” Killian greeted, resting his sword against his shoulder. Emma noticed the bloom of pink along his cheeks that stretched to the tips of his ears, and quirked an eyebrow. She wasn’t too sure about this fairy.

“Never thought I’d see you back here, Captain.”

“Neither did I,” Killian groused. “But desperate times call for desperate measures. We’re here for-”
“Let me guess. For the boy John and Michael traded in order to get Wendy back?”


“You know them?” The woman, *Tinkerbell*, gave Emma an incredulous look before her gaze flickered to Emma and Killian’s joined hands. She gave Killian a stunned look. “Your hand! How did you-”

“It’s a long story,” Killian cut her off. “We know those men as John and Michael Banks. They arrived in our town a few days ago. That boy they traded is Henry. Emma’s son. What can you tell us about the trade? What does Pan want with him?” Tinkerbell crossed her arms over her chest and cocked her head to one side, clearly unhappy with having her question dismissed. Killian flashed her a debonnaire smile and added, “Tink. After all we’ve been through together... a little assistance?”

A small smile pulled at the fairy’s lips as she rolled her eyes. Relaxing her stance she began to share all that she knew of the Darlings. “Wendy’s been here for quite some time. I’m not really sure how long. Pan enlisted her brothers into his service to help him find a specific boy - The Truest Believer. He’s been using Neverland magic to keep them young while they search. From what I understand they almost got a hold of the boy when he was an infant, but missed their chance. Then out of the blue, they arrived today with the boy in tow.”

In spite of herself, Emma couldn’t help but feel a twinge of sympathy for the men who’d taken her son. They’d been in an impossible position, and had done what they had to do in order to get their sister back. None of it explained why, though. Why had Peter Pan been searching for her son? What did he want with him? Where was he keeping him?

“Do you know what Pan means to do with the boy?” Killian questioned as if he’d read her mind.

“No idea.”

“Do you know where they’re keeping Henry? Where Pan’s camp is?” Mary Margaret asked.

“Sure,” she replied, her arms coming up to cross her chest once again, “but it won’t do you a bit of good. Pan’s too powerful.”

“Let us be the judge of that,” Emma challenged. “Does he trust you? Can you get us inside his compound?”

“Maybe. But why should I help you? What’s in it for me other than a death sentence from Pan when you’re gone with your boy?”

“You can come with us,” Killian declared, and Emma couldn’t help but stare slack jawed at him. *Really?* “It’s time to stop hiding, Tink. Help us get Henry back and then come to Storybrooke with us. Blue and the other fairies are there. You can prove to all of them you’re still a fairy.”

*Still a fairy?* Emma questioned.

“It’s kind of hard to call yourself a fairy when you’ve lost your magic and your wings,” Tinkerbell sassed defensively.

“Lost your wings?” Mary Margaret gasped. “How did that happen?”

“I guess people just stopped believing in me.” Tinkerbell dropped her gaze, but held firm to her hardened stance. That’s when Emma saw it. The wall. The vulnerability disguised as sass and spunk.
Whatever had caused her to lose her wings had been devastating: a betrayal, a profound loss, an abandonment. Killian had said it earlier, Tinkerbell was a lost fairy. He’d probably recognized that about her because, even though he’d been a man when he came to Neverland, he was just a lost boy himself. Just as Emma was a lost girl.

Tink was one of them.

“Well, Killian certainly seems to believe in you,” Emma asserted softly. “So, I believe in you, too.”

Tinkerbell looked up at her with astonishment, then at Mary Margaret and David as they echoed the sentiment. Her gaze landed back on Killian who offered her a smug smirk and cocked eyebrow as they all waited for her response.

“Fine,” she relented, dropping her arms back to her sides while trying to suppress the touched expression that threatened to betray just how much their words meant. “Pan trusts me. He’ll let me into the camp. I’ll try to find out why he took your boy, and the best way for you lot to get in. But,” she said firmly, her eyes fixed on Killian, “we don’t go in until you have an exit plan. You and I both know that no one comes and goes from this island unless he allows it.”

Emma’s heart plummeted into her stomach. They’d all been so focused on following Henry to Neverland she’d never even considered how they would get home once they got him back.

“Well, you were here once before, Killian,” David interjected. “How did you get out of Neverland?”

“Aboard my ship,” Killian answered grimly. “With magic that could open a portal, which... I got from Pan in a deal I don’t think he’s ready to repeat.”

“So no one has ever left the island without Pan’s permission?” Mary Margaret questioned.

Emma felt Killian tense up beside her. “One did.” He cast a quick glance at Tink who simply stared at him with furrowed brows. “Though I left before he did, so I’m unsure as to how he managed it.”

“If you left Neverland before he did then how do you know he even left,” David asked.

“Let’s just say his presence has made itself known in our world since that time.” Killian’s jaw began to tick as he finished.

Whoever this person was, it was clear that the mere reminder of him made Killian extremely uncomfortable. Emma gave his hand a supportive squeeze and ran her thumb along his, but it didn’t seem to give him the comfort she’d hoped to provide.

“Bae?” Tink said incredulously. “You’ve seen Bae?”

“Not exactly,” Killian hedged.

“Who’s Bae?” Emma asked, and it did not escape her attention that Killian avoided her eyes as he answered.

“Baelfire. Rumplestiltskin’s son. He landed here not long after I did.”

“And he got off the island without Pan’s permission?”

Tink and Killian answered simultaneously.

“Aye.”
“That’s the rumor.”

“How?” Emma pressed.

Killian took a deep breath before answering, “Maybe we can find out.” Killian turned his attention toward the fairy. “Tink, go find out what you can from Pan’s camp. We’ll go to Baelfire’s cave to see if we can find some answers. Make your way back along the river when you’ve finished and you’ll find Smee with the Jolly Roger. We’ll meet there later to start forming a plan.”

Tink gave a nod before departing, and Emma found herself once again being led by the hand through the Neverland jungle. They set off at once for Baelfire’s cave, and Emma wondered, not for the first time, what it was about this person that had Killian so on edge.

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The cave was dark and dank as they entered. A mustiness of disuse permeated the air. Killian made his way with assured familiarity to the far wall and lit a torch located there, casting a warm glow that seemed misplaced in its cold and abandoned surroundings.

As her eyes adjusted to the flickering light bathing the cavern, Emma couldn’t shake the feelings of unease the space gave her. Drawings littered the walls and various items were scattered about the space. Unsure as to what they were looking for she concentrated on the images and carvings as her parents began going through the sparse items that sat on makeshift shelves and work spaces. After a few moments Emma realized that Killian hadn’t moved from the pensive spot he’d taken up next to the bed. That’s when she saw it.

The handwriting.

Next to a series of hash marks used to count his days, the boy had written various quotes, bits of knowledge, and meaningful sayings. Though the hand that had scribed them onto the wall had clearly been that of a child or adolescent, Emma couldn’t shake the familiarity it stirred in her. As she read down the wall she realized that more writing was being obscured by the mattress. Pulling it away from the wall Emma gasped at what was written there: a lesson.

Never break in somewhere unless you know the way out.

A lesson Emma was all too familiar with. One that had been taught to her long ago by...

“Neal,” Emma whispered in astonishment as the truth of whose dwelling they were standing in hit her.

“What?” she heard her parents say as they came over to see what it was Emma had discovered, but Emma paid them no mind. Her focus was now set on Killian and his guilty demeanor.

‘Let’s just say his presence has made itself known in our world since that time,’ Emma remembered him saying. His presence in the form of another boy. Henry.

“You knew,” Emma accused. “You knew this whole time that Henry’s father was one of you? That he was this… this Baelfire person? Rumplestiltskin’s son?”

“I couldn’t be sure, Swan,” Killian replied softly, “but yes. I’ve had my suspicions for quite some time as to Henry’s parentage.”

“You knew and you never said anything?” Emma shouted, her shock making its way to anger.
“And when would I have done that, exactly?” Killian countered, his own tempering flaring. “When I first suspected it, after you told Henry the truth of his father? You’d have thought me a mad man then.”

“What about after the curse bro-”

“You mean sometime in the last three days while we were dealing with me being the Dark One, you having magic, trying to find Regina, and Henry being abducted?”

Emma snapped her mouth shut at his rebuttal. He was right, she knew he was right, but it didn’t keep her from directing her ire at him. “You could have said something when we first got here. Pulled me aside and explained it like you did when you told me about my touch repelling the Darkness inside you.”

“Come again?” David interjected acutely.

“David. Now is not the time,” Mary Margaret admonished. She pulled him toward the opening, then out of the cave in order to give Emma and Killian a bit of privacy.

Emma gave Mary Margaret an appreciative look before they exited then focused her attention back to Killian. His hands were balled at his sides and the set of his jaw was causing the muscle there to pulse with tension as he stared at the corner behind her with a thunderous expression on his face.

*What is that demon in his head saying now?* Emma set aside her own anger and relented to Killian’s needs with a sigh.

“Hey,” she uttered softly, stepping forward to cup his cheek in her hand. “It’s okay. I’m sorry I overreacted, it just came as such a shock, you know?”

Killian swallowed heavily and took a ragged breath before grabbing her hand from his cheek and leading them to sit together on the mattress. “No, Swan. I’m sorry,” he murmured. “I should have said something sooner, I just… it isn’t easy for me, being back here. In Neverland.” He ran his free hand through his hair then down his face, rubbing the overgrown scruff at his jaw before admitting, “This is the place where I became the worst version of myself. I have so many regrets tied to this place, and Bae - Neal - is one of the biggest. One that’s plagued me for a number of years. Or centuries, to be more precise.”

“What happened?” Emma asked, lacing her fingers with his and giving his hand an encouraging squeeze.

Killian swallowed heavily and took a ragged breath before grabbing her hand from his cheek and leading them to sit together on the mattress. “No, Swan. I’m sorry,” he murmured. “I should have said something sooner, I just… it isn’t easy for me, being back here. In Neverland.” He ran his free hand through his hair then down his face, rubbing the overgrown scruff at his jaw before admitting, “This is the place where I became the worst version of myself. I have so many regrets tied to this place, and Bae - Neal - is one of the biggest. One that’s plagued me for a number of years. Or centuries, to be more precise.”

“What happened?” Emma asked, lacing her fingers with his and giving his hand an encouraging squeeze.

Killian looked up at the ceiling of the cave, fortifying himself before beginning his tale; one that Emma knew had been eating him up inside.

“I told you of Milah,” he began. “The woman I once loved, who was taken from me.”

“She was killed by Rumplestiltskin when he took your hand,” Emma interjected. “That’s all in the book, in your story. You don’t have to-”

“What the book doesn’t tell you,” Killian continued despite her assurances that he didn’t have to dredge up such a painful memory, “is that the son Milah left behind when she left her husband and ran away with me, was named… Baelfire.”

Emma closed her eyes, the individual pieces all coming together in her mind as Killian relayed that particular detail the book had left out. Of course. Milah had been married to Rumplestiltskin, the book had made that clear. Killian had said that Baelfire was Rumplestiltskin’s son when they’d been
at the ridge, so it stood to reason that Baelfire, Neal, was actually Milah’s son as well. The son of the woman Killian had loved and lost.

“Rumplestiltskin became the Dark One after Milah left him, in an effort to protect Bae from having to fight in the Ogre Wars. Bae grew fearful of the Darkness’ power and how it was corrupting his father and sought a way to free him. He discovered that there was a land… a land without magic, where the power of the Darkness would no longer have a hold over his father, and came into the possession of a magic bean to take them there.” Killian paused and Emma tried to keep her swirling thoughts and emotions in check as he continued on. “When the time came for Bae and his father to travel to this new land, Rumplestiltskin’s fear got the better of him and he…”

“He didn’t go through the portal with his son,” Emma finished. A memory sparked in Emma’s mind and she recalled Neal talking about his home life that first night after they’d met, when they’d sat on the swings of an amusement park ride drinking cocoa. He’d told her the tale of how things had gotten so bad at home he’d had to leave. She’d always suspected that there was more to the story, that being on his own hadn’t entirely been Neal’s choice, but she’d never pushed him to tell her more than he was willing to offer. More than she would have been willing to offer back to him.

“Eventually, Bae made his way here to Neverland,” Killian pressed on. “I fished him out of the sea and on to the deck of the Jolly Roger. I’d only seen him once before, several years prior when Rumplestiltskin had come to fetch Milah from the tavern we were all carousing in. It wasn’t until he told me his name that I recognized him. His father had told him that his mother had been kidnapped and murdered by pirates, so he wasn’t too keen on us at first. Eventually, though,” Killian swallowed thickly, “eventually he found a place among my crew and we formed something of a bond. That is… until he found a portrait of his mother on my desk one day.” Emma blinked back tears at the anguish rolling off Killian.

“I told him the truth of what happened to his mother, that she’d gone with me willingly, that we had planned to go back for him when he was old enough, that it was his father, and not I, who had taken her life, but he blamed me nonetheless. He wanted off my ship, and even though I tried to talk him round, he was too hurt and angry to accept my offer of a home and a family.”

If possible, Killian hung his head even lower as he softly made the confession he’d been building toward. “I allowed the sting of his rejection to fuel my anger as well. Instead of dropping him somewhere on the island, I sold him out to the Lost Boys, who I knew had been looking for him. I did it to curry favor with Pan. An act I regretted immediately after, and attempted to make up for numerous times during our years here. The damage was done though, and as I spiraled further into my own villainy, I became powerless to fix things between us. I tried one last time to make things right. I asked Pan to let me take the boy with me when we made the deal that allowed me to leave Neverland for good. He said he had no intention of ever letting Bae off this island, which is how I know he left without Pan’s permission, so I abandoned him once more when I left this accursed place. I abandoned him,” Killian choked out, a sob caught in his throat that had Emma’s eyes stinging with tears again. “The same way my father abandoned me. Bae had already been abandoned by his mother and his father. I was just another in the sequence. A pattern that had been established early on in his life, and one that he perpetuated when he got older.” Killian finally lifted his head and met her gaze with mournful eyes as he lamented, “When he abandoned you.”

Emma’s breath caught in her chest. Did he really think he was to blame for that? Emma wanted to lean further into him, to wrap her arms around him and assure him that what Neal had done was not his fault. Her mind was too busy with a tempest of new considerations to follow through with her compulsion, though.
Emma had always wondered why her super power had failed her so spectacularly with Neal. Why she hadn’t been able to see through his lies and deceptions. Sitting in central booking that horrible night, Emma had concluded that setting her up for the watches had been his plan all along. She’d been convinced ever since that the man she’d opened her heart to had used her, lied to her, but what if it hadn’t been his intention from the beginning? Emma had felt sure that the exchange of their *I love yous* earlier that day had been genuine, so what had changed in those few hours? What would have caused him to run if she’d truly meant something to him? Could it have been the same thing that had caused him to start running in the first place?

“Do you think that’s why he left?” Emma blurted. Killian’s brows knitted together in confusion, a forlorn expression still evident on his face, but Emma continued in her clarification. “That he somehow found out who I really was and decided I wasn’t worth the trouble?”

“I’ve no idea why he left you, love,” Killian responded, his voice thick with a myriad of emotions. “I just know he’s a damn fool for doing so. Would it matter if that were the reason?”

“No.” Emma pulled her gaze from Killian’s and looked around at the abandoned dwelling. “It doesn’t matter. He left and he never came back. He doesn’t even know about Henry.”

“We could try and find him if you wish to,” Killian offered, causing Emma to turn back to him. “When we get Henry back, a drop of his blood on the globe might be able to tell us where Neal is now.”

Emma considered his words for a moment. “I don’t think so,” she whispered. “He didn’t think I was worth fighting for, so he doesn’t get to… he doesn’t deserve to know about Henry.”

“A man unwilling to fight for what he wants, deserves what he gets,” Killian murmured, a tone of self-loathing still grounding his words.

“Hey,” Emma soothed, cupping his cheek in her hand. “Maybe you didn’t fight for him back then, but that doesn’t mean you’re somehow responsible for his decision to not fight for me. Yes, you abandoned him, but you’ve been there for Henry. You have fought for him, *are* fighting for him, and I can never thank you enough for that. *You* are the man Henry deserves in his life.”

“And I’ll never stop fighting for him, Emma,” Killian assured. His eyes flickered between her own, and Emma suddenly felt it hard to draw breath under his intense gaze. “For him, or for you.”

A rustle at the cave’s entrance alerted them that her parents - her father more like it - had decided they’d had enough alone time. Emma removed her hand from Killian’s cheek, but kept a firm grasp of his hand. She tried to impart what his words had meant to her with a squeeze to his hand and grateful look, but knew it fell far short of expressing what she was feeling. A feeling she had to bury for the time being. They had to find a way to get off the island so they could go rescue Henry.

“Did you find anything over here when you were looking earlier,” Emma asked as she and Killian crossed the cave.

“Not really,” Mary Margaret answered. “Just some cups and bowls he fashioned from things he found here.”

“I don’t know how great a cup this coconut could make,” David added, holding up half a coconut shell, “it’s filled with holes.”

Emma surveyed the other items on the table and her eyes fell to another half coconut shell that had been made into a candle that David had lit earlier. As she studied the jagged pattern along its edge
she flicked her gaze up to the shell David held.

“Hold on,” Emma said as she picked up the candle, released Killian’s hand, and took the coconut from David’s hand. “Killian. Snuff out that torch.”

With the room bathed in darkness, except for the small flicker of the candle, Emma placed the hole littered half over the flame then turned her attention to the ceiling.

“A night light?” Mary Margaret questioned.

“Look up,” Emma instructed softly, and all four pairs of eyes trained themselves upward.

“Stars,” Mary Margaret awed.

“It’s a map,” Killian declared.

“To where?” David questioned.

“Home,” both Emma and Killian replied.

“How can you be so sure it’s a map?”

“There was a time in Neverland when Baelfire… Neal, was aboard my ship. I taught him to navigate using the stars.”

“Then you can read it,” David said.

“Possibly.”

“I thought you just said you taught him how.”

“Aye, but I also taught him the key to being a pirate,” Killian disclosed in a clipped tone. “Secrecy. All the best captains conceal their maps in a code. He was an apt pupil, but it’s possible that he used one I taught him. I won’t know for sure until we get back to the ship. I’ve a sextant on board that can chart the stars here in Neverland. If Smee and I can break Neal’s code, then we can use the map and sextant to navigate our way out of this realm.”

“Then we have our exit plan.” Emma felt a sense of relief for the first time since she’d watched Henry go over the side of the docks. A relief that was short lived.

“Not quite,” Killian responded with an apologetic look. “There are only two ways out of Neverland. By portal, or by sky. We can’t sail out… we have to fly.”

“Fly? How are we supposed to do that, exactly?”

“Maybe we can find some pixie dust,” David offered.

“There is no more usable pixie dust on the island,” Killian informed them. “But we don’t need it. I can use my magic to enchant the sails of the Jolly Roger to fly us out of here.”

“No,” Emma asserted with a sharp tone.

“No, what, Swan?”

“No. You can’t use your magic. You might be in control of the dagger, but you begged me to command you from using it. I’m not going to let the Darkness get its claws into you that way,
Killian. Not when we have another way.”

“And what way is that?” Killian asked with perplexed eyes.

“My magic.”

Whose idiotic idea was this? Oh, yeah… mine, Emma chided herself as she stared down at the piece of rigging she was attempting to enchant so that it would levitate into the air. All she’d managed to do with her magic so far was crash a car and shove a heart back into a chest cavity. Why did she think she could levitate an entire ship?

“You just need to focus, Swan,” Killian said tightly. “Concentrate.”

It was difficult to concentrate when Emma knew the Darkness was whispering in Killian’s ear. She couldn’t hear it, but the pained and aggravated expression on his face testified to the harassment.

“Just tell me what it’s saying, Killian.” Emma gave him a pointed stare, abandoning her focus on the rigging.

Killian’s jaw clenched and his gaze flickered to his left as he half answered, “Nothing kind or helpful, I assure you.” Emma crossed her arms over her chest and raised her brows in stubborn defiance. Killian pinched the bridge of his nose then relented, “Fine! It says we’re both pathetic wastes of ability and that you need to find your anger and use it to focus.” Killian turned his attention back to his left and growled, “But there are other ways of accomplishing this task without going dark. I won’t encourage her to take shortcuts.”

Emma stepped toward him and rested her hand against his chest. “Okay, I think it’s time you had a break. Focus on something other than magic for awhile. Maybe go see if Smee has made any progress with the star map.”

Killian swallowed heavily and nodded. “Perhaps you’re right, Swan.” He reached up and placed a hand over hers. “Just remember. Emotion and belief, Emma. I know you can do this.”

As he made his way below deck, Emma caught David’s eye with a silent plea to go and look after him. Turning her attention back to the rigging, Emma fought against the creeping thoughts and emotions that had tried to overtake her since the moment they’d stepped foot on the island. Mary Margaret came to stand beside her, offering an encouraging look. Her eyes were the same green as Emma’s, but the expression within was one Emma rarely ever saw reflected back at her in the mirror. What was it Killian had said that day they’d looked for the twins’, Hansel and Gretel’s, father? That look you get when you’ve been on your own for too long. That’s what Emma usually saw. Not the hope and pride and belief shining at her from identical irises, but loneliness and despair and fear. Fear that she’d never be wanted. Never be good enough. Despite Killian’s earlier assertions that she was worth fighting for, Emma couldn’t shake the ever present doubt that lingered within her. Doubts that the very island itself seemed to stir in her.

“Killian’s right,” Mary Margaret chirped optimistically. “You can do this, Emma. You’re the Saviour. You just need to-”

“Can you just not, right now?” Emma snapped, overcome by the strain of everything that had happened since… when? That morning? Was it still the same day? How much time had passed since she’d found Killian unconscious in his cabin? How long had Henry been in Pan’s clutches? What did Pan want with him? What if they couldn’t get him back? What if she failed?
“Hey,” Mary Margaret intruded gently, placing a hand at Emma’s shoulder. “Talk to me.”

Emma looked up and blinked away the tears that had pooled in her eyes and let out a slow breath. “It’s just,” she began quietly, “on this island, I don’t feel like a hero or a Saviour. I feel like what I’ve… what I’ve always been.”

“Which is what?” Mary Margaret prompted. Her face now set with an earnest expression of openness, a will and desire to understand.

Emma didn’t want to hurt Mary Margaret. She knew they felt they’d had no choice in sending her through that wardrobe, but it didn’t change the reality Emma had grown up in. A reality that she needed Mary Margaret, her mother, to understand.

“A lost little girl who didn’t matter and didn’t think she ever would,” Emma confessed tearfully, breaking open the dam of emotions she’d held in for years. “A little girl who cried herself to sleep at night because she wanted her parents so bad, and could never understand why they gave her up.”

“And then you found us… and it was too late.”

“I still feel like what I’ve always been. An orphan.”

Emma closed her eyes, trying to stop the flow of tears, when she felt her mother’s hands cup her face and wipe away her tears.

“I’m sorry,” Emma exhaled mournfully.

“It’s okay,” her mother soothed. “It’s the truth. You were an orphan. It’s my job to change that.”

Mary Margaret brushed away the last of her tears and Emma opened her eyes to look at the tear streaked face before her. “I can’t change the past,” her mother continued, “but I can tell you that you do matter, and not just for being the Saviour. You matter to your father and me, and you matter to Henry. He went to Boston to find you, Emma.” Mary Margaret’s gaze flickered to the hatch Killian and David had disappeared into moments ago then said, “And that man down there. You matter to him very, very much. Killian is fighting so hard. For you. For Henry. And for himself, because you all matter.”

“I’m scared, Mom,” Emma confided.

“Of what?”

Emma stared down at her feet, afraid to say aloud the thing she feared most, but managed to drum up the courage nonetheless. “Of losing everything I never even dared dream of, but so very nearly have. What if we can’t get Henry back? What if something happens to you or Dad while we’re here? What if… what if I lose Killian to the Darkness?”

Emma’s heart clenched painfully in her chest; each fear another turn of the vice clamped mercilessly around it.

“You love him, don’t you?” her mother asked, though her expression said she already knew the answer.

An answer Emma had been avoiding for fear it would send her running.


“Then use that, Emma,” her mother advised. “Set aside the fear and focus on love, on hope.
Because, Emma… believing in even the possibility of a happy ending is a very powerful thing.”

Emma gave her mother a watery smile then wrapped her arms around her, surprising them both. Once she composed herself she refocused on the piece of rigging and pushed her fears and doubts as far from her mind as possible. Instead she focused on Henry, and her parents, and Killian. Looking inward she asked herself, *why am I doing this? Who am I helping? Just… feel it.*

And she did.

Closing her eyes, Emma brought forth all the feelings of hope and love her son, her family, her friends, and the man she loved had given her, and allowed them to fill her as she focused on the piece of rigging in her mind’s eye.


Emma opened her eyes and took a startled breath at the sight of the rigging floating gently before her, held up by the shimmer of magic.

“I did it.”
Chapter Twenty-Seven

Disclaimer: Canon dialogue and scenes from various episodes will appear within this fic. To Adam, Eddie, and the OUAT writers goes all the credit.

Much love and thanks to the amazing @ilovemesomekillianjones for being our beta! *muah!*

Also, @xhookswenchx created an amazing banner for us. Please visit all of us on Tumblr and check it out! And @flipperbrain made a lovely pic for our belated Christmas presents, both the banner and the pic can be found on Tumblr.

Lines breaks indicate a change of POV or scene.

***We've taken some creative license when it comes to how a certain dagger works in reference to exerting control over the Dark One. We realize that it is slightly different in canon, but felt it a necessary tweak for our story. Just go with us...***

Killian descended through the hatch into his quarters and tried to shake the agitation that had been building in him since Swan had given him back his dagger. The imp had been relentless with commentary, taunts, temptations, and false flattery; whatever means it felt it could use to manipulate and bait him. Emma’s touch was still managing to allow him respite from the onslaught, but the Darkness seemed to have doubled its efforts when unrestrained by her light magic.

“Mr. Smee, what have you deduced from Bae’s star map? Anything of use?” Killian inquired sharply of his first mate.

Smee hesitated in his answer as another set of legs made their way down the narrow steps from the hatch.

The prince cleared his throat, clearly uncomfortable as his feet hit the last step. “I thought, maybe, you could use some help.”

Killian wasn’t fooled by the man’s offer. He knew why he had followed. “I don’t need a babysitter, mate.”

“I didn’t say that you did,” David said, brushing him off as he made his way toward Killian’s desk.

Killian knew the seething anger boiling inside of him was completely irrational, a manipulation of the Darkness, but he couldn’t seem to shake it. Maybe that’s because it isn’t entirely from us, the demon cooed in his mind, and Killian hated that the vileness was right.

He was angry. The Darkness had become more and more agitated with Killian’s refusal to use his own magic, and his unwillingness to instruct Emma in any way that might cause her to tap into darker parts of herself. Not so silently seething with each passing moment as Killian grew impatient as well.
He had complete faith that Emma could perform the task she’d set for herself, but did they really have the time to spare for her to master the spell when he could simply enchant the sails with a quick flick of his wrist? The seductive power of his magic was still something he feared he might lose himself to, but the longer it took to get Emma to focus, the more he fumed at the thought that her concerns for him to not fall into that temptation were taking precedence over Henry.

Killian knew it was ridiculous. Emma would never put anything ahead of saving Henry, but Killian also knew that with each passing moment, the lure of the island would be affecting Henry as it did every other boy who came here. How long before he would become lost to it completely?

“I have no intentions of losing myself again.”

“Really? Because that’s exactly what saving Henry will cost you.”

Pan’s words from earlier slammed into Killian, and he understood now what the demon boy had meant. Neverland was going to claim one of them. If they waited until all the conditions were ideal, including keeping him from using magic, they risked Henry being forever branded by the island as a Lost Boy. Always haunted, always with one foot in despair, feelings of low self-worth forever snapping at his heels. That wasn’t Emma’s Henry, his Henry. Despite all the boy had been through, he’d managed to hold tight to hope and belief - the Truest Believer - and Killian would be damned if he’d let any of that become diminished. He wouldn’t let Henry suffer like that. Wouldn’t let him suffer like Emma had, like he had. He wouldn’t let Henry lose himself, which meant…

He’d have to give in and lose himself instead.

Killian clamped his eyes shut and fought against the tightening of anguish in his chest. There was no other choice. If it came down to it, if it was clear there was no other way, then Killian would use his magic, and whatever else he could draw from the Darkness, to save Henry, to save any of them. He would become the worst of himself, for them; all he needed now was a plan to protect them all from him when that happened.

“Perhaps it would be wise to have someone other than Smee and I know the way home… just in case,” Killian conceded to the prince.

Smee presented his findings, including the course he’d been able to plot after cracking Bae’s code. Killian took great care in explaining, then drilling both Smee and David on the plan, ensuring that each man knew what to do in his absence. He hoped he’d been subtle in his motives, but the prince seemed to sense the undercurrent.

“Relax. We got it,” the prince assured. “You’re acting like you won’t be right there to captain us home.”

“Just a precaution, mate,” Killian offered with an air of flippancy without meeting the prince’s eye.

“No… it isn’t,” David declared suspiciously. “There’s something going on. Something you’re not telling us. What is it?”

“Neverland is full of many perils, I’m only trying to-”

“Bullshit.” Killian’s brows shot up at the prince’s response. “Tell me the truth, Killian.” The prince studied him for a beat longer before realization set in. “You’re not planning to come back with us. Are you?”

Killian clenched his jaw and swallowed hard. He’d been hoping to avoid having to say it out loud, but it was probably best that at least part of their group be prepared. Killian knew the princess,
Emma, and Henry would insist they not leave him behind. Smee would cast off without his captain if ordered to, but there would need to be someone to take command, to do the thing that must be done.

“Every moment we’re on this island, I can feel the Darkness embedding itself deeper and deeper within me,” Killian confessed in a hushed tone. “It’s only a matter of time, David.” Killian met the prince’s eyes with an earnest pleading that the man would understand. “You can’t take me back to Storybrooke with you if I give in to the Darkness.”

“You won’t give in to the Darkness,” David maintained with the staunch faith Killian had come to expect from His Highness. “You’ve been able to fight it off so far, and once we have Henry back, you can give the dagger to Emma again and she’ll-”

“You don’t get it,” Killian snapped. “I am a danger to her, to all of you. If you knew what the Darkness wanted...” Killian stopped himself. The prince didn’t need those details. “We may not have any other choice,” Killian began again. “If it means letting the Darkness in so we can get Henry back, then-”

“No,” David argued. “There is always another choice. There’s always hope.”

Killian scoffed, “You hero types always think there’s hope, but sometimes there just isn’t.” Killian ran a frustrated hand through his hair then turned his attention to Smee. “This isn’t up for debate. When the time comes, when Henry, Emma, Tink, and the prince and princess are safe aboard, you will set sail without me, if need be.”

“Killian-” David tried to interject.

“That’s an order Mr. Smee,” Killian commanded. Smee gave a nod of understanding and Killian turned back to David. “I need to know you have my back on this, David. I need to know that when the time comes, you’ll do what the others won’t. We have to put them first.”

Killian could see the war playing out in the prince’s mind. Weighing the good of his family against the need to believe there was hope for his friend. David opened his mouth to respond, but was cut off by the cries of Emma and the princess from above, beckoning them to come see something on deck.

Killian’s chest constricted with a sense of pride at the sight of the rigging merrily bobbing in mid air as if it were a buoy on the sea. The look of joy on his Swan’s face brought a smile to his own, but it was quickly swallowed up by the heartache that overtook him. His moments with her were fleeting. As much as he wished to waste no time in retrieving Henry, he desperately wanted to cling to each second as it ticked by. To draw out these final moments with the woman he loved. Why do they have to be final? There’s still the book, still an opportunity to turn her- Killian cut the words off with a growl, then plastered a supportive and encouraging expression on his face.

“I knew you could do it, Swan,” Killian praised. Emma’s eyes flicked between his own and her brows furrowed. He should have known there’d be no fooling her, of course she could sense something was off. He just had to hope she wouldn’t think it anything more than the Darkness’ usual tormentings.

“This is good!” the prince exclaimed. “Now she can use her magic and apply the enchantment to the sails, right?”

“It’s a bit more complicated than that,” Killian replied. “Expanding the enchantment will take a greater focus of concentration. One I’m not sure we have time for you to develop, love.”

Emma opened her mouth to argue, but was thwarted by Tink, who was pulling herself over the
“Hook’s right,” she panted as she righted herself on deck. “You’re out of time. I know why Pan took Henry.”


A pained expression beset the fairy’s brow as she answered. “His heart.”

Killian felt the breath leave his body, only to be replaced with white hot rage as it filled his lungs and burned in his chest.

“W-What?” Emma stammered. “What do you mean he wants Henry’s heart?”

“Pan’s dying,” Tink explained. “The only way to save himself is with the heart of the Truest Believer.”

“Is he? Has he?” Emma couldn’t form the question they were all dreading to ask.

“He hasn’t taken it yet,” Tink assured. “There’s still time to get your boy back, but it has to be now. How are we coming with that exit plan?”

“We have a route that will lead us out of Neverland,” the prince answered. “We just need more time so Emma can enchant the sails to fly.”

“We’re out of time,” Killian stated, giving David a hard look.

“To get Henry, yes,” David countered. “But we can go get Henry now and defend the Jolly Roger from Pan and the Lost Boys for as long as we have to until Emma manages it.”

“Or we can get Henry now and get the bloody hell out of Neverland.” Killian’s patience was at an end.

He saw Emma’s eyes widen as he raised his hand. “Killian, No!” she yelled, grabbing for his arm, but she was too late.

With a flick of his wrist a shimmer of magic engulfed the sails as the enchantment infused itself over his ship. Killian felt the rush of power surge through him, rippling over his skin and humming in each nerve ending. Having been a notorious pirate captain for so many years, Killian was no stranger to the satisfaction one could glean from holding dominion over the lives of others, but that was nothing in comparison to the dominance he now felt in his very fingertips to command and control the elements around him. A feral grin broke across his face in response to the sensation, even in the face of a horrified Emma.

“How?! Why would you do that?!”

“You heard Tink, Swan,” Killian replied, his justification ready to roll off his tongue. “Time’s up.”

“But I could have done it, Killian,” Emma argued. “You didn’t have to do that. You don’t have to use your magic. We can save Henry without it.”

Killian felt the heat of shame churn in his gut at the look of concern for him in her eyes, but it was quickly squelched by the whispered reminder of Henry in the back of his mind.

“What’s done is done,” he declared. “Now let’s go get Henry.”
As the rush began to wear off, Killian began to fully understand the nature of the dark magic. It was like a drug. Like opium hitting the bloodstream. Enticing you to come back again and again, to chase the feeling until you no longer turn to it by choice, but out of a clawing need. A need that signaled the point of no return. The point in which he would truly no longer be in control, but would be fully indentured to the Darkness. Killian knew he had to hold off reaching that point until after Henry was rescued, and the lot of them were on their way out of Neverland without him.

Tink led them to the perimeter of Pan’s camp. They’d planned to have her enter through the front while they made their way to the back, where she would be able to sneak them in past the guards. Killian warned them all of the Lost Boys arrows, which would be tipped with dream shade, and made a show of drawing his sword even as he called upon his powers, readying them for whatever use he might require of them.

When the signal from Tink finally came, the four of them made their way into the camp, and right into an ambush.

The whistle of the arrow preceded its appearance. Killian caught it between his fingers next to his head and briefly glanced at the tip before tossing it away. He’d been right, dream shade. Lost Boys burst from the brush, surrounding them, and Killian immediately recognized the lanky figure making his way towards them.

“It’s been a while, Captain,” Felix gloated smugly, standing in front of Killian.

“Aye,” Killian replied with a hushed menace, “but not long enough.” Killian reached out as if grabbing Felix by the neck and squeezed, magically applying pressure to the boy’s throat and cutting off his air supply. “Remember what I did to Rufio? Well, it’s a far worse fate for you if you don’t tell me where Henry is.”

One of the Lost Boys lunged at Killian and was flung away into a nearby tree with a wave of his other hand. The other boys stared at the now purple faced Felix, unsure what to do, and suddenly terrified at the prospect of ending up like their comrades. Killian took a step closer to Felix, but was met by Emma who darted around in front of him.

“Killian, stop!” she had tears in her eyes and a look of utter despair on her face. Tentatively she reached up and cupped his face in her hands, breaking through the haze of madness that had clouded his mind. “Not like this. Please, Killian.”

Killian released his control over Felix and the boy collapsed to the ground. Panic spiked within him and he met Emma’s gaze with true remorse. He didn’t want her to see him this way, didn’t want her to remember him as a monster.

“I’m sorry, Swan,” he whispered, apologizing for so much more than just his recent actions. He was unable to look at her as she took his hand, leading them to the center of the camp with her parents close behind after they’d disarmed the remaining boys and restrained Felix. It seemed Tink’s intentions had been discovered, they found her tied up to a tree with several scared looking boys standing guard. Emma’s touch aided him in quieting the compulsion to use his magic in order to propel their fear further, hoping it might loosen their tongues and tell them where Henry was. As it became clear that the lad was not among them, terror spiked in Killian. He could feel it welling up inside Emma as well, but where Killian’s response was that of administering harsh threats, his Swan
saw the truth of what was needed in that instance.

Not magic, or coercion, or menace, but compassion. Compassion only a mother could provide.

“Pan took Henry to Skull Rock,” one of the boys confided after her heartfelt confession of having once been a lost girl herself. A confession that had Killian’s heart swelling as she told them all how she was no longer alone, that she had people who loved her, and that she loved in return. Perhaps it might have been a cruel twist of hope, but Killian thought she might have glanced his way at her admission before offering the boys a chance to find the same happiness. An offer to leave Neverland and return with them to Storybrooke. A place to call home. Something Killian vowed to get them all back to, even if he would never again have that for himself.

“Skull Rock?” Emma pressed, turning to Killian. “Is it far from here?”

“No,” he answered tightly. “It isn’t far.”

“Okay. Mom. Dad. You and Tink take whatever Lost Boys want to come with us back to the Jolly Roger and get everything ready so we can leave as soon as we get back with Henry.” Killian gave David a pointed look as Emma gave her instruction, and the prince reluctantly nodded. Emma squeezed Killian’s hand to gain his attention and said, “Let’s go get Henry.”

“Aye, love,” Killian replied. “Let’s go get your boy.”

“I know what you’re doing, you know,” Emma said as he rowed them across the lagoon towards Skull Rock. She had adamantly refused to allow him to transport them there by magic.

“I don’t know what you mean, Swan,” he grunted with exertion against the oars.

“You think the only way we’ll get Henry back is if you give into the Darkness,” she called him out, then pressed on, staying his objection, as she reminded, “the first time we met, you said I was an open book to you. You’ve always been able to read me so well because we’re so much alike. I would do anything to get Henry back, and I know you would, too.” Emma reached forward and placed a hand on his knee. “But Killian… you don’t have to do this. Whatever the Darkness is telling you… We’ll find another way.” The shimmer of tears in her eyes illuminated by the moonlight cut right to the heart of him, and he felt the prickling of his own as she whispered, “I want to get Henry back, but… I don’t want to lose you.”

The boat nudged the shore and they both just sat in that moment of the span of several heart beats. Each beat ticking off their time together as it was rapidly coming to a close.

“And I don’t want to lose you,” Killian confessed.

“Then keep fighting, Killian,” Emma pleaded. “You deserve that. So keep fighting for yourself, and for Henry. And for me.”

Killian swallowed past his heartbreak as he gave her an appeasing nod. Together they pulled the boat onto shore and Emma laced their hands together again before they raced up to the ominous entrance of the cavern. As Killian hit the first few steps leading up to the cave’s higher level he felt Emma’s hand being torn from his. He spun around and met her panicked expression as she pressed against an invisible barrier barring her from following. Why had he been able to get through and not she?
“Swan?” Killian began to make his way back to her, but she stopped him.

“No. Go get Henry,” she urged, choking back a sob as she tried to remain strong despite the obstacle before her.

Killian reached through the barrier and cupped her cheek, suddenly unsure if he could keep control of himself long enough to free Henry without her. Knowing that if he couldn’t, this was their good-bye. “Swan, I-”

“I believe in you, Killian.” She brought her hand up to cover his and met his gaze with a firm assurance. “I trust you. Now go,” she told him, this time with steadfast belief. “Go get our boy.”

Killian gasped at her declaration, a fresh resolve settled over him as he determined to do just that. His heart slammed in his chest as he turned and sprinted up the stairs, Emma’s words still ringing in his ears - *our boy*. Killian was going to get their boy back, and he would do all he could to save Henry without succumbing to the Darkness. He wasn’t going to give up. He was going to fight. For Henry. For Emma. And maybe… just maybe he wouldn’t have to lose himself along the way.

“Without your heart, Henry, magic will die.” Killian heard Pan’s lies as he climbed the final few steps. “Think of your town. Storybrooke. It was created with magic. What do you think will happen to the town, to all those people, if magic dies? Isn’t our sacrifice - yours and mine - worth it to save all those people? To protect the ones we love?”

Killian clenched his fists as his jaw ticked. So that was Pan’s game. Make Henry believe he had to sacrifice himself in order to save magic. But why? Why not simply rip Henry’s heart from his chest? Killian knew Pan had the power to do so. If he needed the heart of the Truest Believer…

*The Truest Believer.*

Pan needed belief. Neverland was run on belief. Merely taking Henry’s heart wasn’t enough to save him, he needed Henry to believe in him. He needed a heart that was so full of belief it would be willingly sacrificed, willingly given, for a higher purpose. Even if that purpose was a lie. It had to be Henry’s choice.

“Don’t listen to him, Henry!” Killian cried out as he rounded the corner and entered the expansive chamber that overlooked the lagoon below. “Listen to me. You sacrificing your heart won’t save magic. This isn’t even about magic. Pan’s lying to you!”

“Oh, ho!” Pan replied snarkily. “And what? He’s supposed to believe the words of a pirate? The words of the Dark One?” Pan taunted. “Captain Hook wants magic to die Henry.” Pan began to circle Henry as he continued to spin his web, casting smug looks Killian’s way as he continued to set the boy against him. “He wants magic to die because if magic dies then so will his curse. He’s selfish. Always has been, always will be. Only ever looking out for his own interests, just like he did with your father.”

Henry’s head snapped to Killian, his eyes wide with shock as he asked, “You knew my father?”

“Aye, Henry. I did,” Killian answered, his gut churning with fresh guilt. What other tales had Pan been filling the boy’s head with in order to poison Henry against him?

He’d been wrong to not tell the boy about his father sooner. With Emma there had never been the right time, but he didn’t have that excuse with Henry. He could have told him a dozen different times, but he’d let his cowardice get in the way. Henry deserved better than that. He deserved the truth. Killian just hoped that truth wouldn’t push Henry into rashness.
Like it had with his father, the Crocodile reminded. Why risk it? He’ll only end up hating you for what you did… just like Bae.

Killian ignored the imp’s warning and pressed on with his confession. “I knew him as Baelfire. There was a time while we were here in Neverland that I’d hoped he’d want to stay with me. Be a part of my crew. Be my family. But he rejected me when he learned the truth of who I was - the pirate his mother ran away with. He was just a boy. Angry over what I’d done to his family, but because of his rejection I… I abandoned him, Henry,” he confessed softly, unable to meet the lad’s eyes as he revealed his treachery. “He said he wanted to leave my ship, so I traded him to the Lost Boys in order to curry favor with Pan. Then I abandoned him again when Pan refused to let me take your father with me when I left Neverland that final time. I abandoned your father, Henry,” Killian raised his head and looked at the lad with all the sincerity and honesty he could muster, “but I won’t abandon you.”

“How?” Henry asked with furrowed brows. “Why my father and not me?”

“I cared for your father, Henry. Very much.” Killian stepped forward and bared the truth he’d buried within himself for many years. “But I never loved him as I love you,” Killian declared before he made his final plea. “So, please, Henry. Don’t give Pan your heart.”

A wide grin broke over Henry’s face as he turned back to face Pan, who looked bored with the emotional scene playing out before him, though Killian could tell that the demon boy was silently seething.

“You can’t have my heart,” Henry told him. “I don’t believe you, and even if I did, I still wouldn’t give it to you.”

“You would just let magic die?” Pan questioned with a bewildered tilt of his head.

“If magic dying meant that Killian wouldn’t have to be the Dark One anymore, then yes,” Henry answered, stunning Killian with his declaration. “That is a sacrifice I am willing to make.”

“I see,” Pan drawled as he assessed the boy anew, before throwing the same scrutiny Killian’s way. “Then I guess the real question is,” Pan pulled a knife from his belt, pulled Henry toward him, and placed the blade against his neck, “whether or not Killian would make the same kind of sacrifice for you.”

“Let him go!” Killian growled. Flames erupted in the palm of his hand as the Darkness excitedly spurred him on.

“You and I both know you won’t risk Henry’s safety,” Pan scoffed. “You also know that whether it’s with Henry’s heart or your dagger, I aim to get what I want. Immortality.” A sinister smile spread across Pan’s face as he posed, “So, what’ll it be Dark One? Your dagger or Henry’s life?”

The Darkness hissed and flared inside him, demanding that he put an end to demon boy, Henry’s well-being be damned. The boy isn’t worth that cost, it argued. Think what Pan would do with the power of the Darkness at his disposal. Is the boy’s life really worth your own?

It wasn’t even a question worth considering. Killian didn’t hesitate as he reached up and summoned his shadow.

“Killian, don’t!” Henry exclaimed when the shadow appeared and placed the dagger in his hand. “You can’t, Killian. You can’t.”

“It’ll be okay, Henry,” Killian tried to assure him before turning his attention to Pan. “Let the boy
“Toss me the dagger.”

Killian arched a brow and gave the nasty little boy a steely stare as he held the dagger out at arm’s length. “If you want it. Come and get it.”

Pan approached Killian with Henry still held tight in his grip and taunted, “It seems you’ve forgotten an important fact while you were away from Neverland.” Killian raised his brows at the gloating, triumphant look on the Pan’s face as he released Henry so he could reach out and claim the dagger, crowing, “Pan never fails.”

Killian kept a firm hold on the dagger, not allowing Pan to remove it from his grip as he sneered, “I’m not the only one who’s forgotten facts.” Killian used Pan’s hold on the dagger to pull the demon boy into him, then reached into his chest and ripped his heart from it as he declared, “Captain Hook always survives.”

The Crocodile gleefully clapped his hands together. “Good, good. Now… crush it.”

Killian began to apply pressure to the coal black heart in his hands, deriving unending amounts of satisfaction from the look of agony on Pan’s face as he doubled over, clutching at his chest. Reminders of the atrocities he’d committed at Pan’s face as he doubled over, clutching at his chest.

Reminders of the cruelties unleashed against the innocent he’d both witnessed and administered during those innumerable years in Neverland flashed through Killian’s mind, causing him to squeeze a little tighter to draw out the torture.

“Killian?”

Henry’s small, worried voice pulled him from his thoughts, much to the displeasure of the Darkness. The boy is safe now, it assured. Let him run along to his mother and leave us to our killing.

“No,” Henry argued. “Not without you.”

Why does the boy never listen?!

“I can’t come with you, Henry.”

Killian’s words were filled with regret and heartache. The Darkness was right. Pan had to die, and though Killian had killed dozens in his long life, he knew this kill would be different. Crushing Pan’s heart would make him a villain again, it would be his full surrender to the Darkness, and the final step in becoming the Dark One. It was a fate he’d fought against for as long as he could, and now willingly accepted if it meant Henry and Emma would be safe.

“I have to make sure Pan can’t come after you,” Killian asserted. “That he can’t threaten you or anyone else ever again. In order to do that I… I don’t want you to have to witness this, Henry. I need you to go.”

“No, this isn’t you,” Henry insisted, “it’s the Darkness. It’s telling you that the only way to protect me is by giving in and killing Pan, but that isn’t true.”

“Henry-”
“You can’t give the Darkness what it wants!”

Killian felt his grip tighten on Pan’s heart. “I have to,” he resigned. “If it means saving you, I’ll do whatever I have to do.”

“But you *don’t* have to, don’t you see? You *already* saved me.”

“Henry,” Killian growled at the boy’s infernal stubbornness, anger roiling within him as he barked, “I told you to go.”

“No! You came here to save me, and I’m not leaving until I save you, too.”

“I’m not *worth* saving, Henry!” Killian roared.

“You are to me,” Henry insisted quietly. “I love you, Killian.” Killian took a shuddering breath at Henry’s declaration, the rage ebbing as the boy further professed, “I don’t want to lose you.”

Tears pooled in Henry’s eyes, and Killian was struck by the very same words Emma had said to him earlier. The words Killian had echoed back in lieu of admitting his love for her, now realizing that she might have done the same as those words replayed in his mind.

*Keep fighting, Killian. You deserve that. Keep fighting for yourself, and for Henry. And for me.*

*I believe in you, Killian. I trust you. Go get our boy.*

Our boy.

*You are the man Henry deserves in his life.*

*And I’ll never stop fighting for him, Emma. For him, or for you.*

A man unwilling to fight for what he wants, deserves what he gets. Henry wanted him to fight. Emma wanted him to fight.

Perhaps, he was worth saving after all.

“Fool!” the Crocodile spat. “Haven’t you learned by now? Don’t you understand? Love is weakness!”

“No,” Killian grit out as he shook off the Darkness’ remaining influences and internalized the truth he’d known all along. “It’s strength.”

Killian plunged Pan’s heart back into his chest with such force that it propelled him backward. Pulling Henry behind him, Killian unsheathed his sword and prepared himself for whatever trick Pan might have up his sleeve, but the demon boy continued to grasp at his chest as he fought for breath. Killian wondered if he’d damaged Pan’s heart in some way?

Pan fixed his attention to the cavern wall next to them and waved his hand, removing what appeared to be a glamour spell that had concealed a gigantic hourglass. Killian watched as the few remaining grains of sand passed through the narrow expanse and settled in the well below.

“No! No, no, no!” Pan wailed as a swirl of magic engulfed him.

When the cloud finally dissipated, it was no longer the demon boy Pan who stood before them, but a man. Malcolm, Killian recognized from a flash of the Crocodile’s memory. Rumplestiltskin’s father. No longer retaining the youth he’d traded his son for, the man paled before collapsing to the floor,
death claiming him at last.

“Henry?! Killian?!” Emma’s voice rang out. Her footfalls sounded as she raced up the steps. Pan’s death had apparently dispelled the barrier that had barred her entrance earlier.

Her relieved smile beamed when her anxious eyes landed on Henry who launched himself into her arms.

“Mom!”

“Henry! Are you okay, kid?” Emma embraced him for a scant second before pulling back to look him over.

“I’m fine, mom,” Henry assured. “Killian saved me. He defeated Pan without giving in to the Darkness.”

Emma’s eyes shot up and met Killian’s gaze. The pride in her eyes stole his breath, and his skin sparked to life as she drew closer.

“I knew you could do it, Killian,” she murmured softly as she reached down and took his hand in hers. “I knew you could overcome the Darkness.”

“But I almost didn’t, love,” he confessed, breathing in a sigh of relief that her touch had once again banished the Crocodile from his consciousness. The imp may be gone for the moment, but Killian’s fears remained. “I almost let it win, and it’s still inside me. What if there comes a point when I do have to let the Darkness take hold? Because I would. I would let it take control if it meant saving Henry again, saving any of you. Even if it means losing the chance for my happy ending.”

“Getting rid of the Darkness permanently, you mean?” Emma questioned.

“No,” Killian professed. “Getting rid of the Darkness isn’t my happy ending.”

Emma furrowed her brows. “Then what is it?”


Emma smiled and raised herself up to touch her forehead to his, closing her eyes as she breathed, “I love you, Killian Jones.”

Killian wrapped his arms around Emma’s waist as her lips pressed against his own and felt a prismatic energy burst from the point of their union, snapping the last sinuous tie of the Darkness from within him. Luminescence flooded him, expelling the Darkness like a cleansing tide, though one last tether remained like a barnacle holding fast to his will. His choice.

Choose power and surrender to the Darkness, or choose love and surrender to the kiss.

It wasn’t even a choice.

Killian abandoned himself to the feel of Emma’s lips against his own and felt a prismatic energy burst from the point of their union, snapping the last sinuous tie of the Darkness from within him. Emma gasped and they both stared at one another with wide-eyed wonder.

“Was that?”

Killian released Emma to look at the dagger still clutched in his hand and was not ashamed that he nearly burst into tears at what he saw.
Nothing. No name. No Killian Jones. Just... blank.

As the three of them stood in awe, the dagger began to disintegrate in Killian’s hand, the ash floated away on the winds of Neverland, taking with it the remnants of the nightmare that had plagued him for far too many years.

“You did it, Killian,” Emma marveled.

“No, Swan. We did it.” Killian pulled her back into his arms and brought his lips to hers once more, pouring every bit of relief, joy, and happiness that overflowed from his heart into his kiss.

“Does that mean we can go home now?” Henry interrupted with a slightly disgruntled tone at the display of affection before him.


Killian’s face fell as the words left his lips and realization set in.

“Killian? What’s wrong?” Emma asked.

“The sails,” Killian replied. “With the Darkness gone, I fear the enchantment I put on the sails will be, too. Looks like we’ll be here a bit longer until you can manage the spell on your own, love.”

“I’m afraid my hospitality will not extend that far,” a voice breezed in from the cavern opening.

Killian pushed Emma and Henry behind him, brandishing his sword once again as Pan’s Shadow swooped into view.

“I have no quarrel with you, Captain,” the Shadow declared. “With Pan’s death, I am once again my own entity, the original inhabitant of this island, and as such, I wish you to leave. Neverland is not meant for grown-ups.”

“Give us a way to leave and we’ll happily get the hell out of this place,” Emma quipped as she stepped up next to Killian, causing the corners of his mouth to twitch up.

From some unknown reaches of the phantom’s existence the Shadow produced a shimmering vial and presented it to Killian.

“Pixie dust?” Killian questioned incredulously.

“Neverland was meant to be a place where dreams were born. Now that you’ve rid the island of the nightmare of Pan, this restored pixie dust is testament that it can be once again.” The spectre gave a quick nod of gratitude as it spoke. “Farewell, Captain,” the Shadow expressed before whisking away into the night, leaving a stunned Killian behind.

Emma took the vial from Killian’s hand and inspected the glittering dust within, before extending it back to him and taking Henry’s hand. “Take us home, Killian.”

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It was a joyful reunion when he, Emma, and Henry returned to the ship. Mary Margaret wasted no time in embracing them all tightly. David clapped Killian on the back and said he was happy to see that he’d come to his senses. A happiness that faltered slightly when Henry pronounced to all and sundry that Killian and Emma had shared True Love’s Kiss and had vanquished the Darkness
forever. Until that moment, the prince and princess had assumed the radiant evidence of the event meant that Emma and Henry had once again required a kiss in order to break some type of curse.

After a moment’s shock, Mary Margaret pulled Killian and Emma back into another firm hug, while David assessed Killian with stern eyes.

“Perhaps it’s time you and I have a little chat about your intentions with my daughter.”

Killian floundered for a moment, unsure whether his friend was jesting, but Emma merrily rolled her eyes and reminded, “I can take care of myself, Dad.”

The prince smiled and eased his stance. After another hug with his daughter, and a handshake of male understanding with Killian, David inquired, “So, what are your orders, Captain?”

Killian called Tink forward and passed her the vial of pixie dust. “Would you care to do the honors, milady?”

Tink grinned as she uncorked the vial, then instructed everyone to think of a lovely thought while the dust scattered into the air, infusing itself into the sails. The ship lurched forward and Killian began to bark out orders to Smee and several others. Before they knew it, the *Jolly Roger* was sailing among the clouds, and the last images of the island that had brought Killian so much pain slipped out of view for what he hoped would be the final time.

Smee immediately began to set a course while Killian approximated how long it would take them to reach Storybrooke, given their present speed.

“I’d say we have about ten hours, give or take,” he announced to the group after he finished his calculations.

“Then we should all try and get some rest,” the princess advised.

The prince and Emma both agreed. It was impossible to determine just how long it had been since Henry had been taken, and they’d begun their mission to rescue him. What was clear, however, was that the adrenaline and urgency that had been fueling them was now waning with the lad’s safe return.

While the rest of the adults made preparations for themselves and the lost boys, Killian took the helm for a few hours before Smee came to relieve him. A pang of disappointment went through him when he found his quarters empty. He hadn’t wished to presume that Emma would choose to retire with him, but he couldn’t deny that he’d hoped she would. Of course, she most likely wished to stay close to Henry, and Killian couldn’t begrudge her that.

Slipping off his boots and jacket, Killian could feel the weight of the past few days lift from his shoulders. He began to unbutton his shirt when a soft knock came from his door.

“Enter,” he called out, assuming it to be Smee.

It wasn’t.


“Oh, no! Henry’s fine. Everything’s fine,” she assured as she crossed the cabin towards him. “There isn’t a problem. That’s not why I’m here.”

“Then why are you here?” he whispered, though he had an inkling of an idea. Or hoped he did,
“Well,” she began, bringing her hands up to his chest and teasing the buttons he hadn’t managed to undo before she’d arrived. “I was thinking about what you said the other night. When you made sure I got home okay from the bar.”

“And what was that, love?” he inquired, his voice dropping to a lower tone as he swirled a section of her hair around his finger.

“That you were willing to be patient,” she continued, wetting her lips and glancing up at him through her lashes. “That once the truth was revealed you hoped that was when the fun would begin.”

“Aye. What of it?”

“Well, I don’t know about you, but I could sure go for a little bit of fun right now,” she said coyly, flicking one of the buttons of his shirt open, then gliding her hands down to the next.

Killian swallowed past the lust building inside of him. He wanted nothing more than what Emma was offering, but they’d only just declared their feelings for one another. He wanted her to be sure that this was the right moment for such enjoyable activities.

“What about Henry?”

“He’s asleep in the crew’s quarters with the lost boys. Tink is looking after them.”

“What about your parents?”

“Smee gave them his quarters, and trust me. They have no interest in walking in on this.”

“What about you, Emma? Are you sure?”

“I’ve never been more sure about anything, Killian.”

It seemed Emma was through talking. She grabbed the lapels of Killian’s shirt and pulled his lips to hers, searing them with all the pent up emotion they’d both been harboring for months. The hot slant of her mouth against his pulled a moan from the back of his throat, and at the first moment of invitation his tongue plundered hers as they swayed and clung to one another for balance.

“That was…” Killian willed his mind to make sense of how the heady experience of a simple kiss from the woman he loved could leave him feeling so wrecked.

“Just the beginning, pirate,” Emma promised as she continued to work open the buttons of his shirt.

Killian buried a hand in her hair and claimed her lips once more while turning them toward his bunk. Managing to divest themselves of their shirts along the way, Killian let out a stuttered breath at the feel of her fingertips grazing through his chest hair as they made their way down his body to the waistband of his pants. Killian ran his hands up her back and undid the closure of her bra with a little less finesse than he would normally be known for, but couldn’t bring himself to give a damn. Not when Emma immediately pressed her magnificent breasts against his chest and palmed him through his jeans the moment she extricated herself from the lacy garment.

He wasn’t sure how it happened, but Killian suddenly found himself backed up against the bunk, his legs hitting the side before Emma pushed him down to sit along its edge. Killian pulled her closer and began lavishing the skin between her breasts with his lips and tongue, smirking at the soft gasp that escaped her. When he eventually latched on to one her nipples, after taking his time in coaxing
them into hardened peaks, he felt himself grow even harder at the breathy moan she gave while fist ing her hands in his hair.

Not one to play favorites, Killian moved to give equal attention to her other side and once again felt her hands at the waistband of his jeans, fumbling with the button and zipper in her haste.

“Someone seems eager,” he teased after releasing her nipple with a soft pop, earning him a slightly disgruntled huff.

Kilian groaned as her hands ran over his erection, and Emma smirked at his reaction. “Seems I’m not the only one. Pants off pirate. That’s an order.”

With a growl Killian grabbed Emma and lifted her off her feet, depositing her rather unceremoniously on her back atop his bunk. “Seeing as I am captain of this ship, I’ll be the one giving the orders, darling.”

A visible shudder of desire passed over her and her eyes grew darker with want. Want of him. Killian could scarcely believe the miracle of that, or fully fathom what a lucky bastard he was.

“And what are my captain’s orders?” Emma inquired seductively, drawing her bottom lip between her teeth and popping a brow in his direction as he set to work removing her remaining clothes.

“Let me tell you how it works on my ship,” he replied as he slowly stripped her of her underwear, feasting his eyes on the bounty before him while attempting to maintain some semblance of composure in his speech. “I make the demands, and you follow them.”

Emma arched her brow further and hungrily watched as he shed the remaining layers of his clothing before challenging, “And if I don’t?”

“Mutiny will not be tolerated, love,” he warned huskily as he made his way back onto the bed and knelt between her now splayed thighs. “Besides, I think you’ll find that what your captain demands will be to your liking.”

Emma moaned again at the trail of kisses he left along the inside of her thigh. Her breath started to draw itself in pants of expectation the closer his mouth got to her core. The scent of her arousal had him rutting against the mattress in an effort to find a bit of relief as he applied a few last kisses to the juncture of her hip.

“And what demands would those be?” she asked breathlessly.

“That you come,” he growled, slipping his hands beneath her and wrapping them around her thighs so he would be able to keep her in place. “Often.”

Emma cried out as he buried his head between her legs, using the broad side of his tongue to thoroughly explore the delicacy that awaited him. He tightened his grip when she bucked up off the bed and fluttered his tongue against her swollen and sensitive bud, earning him another cascade of moans and utterances.

“Oh, god!”

“Captain will do, love,” Killian teased as he released her hip and began to fill her with his fingers. “Besides, you are the one that tastes of the divine.”

Emma writhed against him as he inserted another finger, her body flushed in a dusky pink and looking every bit the goddess he’d just alluded her to be.
“Then get back to it before I smite you!” she demanded impatiently, causing Killian to grin wickedly.

“As you wish.”

Swirling his tongue over her bundle of nerves once more he could feel the tremor in her thighs. He increased the pace of his fingers and moaned appreciatively at the wash of her orgasm as it coated his tongue, giving her no quarter as he continued to use his mouth to draw out her pleasure for as long as he could.

“May I pleasure you again Emma, or are you too sensitive?” Killian asked softly as she began to recover from her release.

“You’re asking? I thought you said you’d be the one making the demands,” she reminded him with a playful tone.

“I believe goddess trumps captain love, so the choice is yours. How would you like me to worship you next?”

He twitched his brows and shot her a saucy smirk, but was met with a raw vulnerability in her eyes that pierced straight through his heart and into his soul.

“I want you to make love to me, Killian,” she confessed on no more than a whisper. “I just want you.”

Killian reverently made his way up her body, placing delicate kisses along the expanse of her skin and murmured, “And I want you, Emma. Gods, I want you so bloody much.”

His length slid through her folds, readying them both for his entrance. Killian held firm to Emma’s loving gaze, the sight of which, coupled with the feel of her slick heat molding itself tightly around him as he pushed into her, gave him momentary pause to savor this moment.

Emma’s eyes fluttered shut and she gasped his name when he withdrew then thrust into her again. Each ebb and flow of their bodies joining together again and again provided him greater purchase towards that place that had them both teetering on the edge of bliss. The scrape of Emma’s nails down his back spurred him on until he felt her muscles constrict around his length. Her head tilted back and she grabbed his backside as she cried out her ecstasy.

Bloody beautiful, was his last thought before euphoria claimed him as well and he spilled himself inside her still quivering depths with shouts of her name echoing through the cabin.

Killian was only vaguely aware that he had partially collapsed on top of Emma when he felt her body shake beneath him. Bracing himself onto his forearms, he looked down only to realize she was stifling a series of giggles.

“What’s so amusing, love?” he asked with a raised brow. She opened her eyes and looked back at him, which only made her giggle harder. “You do wonders for a man’s ego, you know that, Swan?”

“No, no. I’m sorry, it’s just,” she chortled, taken over by mirth once more. “I just had sex with Captain Hook!”

Killian chuckled, “Aye, you did.” He brushed a kiss against her shoulder and nuzzled his face into her hair. “Tell me, love. Do you feel thoroughly pillaged?”

“Mmm, and plundered,” she replied in a satiated tone.

“Well, if you enjoyed your plundering this go round, remind me to start out in my leathers next time.
Give you the full pirate experience.”

“Oh, I will definitely hold you to that, Captain.”

They repositioned themselves on the narrow bunk and held each other close as they continued to run caressing fingers and press soft kisses over one another’s skin. The gentle creaks of the ship as it soared through the night sky lulled them into a state of serenity neither of them would wish to leave any time soon.

“It’s going to take some getting used to isn’t it?” Emma murmured.

“What’s that?”

“Being true love,” she answered quietly. “I never… I never thought I’d have that.”

“Especially with Captain Hook, I’d imagine,” he responded playfully, wanting to keep the mood light.

“No,” Emma whispered. “Captain Hook certainly has his appeal, but he’s not my true love.” Emma turned her face towards Killian’s puzzled expression and swept his bangs from his forehead. “That honor belongs to Killian Jones. He’s the man I fell in love with.”

Killian gave her a broad grin before pressing his lips to hers. “And the honor of my true love does not go to the Saviour,” he reciprocated. “I love you, Emma Swan.”

After a few more languid kisses Emma nestled back down against Killian’s chest. It wasn’t long before he heard the subtle change in her breathing, indicating she’d fallen asleep. Killian knew he should follow her example and surrender to slumber, but he couldn’t stop the thoughts running through his mind.

Sailing among the clouds with his true love wrapped in his arms, Killian was struck with the realization that he had left Neverland as a truly free man for the first time in his life. Not as a man under the bonds of service or duty, nor driven by orders from Pan or his own vow for revenge. He’d left, not as a Lieutenant under the command of a treacherous king, or as the villain Captain Hook, or even as the Dark One. No. He’d left Neverland behind as Killian Jones.

True Love of the Saviour and Protector of the heart of the Truest Believer.

Two monikers he would shoulder with more pride than any that had come before. He would spend the remainder of his days atoning for his past sins and redeeming himself to be worthy of these newest monikers. And he would seek forgiveness from those he’d wronged, most crucially himself.

Killian knew there were still challenges to come. Regina still needed to be dealt with, the town needed protecting from the outside world, and they all had to find a way to reconcile the years they’d lived under cursed identities. Despite whatever obstacles they may yet have to face, Killian had faith there was nothing he and his Swan couldn’t handle as long as they had each other. As long as he had her and Henry.

Because one thing was for sure… with them, Killian had everything.
Killian stood on the bustling sidewalk in front of the towering apartment building, steeling himself for the impending confrontation. In the almost four months that had passed since the curse broke, Killian had made a great many strides in putting his past well behind him in order to carve out a future of happiness. Happiness in the form of his true love and her boy, a boy who for all intents and purposes may as well be his own. Emma and Henry. His family.

Killian never would have dared dream for a life such as he was living now. A life filled with love and friendship and community, in a place he now called home. A place where he belonged. A place that accepted him. Not that everything had been smooth sailing since their return from Neverland. Once they’d returned to Storybrooke there were still a number of issues that had to be addressed from the fallout of the curse.

While the fairies had managed to reunite most of the displaced citizenry, there were a fair few that had loved ones unaccounted for. Some wished to leave town, eager to either find a way to return to the Enchanted Forest or willing to brave the outside world in order to escape the memory of so many sad years trapped under the curse. Unfortunately, the restriction at the town line remained.

One of the first things Killian did upon his return from Neverland was seek out Belle, wishing to thank her for the advice she’d given him. Though, he was mindful of the fact that the news that True Love’s Kiss had worked for him and Emma could be one of a sensitive nature, given it hadn’t worked for her and Rumplestiltskin. The woman surprised him, however. Pulling him into a tight hug she expressed her joy and relief.

“I’m so proud of you, Killian,” Belle praised. “I’m so happy that you chose love, happy for you both.”

“Thank you, Belle,” Killian answered tightly as he pulled out of her embrace. “I hope one day you’ll find the same. I know there’s nothing I can do to make right all the things I’ve done, and all the pain I’ve caused you, but I am sorry. I just hope one day you can find it in your heart to forgive me.”

Belle reached out and placed a hand on his forearm. “I already have,” she professed, much to
Killian’s shock. “You’ve proven that you’ve changed since all of that. I know you aren’t that man anymore.”

Too stunned in the moment to properly convey his gratitude, Killian managed to render Belle speechless a few days later when he presented her with the deed to the library. An act that not only blessed her, but the entire town in turn. The bookish beauty was nothing if not an extremely talented researcher. Within a few days she’d come across a spell that helped secure Storybrooke’s borders so outsiders, whether by hapless circumstance or more nefarious intentions, would not be able to find their way into town unless by invitation. With the aid of a few fairies, including the reinstated Tink, she was also able to find a cure for the effects one endured if they crossed the town line. Unfortunately, the cure only worked within the town limits which continued to make leaving an impossibility.

In the weeks that followed, the prince and princess immediately took up their roles as leaders, serving in a mixed capacity as sovereigns and mayor. Graham stepped down as sheriff, preferring instead to serve in the role of deputy with Emma and her father jointly taking up the reins as co-sheriff. Most of the citizenry fell into a rhythm of new normalcy, some in the same roles they’d had under the curse, others casting off all aspects of that life and forging a new path.

Like Killian.

The library deed wasn’t the only real estate transaction Killian had executed since returning. In addition to freely giving lands, homes, and businesses to the denizens starting anew, he also strived to reunite the pawn shop items with their proper owners. The vanquishing of the Darkness meant all deals were now void, leaving the once desperate souls free of any further price to be paid. That’s not to say that the shop did not continue to do business. Many brought in items that no longer held significance to them now that they were awake, and Smee, having confessed that he quite liked the work, kept the shop running with the aid of a few lost boy apprentices.

Killian filled his days overseeing things at the docks. Where Graham officially served the town by patrolling the woods, ensuring that people did not stray too close to the town border or engage in anything untoward, Killian filled a similar role unofficially, at the harbour. He and Henry still enjoyed their afternoons together, and even had company with the addition of a few of the other lost boys wishing to learn more about the sea.

His evenings were devoted to Emma and Henry, with the three of them usually meeting at Granny’s, the loft, or Swan’s house for dinner. A week after their return, Emma asked Killian to move in with her and Henry, and Killian deeded his house over to the fairies for use in housing the lost boys. All-in-all things were going rather perfectly.

Except for two things.

What to do about Regina, and what to do about the bomb Marco… er, Gepetto dropped on them all about a month after their return.

Secured in a cell below the hospital, Regina had demanded to see Henry the moment Emma informed her of their safe return. At first Emma refused to allow the Evil Queen access to Henry, but at Snow’s insistence (ever hopeful that Regina would change), she was finally allowed a few supervised visits. She spent most of the time justifying her actions, painting herself as the victim, and attempting to manipulate Henry further. Eventually, Henry refused to see her, and sent her a letter. It stated that if she wanted to change and earn forgiveness then she needed to prove it by admitting she was a villain, and be willing to make things right - like Killian had done. A point of fact that, reportedly, didn’t sit too well with Her Majesty.
Despite all the hell Regina had put Henry through in making him believe he was crazy, Killian knew that a part of Henry missed the woman who had raised him for the first ten years of his life. For that reason alone, Killian held out the smallest bit of hope and goodwill that perhaps, one day, the Evil Queen would truly repent and seek redemption. Until that day came, however, they were taking no chances. The cuff remained on her wrist and she remained in her cell with little access to the outside world… except the occasional visit from Snow White and her hope speeches.

Just as things were truly beginning to hit a comfortable rhythm, a guilty conscience and desperate plea for help from the town’s handyman would be contained no longer.

“The wardrobe I built for you, the one that transported Emma to this world,” Marco began to confess one evening when he came by the loft as they were all having dinner, “she did not go alone.”

“No. That was a lie I made the Blue Fairy tell you. It had enough magic to transport two. And it did,” Marco lamented, “Your daughter… and my son.”

Once the initial shock and tempers settled, Emma agreed to help Marco find his son, Pinocchio. After the elderly man gave them the full story, Emma determined that Pinocchio had to have been the seven-year-old boy who’d found her on the side of the road when she was an infant. With Belle’s assistance, she was able to trace him through the alias August Booth, and found that he was being treated for some type of paralysis in a hospital in Phuket. Through some deception, a healthy chunk of Regina’s bank account, and maybe a little bit of magic, they were able to get August back stateside and transported into Storybrooke so he could be treated by a specialist.

It had taken quite a bit of effort, and a forgetting potion for the paramedics that had transported him into town, but after weeks of searching, Marco was finally reunited with his son… his wooden son. It was an affliction that had begun around the same time Emma had decided to stay in Storybrooke, and couldn’t be discerned by anyone in the outside world, save for one man August referred to as the Dragon.

Belle and the fairies worked tirelessly to find a cure, but it wasn’t until August made some confessions of his own, chose honesty and selflessness, that a change in his timbered complexion began to occur. Turned out it had been under his influence that Neal chose to set up Emma for her crime that landed her behind bars for eleven months. Not just that, but Neal had entrusted August with both the bag and the money he’d gotten for the watches, asking him to see that Emma received both. He’d only sent her the keys to the vehicle and had kept the cash for himself. Money that could have given Emma a fresh start with her son, rather than the bleak choice of giving him up for his best chance.

With each admission the effects of his treachery began to diminish from his visage, but did little to appease the pain. The Blue Fairy assured them that August must be truly remorseful and willing to do whatever it took to make things right in order for him to become fully flesh once more, but the damage of his actions had been done. Emma didn’t truly fault him for Neal’s actions, he had made his own decisions in that regard, but what could August possibly do to repay the ten years he’d stolen from her and Henry with his theft of the money?

August, like his father before him, had caused a parent to be separated from their child when they’d had it within their power to see to it they could stay together. Granted, August didn’t know that Emma was with child at the time of her incarceration any more than Neal had, and probably for that reason alone, Emma, like her mother had with Marco, chose to forgive August for his role. Though it didn’t mean she would ever forget the betrayal, or truly trust the man - neither would
As the weeks passed, Killian witnessed the transformation of their previously cursed town to one filled with happiness and hope. August’s continued presence in town, and continued attempts to make amends, eventually helped Emma find some closure to a painful part of her past, but it only further plagued Killian with the reminder of the one person to whom he had the most to answer for. Baelfire. Neal.

Killian watched as Belle found new happiness with Will Scarlett, able to move forward and make a new life for herself as she worked through her grief and found closure over Rumplestiltskin’s death. August had told them how Neal had reacted to the idea that his father found a way to this land. Living a life always looking over one shoulder for fear that his past would catch up to him. Killian didn’t want that for him. There was no reason for Bae to run any longer. He deserved to know the truth of his father’s fate, and Killian felt he needed to make this last atonement to truly move forward. He wasn’t sure how to broach the subject with Emma though, until she caught him thinking things over one evening.

“Woah! Beware of lurking pirates,” Emma stated as she exited the ladies room at Granny’s. “What are you doing back here?”

“Just thinking.”

“Lurking and brooding. There’s a classic combo,” she teased with a bright smile. A smile that diminished slightly when she realized how heavily the issue was weighing on him. “Hey. What is it? You know you can tell me anything.”

“I wasn’t prepared to have this conversation here,” Killian began hesitantly. “I’ve been thinking quite a lot about Bae lately, and I-”

“You want to try and find him,” Emma finished knowingly, causing Killian’s gaze to snap up and meet hers with wide eyes.

He should have known his Swan would be in tune with his musings. They had always been able to read one another so well.

They spent many long evenings discussing it. How to find him? Do they use Henry’s blood, which would mean telling the boy of their plan, or track him the old-fashioned way with Emma’s skip tracing skills? Even if he was still in this land, how would Killian get to him with the restriction at the border? If there was a way around the restriction, would they both go and face Neal, or just him?

Killian spoke with Tink on the matter and she believed that the fairies could use the enchanted nature of his ship to create a protective cloak against the effects of the border restriction that would allow him to sail out of Storybrooke. A cloak that could extend to him as long as he kept a piece of the ship with him while in the outside world. It took some time to work out, but eventually they were successful and Killian became more determined than ever to seek Bae out. He told Emma that he had no wish to pressure her in the decision to come with him. He was willing to go face Bae on his own and leave her and Henry completely out of the tale.

Now here he was, standing outside the man’s apartment building, willing himself to do and say that which he’d spent countless amounts of time going over in his head. How does one apologize for the amount of atrocities Killian had perpetrated against this single individual? He was about to find out.

Killian entered the lobby and scanned the placard of names. Finding no listing for Cassidy, he deduced that the blank slot towards the bottom must be his as he remembered everything Emma had
told him about finding people who didn’t want to be found.

“Yeah?” a gruff voice sounded over the intercom after Killian rang up to the apartment.

“Package delivery for 407,” Killian stated. He knew there was little to no chance of Bae letting him up if he announced himself truthfully.

The intercom fell silent before the clanging of metal rang out from the alleyway on the other side of the wall. Someone was rushing down the fire escape from the sound of it.

“Bloody hell,” Killian cursed. “He’s running.”

Killian bolted out the door just as the man exited the alleyway and sprinted down the sidewalk. Immediately giving chase, Killian wove through pedestrians and traffic in his pursuit. As his quarry veered left in the middle of a courtyard between buildings, Killian took a chance and followed his instincts to try and cut him off at the alleyway beyond. The two men barreled into one another, knocking each other to the ground when Killian emerged from the narrow channel between the buildings.

Clutching his side and his aching ribs, Killian groaned as he rolled to face the stunned looking man. A man who still bore the countenance of the boy he’d known so long ago. Bae. Milah’s son.

“Hook?!”

“Baelfire,” Killian grimaced as he picked himself up from the ground before extending a hand to the still flummoxed man.

“What the hell are you doing here?!” Bae exclaimed, taking Killian’s hand then dusting himself off. “How did you get here? How did you find me?”

“I got here on the Jolly Roger,” Killian answered. “Your old mate, August, clued us in as to your possible whereabouts. I had to come find you.”

“Why?” Bae asked guardedly.

“The curse is broken.”

“I know,” Bae replied. “August sent me a postcard.”

“He did? What did it say?”

“It just said broken. Nice clock tower by the way. Storybrooke seems real homey.”

Killian recognized Bae’s defense mechanism of sarcasm, fully aware that the man was eyeing possible escape routes as he gauged Killian’s true purpose for showing up unannounced.

“It holds a certain charm, despite the fact that it originated from a curse.”

“Why are you here, Hook?” Bae’s eyes flickered down and his brows shot up. “Or do I need to call you something else now?”

Killian huffed amusedly to himself as he considered all the things the man would probably wish to call him once they’d had a chance to talk.

“Killian will do,” Killian replied wryly. “I’m here because I have news I need to share with you. Something you ought to know… about your father.”
Bae paled, his eyes widening as a glimmer of alarm passed over his features. “My father? Is he? Did you? You didn’t bring him here did you?”

“No, Bae. He isn’t… he isn’t here,” Killian assured, momentarily easing Bae’s panic. “Why don’t we grab a drink? I noticed a pub around the corner from your building. We could go grab a beer, or something stronger, and I can explain my reasons for coming.”

Bae eyed him suspiciously, and Killian only then became aware of his hand nervously scratching at the back of his ear.

“After everything you did, you expect me to go have a drink with you? No. No, whatever it is you need to tell me, you can tell me right here and now.”

Killian knew this wouldn’t be an easy conversation, but a New York City back alleyway was hardly the place he’d wish to discuss things. Killian sighed, “Bae—”

“It’s Neal!” he yelled.

Killian held up his hands in supplication. “You’re right… Neal. I’ve no right to ask anything of you, but please. Please, just hear me out. Come have a drink with me.” Killian raised his brows in expectation then added. “I promise, you can resume yelling at me afterward.” *If not worse.*

“Fine,” Neal relented before turning back towards his apartment building and the pub beyond.

After the two staked a claim at the corner of the bar with their spirits in hand, Killian began to confess the truth of what he’d done to Neal’s father in the name of revenge. The man stayed unnervingly quiet during Killian’s recitation, only speaking when he reached the part of the tale that had him emerging from the Dark Vault just prior to the Dark Curse descending.

“So, you’re the new Dark One now?” Neal asked in a hushed and strained voice. His eyes affixed to the slab of mahogany before him.

“I was,” Killian answered, causing Neal’s perplexed gaze to snap to his.

“Was? What do mean was?”

“I was able to break the Dark One curse,” Killian revealed. “Well, not just me. I had help.”

“From who?”

Despite the dark and dismal nature of the topic, Killian couldn’t help the smile that pulled at his lips. “My True Love. It was her kiss that freed me.”

Neal scoffed bitterly, “Captain Hook has a True Love?”

“Aye,” Killian swallowed heavily, nodding down the bar, “and she’s the other reason I’m here.”

Neal turned to see Emma sitting at the other end. Killian was so focused on his Swan, and how she was faring being nearly face-to-face with the man who had abandoned her all those years ago, he didn’t register Neal’s punch until the blow landed squarely against his jaw.

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The back door of the pub slammed against brick as it opened to the alleyway. “You heard the owner,” the burly bartender gruffed, “take it outside.”
The three were unceremoniously shut out of the establishment that was meant to serve as some sort of neutral ground for the bombshells Killian had just dispensed on Neal. Neutral was the last thing on Emma’s mind, though. Not after she’d witnessed Neal slug Killian in the face. If anyone deserved a good punch to the face, it was Neal, but Emma had told herself she would keep her anger and emotions in check. Unfortunately, Neal seemed to have no such intent.

“What did I ever do to you, Hook?” Neal shouted as he rounded on Killian. “You’ve taken everything from me! My mother, my freedom from Pan, my father, the woman I love-”

“You mean the woman you set up for a crime you committed, earning her an eleven month jail sentence?” Emma snarled, stepping up next to Killian and getting right in Neal’s face.

“August told me I had to do that,” Neal contended. His tone softer now that he was addressing her and not Killian. “So you could fulfill your destiny.”

“Listen to yourself, Neal,” Emma hissed. “You let me go to prison because Pinocchio told you to. Not exactly the most reliable source. You never thought that maybe he was wrong? That maybe there was another way to let me go than sending me to jail? Or that I could have still fulfilled that destiny with you?”

“I… I thought,” Neal stammered uncomfortably. “I thought I was doing what was best… for you.”

“Bullshit,” Emma countered. “August told us everything.”

“Then he must have told you how it tore me up to leave you like that.”

“You still left, Neal. And don’t pretend it was because of my destiny. You left because you got scared. Because you thought your father would find you. Or that being with me meant you’d have to face him one day. You chose to leave, and you did it in the shittiest way imaginable.”

“Hey, you didn’t know him! You have no idea what becoming the Dark One did to him, what it made him do. I’ve been in hiding. I came here to get away from all that crap. Besides,” Neal continued defensively, “are we really going to stand here and pretend that what I did to you is somehow worse than what he did to me?”

Neal gestured toward Killian and Emma felt him go rigid beside her. She didn’t have to look over to know the muscle in his jaw was probably ticking a mile a minute, and self-loathing was inundating him. Reaching down, she laced her fingers with his and gave his hand an encouraging squeeze.

“What Killian did was… inexcusable,” she admitted, “but he paid a very steep price for it, and has worked to change. He’s here because he didn’t want you to spend the rest of your life looking over your shoulder. He knew he owed you the truth. He’s trying to do the right thing.”

Emma glanced at Killian and the two exchanged soft smiles before Neal drew her attention back.

“Why are you here, then?”

“I’m here… to support him. I’m here so he doesn’t have to face you alone.”

“Because he’s your true love,” Neal scorned.

“Yes. He is,” Emma stated emphatically.

“Oh, come on, Emma! Do you really believe that? Are you honestly going to stand there and tell me that you believe Captain Hook is your true love?”
“I don’t have to believe it,” Emma stated. “I know it. It was our love that broke his curse.”

“Says who? Him?”

“What?”

“How do you know the curse actually broke? You don’t know the Dark One like I do.” Neal shifted his gaze to Killian as he accused, “The Dark One lies. The Dark One tricks.”

Emma stared slack jawed as Killian spoke up in an incensed tone, “Are you suggesting that I have been lying to Emma all these months?”

“You are a pirate, man.”

“That is the most ludicrous… you have got to be kidding me!” Emma exclaimed. “We shared a True Love’s Kiss, Neal. I saw the dagger go blank and then turn to ash in front of my very own eyes!”

“Emma, you didn’t grow up around magic,” Neal argued. “He could have faked the whole thing and you wouldn’t know.”

“I would know,” she insisted.

“How?” he inquired flippantly. “The thing with the lies? I know you always thought you could tell when someone was lying, but I never bought it. It wouldn’t be that difficult to fool you with the kind of power he has. I mean, it isn’t like you know what a real True Love’s Kiss is like, you have nothing to compare it to.”

Emma’s eyes widened slightly and she cast a furtive glance at Killian. Catching his eye, she could see that just beyond the anger that had begun to simmer at Neal’s accusations, he was thinking the same thing she was. She did have a True Love’s Kiss to compare to the one they’d shared in Neverland.

“What?” Neal asked after taking notice of the exchange between them.

“No,” Emma answered quickly. “Look, Neal. I-”

“No,” Neal interrupted. “There’s something… you’re hiding something.”

“I’m not hiding anything.” Emma asserted. “I just don’t have to answer to you, Neal. I don’t have to justify what Killian and I share to you.”

Neal stared at Killian and his face flushed with agitation. She loved her pirate, but sometimes he had the worst poker face. “No. No, there’s something you’re not telling me. You didn’t just come here to stand by Hook, did you? There’s more, isn’t there?”

Emma’s heart hammered in her chest. She hadn’t come to a firm decision about whether or not to tell Neal about Henry before they’d arrived, and given how he’d reacted to everything up to this point, it sure as hell didn’t seem like the right time to have that particular chat.

“Isn’t there?!” Neal roared as he advanced on her.

“That’s enough, mate.” Killian put himself between her and Neal, his hand pressed against the man’s chest to halt his steps.

“Get your hands off me, Hook,” Neal spat as he roughly pushed his hand away.
“Look, I know that this whole day has come as something of a shock, but I won’t have you raising your voice to Emma. Yell at me all you like, but you’ll not treat her that way.”

“Yeah? What are you gonna do about it,” Neal challenged.

“I’ve no wish to fight with you, Bae,” Killian said earnestly, but his sincerity fell on deaf ears.

“I told you,” Neal grit out before his anger exploded. “It’s Neal!”

This time Killian was prepared for the other man’s swing, ducking out of its way before Neal’s fist could make contact with his face again. Instinct had Killian bringing his hands up, ready to block the next attack as Neal turned back toward him. Emma was about to shout for Neal to stop when a cry from the end of the alleyway beat her to it.

“Stop!” Henry pleaded. “Don’t hurt my dad!”

As Emma watched her parents round the corner to stand next to her son, his words settled over her. Henry’s eyes were wide in astonishment, but not at the scene before him. He seemed more stunned by the words he’d just uttered than the two men about to come blows, though one man in particular was set firm in Henry’s attentions as he anxiously waited for the man’s reaction.

“I’m sorry, lad,” Killian responded. “It was never my intentions to hurt-”

“He wasn’t talking to you, Killian,” Emma corrected.

Both men’s faces began to morph in stunned understanding, the same revelation with vastly different meanings. Neal gawked at Henry in disbelief while Killian tried his best to suppress the grin that threatened to take over his entire face. Her son’s words had clearly taken root in their full meaning, and as much as Emma knew such a declaration meant the world to Killian, the timing of it was less than ideal. Neal finally came to his senses and turned his attention toward her.

“Is he?” Neal began, motioning to Henry. “Emma, is this? Is he my son?”

Emma popped a brow at his accusatory tone before answering. “Technically? Yes.” Emma turned and reached out toward Henry, encouraging him forward. Once he was secure at her side she offered up the introduction she hoped wouldn’t prove to be one giant mistake. “Neal. This is my son.” Emma flicked her gaze to Killian who stood just behind Neal, offering her a supportive look filled with the love and comfort she’d grown to rely on. A look he didn’t reserve just for her, but shared with her boy, their boy. “Henry. This is Neal. Your… father.”

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Killian stood next to Emma, his arm wrapped around her waist as they waited at the town line. After the shock had worn off in that alleyway back in New York, it had been decided that if Bae - Neal - wanted to get to know Henry he’d have to come to Storybrooke. Given Henry’s initial reluctance once the introduction had been made, Killian had made the suggestion, hoping it would ease everyone’s nerves having the man on their own turf, so to speak. He knew Emma and her father were dubious as to whether or not letting Neal have access to Henry was a good idea; and though Killian lamented that Henry’s first experience with the man had been less than favorable, he and Snow had been united in their desires to hope for the best and give the two a second chance to connect.

Killian, Emma, and her family had all sailed back to town on the Jolly Roger with the understanding that Neal would make his way by car the next day. Now he and Swan awaited the man’s arrival, wishing to ensure he’d be able to make it through the barrier protecting the town. Killian could feel
“I hope we’re doing the right thing,” Emma murmured, laying her head against his shoulder as she wrapped her arm around his middle.

“As do I,” Killian admitted. “I just keep thinking that if it were me… if I discovered I had a child out there somewhere, I’d want the chance to get to know them.”

“Any chance that there is?” Emma questioned, turning her head to peer up at him. “Or that there may have been once? I mean, you are like a million years old, right?”

Killian wondered if her teasing smile and tone was masking a deeper-seated insecurity, so his reply, though also teasing in nature, was earnest. “Neverland and curses may have given me experience, but as you can see, I’ve retained my youthful glow.” Emma snorted at his side, and he gave her a squeeze before confessing, “I honestly don’t know. I’ve always tried to be fastidious in preventing such a thing, as you well know,” he said with a saucy wink, “but as you said… I’ve lived a long time.”

Emma swallowed heavily, her nerves visibly rising again, and Killian wondered if their current topic was adding to her trepidations about Bae’s impending arrival. “Did you ever want a child? Children?”

“I… I never really had a chance to consider the idea,” Killian admitted. “I was still a young man when I turned to piracy after Liam’s death, and Milah made it clear she didn’t want another child. I thought… I had thought that perhaps Bae - Neal - might be my chance to experience fatherhood, but after his rejection… I allowed my quest for vengeance to rob me of many things, including the hope for a family.”

“What about now?” Emma inquired softly. A look Killian couldn’t quite identify shimmered in her eyes.

“Now.” He turned Emma in his arms, bringing her flush against him as he smiled lovingly down at her. “I have more family than I could have ever dreamed of having. You. Henry. This whole bloody town. You’re all my family. Seems a bit greedy to wish for more,” he quipped playfully, pulling a smile from his Swan’s lips, though he noted it didn’t quite meet her eyes.

Before he could question it, the sound of a vehicle pulled their attention to the road ahead of them. Neal pulled over to the side of the road after crossing the town line without any difficulty. Killian and Emma approached as he exited his vehicle, eyeing Emma’s bug.

“You kept it,” he commented, a smug sense of satisfaction lacing his tone.

“Um… yeah. I did.”

Emma had told Killian all about how she had acquired her vehicle. Stealing a car that had already been stolen, it was the event that had brought her and Neal together in the first place. After her incarceration she’d kept it out of necessity, though admitted that she still had sentimental attachment to it, given its history. Over the years she couldn’t bear to part with it. As painful a reminder as it was to the betrayal she’d experienced, it was still a connection to the man she had once loved, and in a way, to the child she’d had to give up. Now, she said it was a reminder of who she’d been and how far she’d come.

“Welcome to Storybrooke, B-Neal,” Killian said, extending his hand in greeting. A gesture that went
unacknowledged, Neal’s attention still fixed on Emma.

“Where’s Henry?” Neal asked.

“He’s with my parents,” Emma answered, her brow raising at his slight as she crossed her arms over her chest. “We thought we’d get you settled at the B&B and then meet them at Granny’s for dinner.”

“All of us?” Neal blanched before taking another step toward her, turning himself so that his back was to Killian, essentially pushing him out of the conversation. “I was kind of hoping it would just be the three of us. You know. You, me, and Henry. Why can’t we have dinner at your place? Or better yet, why can’t I just crash with you and Henry?”

“You mean at our house?” Emma replied incredulously. “The house we live in... with Killian,” she emphasized sharply.

“You’re letting him live under the same roof as our son?” Neal snapped.

Killian’s fists clenched at his side. He knew Neal still carried a torch for Emma, as well as a healthy dose of disdain for the man who’d won her heart, and though he knew he had much to atone for, he couldn’t bring himself to just stand by and let the man say the things his words were implying.

“Aye,” Killian responded as he came to stand by his Swan once more. “And I think it best if you stay at Granny’s for the time being. Until Henry is more comfortable with your presence.”

“Okay, that’s enough,” Emma snapped. “If this is how it’s going to be you can just get back in your car and head back to New York, Neal. I’m not letting you around Henry if all you’re going to do is act like this. I get that you and Killian have things to work out, and I hope that you can, for both your sakes, but you’re not dragging Henry into it.”

“You’re right,” Neal agreed. “I’m sorry. I promise, best behavior from this point on. I just… I just want a chance to know my son.”

Emma gave him a withering assessment before offering a curt nod. “Just… don’t break his heart.” Her words were half command and half plea as she continued to stare at the man before her.

“Trust me. I’m not going to do to him what Hook-” Neal broke off his reply and cast a quick look over to Killian before offering Emma a chagrined look. “I mean. I won’t. Promise.”

Emma turned and headed back for the bug, muttering for Neal to follow them back into town. Before he got back into his car Killian caught him.

“I’m glad you came, B-Neal. I know you and Henry got off to a rough start yesterday, but it means something that you’re here. Maybe not to Henry just yet, but to me-”

“Let’s get one thing straight,” Neal cut in, his tone dripping with venom as he kept his words hushed
so they wouldn’t be overheard by Emma. “I’m here for Henry. I don’t give a damn about you, except to see to it that you don’t take another thing from me. You might have taken Emma, but I’ll be damned if I let you take Henry.”

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Two weeks in, and Neal’s visit wasn’t going as well as Killian had hoped. It wasn’t as if the town was giving him much of a chance, which only seemed to bolster Henry’s hesitancies about the man. In the months following the breaking of the curse, rumors had begun to circulate that although Regina had been the one to cast the Dark Curse, it was really Rumplestiltskin who’d been behind it all. Rumors that Killian and few others knew to be fact, and were further confirmed by August after he’d arrived with his tale of how it had all been The Dark One’s grand design to reunite with his son while still holding on to his power. Now that son was in Storybrooke, and it seemed the citizenry felt he deserved a bit of the blame as well.

If it wasn’t some random stranger on the street or patron at Granny’s giving Neal an angry side eye, it was the prince, who’d made his feelings about the man who’d left his daughter pregnant and in jail quite clear. A daughter who offered only cool civility so as not to encourage Neal’s continued advances, and made it clear that she wouldn’t push Henry to interact with him anymore than the lad felt comfortable with. Which wasn’t turning out to be much.

Indeed, the only people who seemed to be somewhat in Neal’s corner were Snow, Belle, and Killian. Ever the hopeful optimists and believers of second chances, Snow and Belle rallied around Neal with their encouragements to keep trying with Henry. Encouragements Killian echoed, despite the man’s continued hostility towards him when others weren’t around.

Henry wasn’t refusing to see his father or spend any time with him, he simply insisted that others join them any time Neal invited him to go and do something together. Neal didn’t seem to mind too much when that additional person was Emma, but he became surly and temperamental when either Killian or David merited an invitation from the lad. Not that he demonstrated such frustrations in front of Henry. With Henry he was patient and amenable, willing to do whatever was necessary to get in the boy’s good graces.

“How much longer do you think we should let this go on?” Emma asked as they lay in bed one night. She was curled at Killian’s side, running her fingers through his chest hair.

“Let what go on, love?” Killian murmured softly, still enjoying a bit of post bliss from their earlier activities.

“Neal,” she answered. And just like that, the bliss was gone.

“What do you mean?”

“I mean how much longer are we going to let him stick around? It’s obvious that Henry isn’t all that interested in him being here, and everyone is on edge. Maybe… maybe we should tell him to go.”

Killian shifted onto his side to face her. “If you think that’s what’s best Swan, then I’ll-”

“I’m asking what you think, Killian,” Emma stated. “I know you wanted Neal to come here so you’d have a chance to make amends. I want to know if you think more time will give you that?”

Killian considered her question; one he’d already pondered a number of times over the past fortnight. “No,” he admitted sadly. “I don’t think any measure of time will grant me the forgiveness I seek from Bae. But my relationship with him isn’t the one that matters. Henry’s is.” Killian paused and
weighed the words that were rolling through his mind before he spoke them. “I’ve stolen every chance Bae had for a family from him, Swan. I took his mother from him when he was just a wee lad. I offered him a place to call home once, told him that my crew and I could be his family. When he rejected my offer I continued on in my vengeance, taking away any chance he had to reconcile with his father when I murdered Rumplestiltskin in his cell beneath your parent’s castle. Then I went and fell in love with the woman he’d once hoped to call his own, and ended up inadvertently raising his son in both your absences.”

“And at some point Killian, you’ve got to forgive yourself for all that,” Emma insisted, cupping his cheek in her hand. “You have apologized enough. If Neal can’t find it within himself to forgive you, then all you can do is forgive yourself and move on.”

“I know, Emma. It’s just…”

“It’s just, what?”

“He deserves a chance for happiness, too. I just want to give him every chance to find that happiness. With the only family he has left.”

Emma moved her hand to run it through his hair as she took in his words. “Alright,” she said. “We’ll give it a little more time.”

The next day Killian was determined to help things along with Bae and Henry. Finding Neal at Granny’s, he pulled the man aside and made him an offer.

“You wanna let me take Henry out on the Jolly Roger?”

“That’s right,” Killian affirmed.

“ Alone?”

“I can ask Smee to accompany you if you don’t think you can handle her on your own,” Killian offered.

“Why?”

“Why what?”

“Why are you offering to let me take your ship out?”

Killian brushed off the suspicion pouring from Neal’s tone and expression while trying to convey sincerity in his own. “We bonded over sailing, you and I,” Killian reminded. “Henry and I have done the same, and I thought, seeing as it is a point of common ground for you both, that it might help bond the two of you together as well.”

“Do you really mean that?” Neal questioned.

“I do.”

Neal assessed Killian anew, gauging the level of trust he was willing to place in the pirate’s response, before his features softened slightly. “Thanks, man.”

Killian couldn’t help the smile that twitched at the corners of his mouth. It was the most progress he’d made with Bae since their meeting in New York.

“I’ll go and get her ready to set sail. You can meet Henry there after he’s done at school.”
Killian left Granny’s that morning with a fresh swagger in his gait, and spent the day ensuring everything was ship shape. At three o’clock on the dot Neal arrived, followed closely by Henry, who seemed surprised to find Neal and Killian together.

“What’s going on?” Henry inquired hesitantly as he made his way up the gangplank.

“Hook offered to let me take you sailing this afternoon,” Neal answered with a hopeful countenance.

“Can Killian come, too?”

“Henry, lad,” Killian began as he stepped forward. “I thought it might be nice to let you and your father have some time together.”

“Yeah, buddy,” Neal said, stepping up beside Killian. “Just the two of us. What do you say?”

“No,” Henry replied, and Killian’s heart sank as he watched Bae’s face fall.

“How do you know he won’t just sail away with me?” Henry interrupted. His speculation made Killian’s brows shoot up and he sensed Bae stiffen beside him.

“What?” Killian queried.

Was the boy really worried that he was about to be kidnapped?

“Henry, I would never force you from your home,” Bae assured.

“And I’m just supposed to believe that?” Henry shot back with a tone of contempt Killian was quite sure he’d never heard from the lad before.

“Why wouldn’t you believe it?”

“Oh, I don’t know. Maybe because you’re a thief, and a crook, and a liar!”

“Henry, lad, that’s no way to speak to your-”

“Yeah, I got this if it’s all the same to you,” Bae interrupted impatiently. “This is between me and my son, Hook.”

“His name is Killian!” Henry snapped. “He isn’t Captain Hook anymore. Stop calling him that!”

“It’s alright, Henry,” Killian said, casting a discerning gaze between father and son before deciding, “I’ll just go below and let you two have a moment.”

“I know you want to believe that, Henry,” Bae stated. “But you don’t know him like I do. I’m not the bad guy here. I need you to see that. Hook’s got you and the whole town fooled, but if you knew what he’s done-”

“You mean taking your mom away because she asked him to? Or becoming a villain because of what your father did to him?”

Killian had meant to withdraw far enough to allow Henry and Bae some privacy, but there was nowhere he could go once below deck that didn’t offer him a first-hand account of the discourse happening above. It gutted him to hear that Bae still saw him as a villain, but more than that he hated being the reason a divide had been cast between Bae and Henry in the first place. As much as it filled him with overflowing amounts of pride and happiness to hear Henry’s words defending him, each was also a stab to his gut where all the guilt he still harbored for what he’d done to Bae resided.
“How do you know all that?” Bae asked incredulously, clearly not expecting Henry to know the tale of their origins.

“The storybook,” Henry replied. “I knew who Killian was before he even remembered.”

“Well, did the book tell you that he lied then betrayed me when we were in Neverland together?”

“No,” Henry answered, and Killian heard a smug sound escape Bae before Henry added, “he did.”

There was a beat of silence, then Bae replied, “He did?”

“Yeah. When we were in Neverland he told me how he abandoned you there, twice. But he also promised to never do that to me. Because he loves me.”

“Henry, I know you want to believe him, but-”

“I do believe him!” Henry shouted. “Why can’t you? You want me, and everyone else to believe that you’ve changed. That you’re not the same guy who left my mom in jail, but you’re not willing to believe Killian has changed. You refuse to forgive him for what he did, so why should I forgive you?”

“That’s different,” Bae countered. His tone was tight and clipped, and Killian poised himself ready to intervene should things get anymore heated between the two.

“How?!”

“How?! Because he’s Captain Hook!” Bae hollered. “He is a true villain, Henry. I’m just a regular guy who made a mistake. It isn’t the same thing. Someday you’ll see that, you’ll understand, but until then it’s up to me to protect you. From him.”

“I don’t need you to protect me,” Henry snapped back.

“Well, I think you do. I’m your father, Henry. I know what’s best-”

“You don’t get it, do you?!” Henry exclaimed with such force it caused Killian to flinch and seemed to have rendered Bae momentarily speechless.

“What?” Bae questioned. “What don’t I get?”

“Killian is more of a father to me than you’ll ever be,” Henry declared fervently. “I’m sorry that Captain Hook is the guy you knew, the one who didn’t fight for you, but that’s not who he is to me. Since the moment we met he’s looked out for me, protected me, fought for me. Before and after my mom came to town and he got his memories back. Even when he was fighting the Darkness.”

Killian could hear the sobs working their way up Henry’s throat as he spoke and it caused stinging tears to prick at his eyes.

“My mom is The Saviour. My grandparents are Snow White and Prince Charming. And yeah. My best friend is the guy who used to be Captain Hook and The Dark One. You said it yourself. You’re just some guy who made a mistake once. I don’t need you here. I don’t want you here. I’ve already got a spare parent who can’t let go of past grudges. I don’t need another.”

Killian heard the rushed footfalls of Henry sprinting off the ship with Bae’s cries following him. After several long moments Killian emerged from below and found Bae braced at the rail with his head hanging. His boots echoed across the deck, alerting the man to his presence and caused him to
turn with a rueful smile on his face.

“Well,” Bae began with false levity. “I guess you all got what you wanted.”

“No one wanted this, Neal. Henry’s just a lad who’s been through a lot. Give him time.”


“He’s just angry,” Killian tried to reassure. “He didn’t really mean all those things he said.”

“It sure as hell sounded that way to me,” Neal muttered. “Maybe I should just go back to New York.”

“No, don’t.” Killian moved to block Bae’s attempt to exit the ship, earning him a hard look.

“Get out of my way, Hook.”

“Did you mean it?” Killian questioned quietly, returning Bae’s stare with a forcible one of his own.

“Did I mean what?”

“When you said you wanted to leave my ship all those years ago,” Killian clarified. Surprise flashed in Bae’s eyes, completely caught off guard by the pirate’s question. “Did you mean it, or did you wish that I had fought harder for you to stay?”

Bae tore his eyes from Killian’s and focused them on the deck.

“Because the moment the Lost Boys took you from my ship, I wished I had fought for you.” Killian took a step closer and fought the urge to place his hand on Bae’s shoulder. “Don’t make the same mistake I did, Bae. The same mistake our fathers made. They didn’t fight for us, and I didn’t fight for you, but you can fight for Henry. Show him you’re willing to stay and fight, that he’s worth the effort, because believe me, he is.”

Killian tried to catch Bae’s eye, but the man refused to look up. That is, until Killian gave in to his impulse and placed a hand on his shoulder. “Stay, and fight for him, Bae,” Killian pleaded. “Stay, and accept the offer I once made you. This can be your home. We can be your family.”

When Bae didn’t respond Killian removed his hand and started to turn away, defeated.

“Would you have really changed?” Bae asked, claiming Killian’s attentions once more. “You told me then that you could change. For me. Do you really think you could have?”

“I did change, Bae,” Killian replied. “I changed for another boy, and his mother. And I changed for myself. Love changed me, it saved me, and it can change you, too.”

Another long moment stretched between the two men before Bae nodded and made his way off the ship. Watching him go, Killian held firm to the hope that Bae would heed his words as a sense of peace settled over him. Peace that only comes with forgiveness. He’d done all he could to make things right, and even if Bae never forgave him, Killian could finally forgive himself. He hadn’t abandoned the boy this time.

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Having just gotten off work for the day, Emma decided she would swing by Granny’s before meeting Killian and Henry at the Jolly Roger, to pick up dinner for the three of them. As she walked
to the entrance of the courtyard she ran head on into a luggage laden Neal. Looking to her left she saw that his car was parked at the curb with the trunk already open and full of everything he’d brought with him to Storybrooke, everything but the two suitcases currently in his hands.

“Going somewhere?”

Neal moved past her, continuing on to his car without meeting her eyes. He put his suitcases in the trunk and rested his hand on the lid before he turned to look in her direction.

“Uh… yeah, I think this, me coming to Storybrooke, I think it was a mistake. It’s too much, too soon for Henry, he’s got a lot going on in his life, a lot of change. I think that I… maybe I should back off, go back to New York. He and I can still get to know each other though, you know, with phone calls, texting, Skype, and whatnot, and then we can try again with the in-person thing when Henry’s older and can understand things better. When he can understand me better.”

Emma gave Neal and his luggage an assessing glance. “It looks like you were planning on just skipping town. Were you even planning on going to say goodbye to Henry?”

Neal looked up guiltily as he shut the trunk. “What?! Of course, I was!” Her super power started pinging at the blatant lie, but she didn’t point it out as Neal continued to speak. “But, you know, since you’re here and all… maybe you could tell him for me?”

“Seriously Neal?!” Emma took a step back, putting more distance between them, and started pacing, “You weren’t going to say anything, and now you want me to be the bad guy? You haven’t changed a bit, have you? Still a coward.”

“Come on now Ems, that’s low. It’s not like I’m Hook-”

“AHA! THAT! That right there is what this is all about. Isn’t it? Not Henry being overwhelmed by all the changes. You just can’t get past the fact that Killian is a part of our lives. Can you? I know what he did to you some hundreds of years ago was terrible, I get it, but come on Neal, man up.”

“I know you want me to forgive the guy Emma, but it isn’t that easy,” Neal countered defensively.

“You think I don’t get that? You think I don’t understand how difficult it is to forgive the person who betrayed and abandoned you? You think I don’t understand how it feels to have everything ripped away from you? I was sent through a magical wardrobe at birth! Torn away from my parents for twenty-eight years! I had to give up my son then fight like hell to get him back!”

“Can you honestly tell me that you can forgive Regina for what she did to you?”

“I already have.”

“Then why is she still locked up in a cell?”

“Forgiveness isn’t about freeing the other person, Neal. It’s about freeing yourself. So yeah. I’ve forgiven Regina. I’ve forgiven you too, but things will never be the same between us.”

“Do you think Henry will ever forgive me? For leaving?”

“When? Before he was born, or now?” Neal grimaced at her blunt question even as she ploughed on, “But, yeah. Henry will forgive you one day.” Wanting to make sure he fully understood her, she looked him dead in the eye as she said, “But if you leave now… things will never be what they could be between you two.”
“Yeah, okay… whatever. I still really think it’s best if I just go.”

“Best for who? You, or Henry?”

“I gotta go Ems. I’ll call you. Tell Henry I’m sorry.” Emma was stuck where she stood as Neal got into his car and drove off. Her heart broke for her son as she watched Neal drive away without looking back. He’s still got me and Killian, and he knows that we love him, and we always will, she reassured herself as she turned to make her way to the Jolly Roger, dinner long forgotten.

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When she arrived at the ship, Emma was surprised to find Killian at the helm by himself. “Hey you, where’s Henry? Is he in the Captain’s cabin?”

“No,” Killian answered as he scratched behind his ear. “The lad is at the loft with your mother. He… uh… he got into a bit of a row with Neal this afternoon.” Killian, still able to read her like a book, rushed on, “He’s okay. His mood definitely improved when Snow made him a batch of snickerdoodle cookies.” Killian gave her a reassuring smile as she came to stand before him.

“Really?”

Killian nodded his head in response.

“Do you know what they fought about?”

“Me,” he answered solemnly.

“Oh,” Emma reached out and took Killian’s hand, offering it a gentle squeeze before she muttered, “Well, I guess that explains things.”

“Are you alright love? You look a bit pale.”

“Yeah… I’m… I’m okay.” Emma shook off the ill feeling that had come over her, wishing the news she had was more pleasant. “It’s Neal, he left. I stopped by Granny’s to get us dinner, and I ran into him as he was packing up his car. He left without even saying goodbye to Henry.”

Killian wrapped her in his arms as he told her, “I’m sorry, love. This is all my fault, I never should have pushed to go find him.”

“Killian no,” she refuted. “None of this is your fault, this is all on Neal. As painful as it has been, it’s better to have everything out in the open. I just hate it for Henry, I hate that Neal let him down.”

They both stood gazing out at the horizon for several long moments. Emma could practically hear Killian’s thoughts. Both of them concerned for Henry and for one another in how Neal’s departure would affect things for them all moving forward.

“Love, I can sense that your heart is still uneasy,” Killian said softly, releasing her just enough so they could stand face to face, “and it’s my job to protect your heart. I know your life, our lives, have been filled with uncertainty, but there is one thing I always want you to be certain of.”

“What’s that?” she asked as he brushed a tendril of hair off her face.

“That I will always, always, be by your side. Yours and Henry’s. For as long as you’ll have me. If you’ll have me.”

Emma’s heart began to race at his words and their implication. “Is this a proposal, Jones?”
“Do you want it to be?” Emma bit down on her lip in response to his expectantly raised brows, and a smile broke across her face at the prospect of such a reality. Killian, ever the observant man that he was, sank down onto one knee as her smile continued to grow. “Emma Swan, true love to this hapless scoundrel,” he teased, eliciting a giggle from her, “I will love you until the end of time, and be there for you, and Henry, always. Would you do me the great honor of becoming my wife?”

As he finished speaking, before she had a chance to reply, Killian pulled a ring from his pocket and presented it to her. She cupped his face, tears flowing down her cheeks as she whispered a happy, “Yes!”

At her acceptance a beatific smile bloomed across his face as he slipped the ring onto her finger, then stood to kiss her. Wrapped in his embrace, Killian twirled her around on the deck and the two laughed joyously before sealing their lips together once more.

They both decided to wait before making an official announcement regarding their extremely recent engagement, but agreed that the one person they did not want to wait to tell was Henry. After spending some time at the prince and princess’ loft, relaying the news of Neal’s departure, they at last found themselves back home. Killian set to lighting a fire for them as Emma situated herself on the couch next to Henry.

“So, um, kid,” she began. “Killian and I have something we want to tell you.”

Killian joined them, sitting next to his Swan and wrapping an arm around her shoulders to offer her comfort for the nerves he knew had begun to spike in her as they had in him.

“Okay? What’s up?”

“Well…” In lieu of an actual answer, Emma slipped her engagement ring out of her pocket and back onto her finger before holding it up before him.

Henry’s eyes went wide and his mouth gaped before he grabbed her hand. “Are you serious? You’re getting married?”

“Yeah kid,” she answered before looking over her shoulder to smile at Killian. “We’re getting married.”

“That’s awesome!” Henry launched himself at them both. He wrapped his arms tightly around them, and they both reciprocated. “When? When’s the big day? Where are you gonna have the ceremony? Can I help pick out the cake?”

“Whoa! Hold on kid,” Emma laughed. “It only just happened. Give us some time before we have to make any actual decisions, will ya?”

“Yeah, sorry,” Henry replied, a sheepish, but ecstatic smile set on his face.

“It’s alright, lad,” Killian commented. “But there is actually one decision you can help with tonight.”

Both Emma and Henry looked at him with matching quizzical expressions on their brow.

“What’s that?” Henry asked.

“Whether or not you’d agree to be my best man.”
Henry stared at him and Emma’s eyes began to sparkle with a sheen of fresh tears.

“Me? You want me to be your best man?”

“Of course I do,” Killian assured him. “Who else would I want to stand with me on my big day… son?”

This time Henry’s hug was meant just for him, the force of which nearly knocked them both from the couch.

“I’d be honored.” Henry’s words were muffled against Killian’s neck, “Dad.”

Snuggled together in their spacious bed, enjoying the afterglow of their celebratory activities, Killian felt Emma tangle her fingers in the chain and charms he wore. Just as he wondered what had her mind so occupied, Emma propped herself up on her elbow and looked down at him, her True Love, both of them wearing identical happy, and sated smiles.

“Killian.”

“Hmm?”

“I have a confession to make.”

“Most women do.”

She gave him a playful smack on his bare chest for that quip.

“What is it, Swan?” he chuckled in response.

“I agreed to find Neal because I needed that closure too, in order to move forward with our future.”

“Oh?” he questioned with a waggle of his brows. “Were you planning to propose, too?”

“No.” Emma drew in a shaky breath before confessing. “I’m pregnant.”

Shock slowly transformed into elation before Killian pulled her back into his arms. Tears pricked at the corners of his eyes and he couldn’t help but wonder what he’d ever done to deserve such favor as this. For far too many years his life had been consumed by darkness. Darkness of his own making as he pursued what he thought would be his happy ending.

Killian’s mind flashed back to that moment after he’d finally taken his revenge against Rumplestiltskin. The imp’s words of how he’d just become the new Dark One, and was also about to fall victim to the Dark Curse echoed in his head.

“What the blazes is that?! Hook exclaimed.

“Oh, that,” the crocodile quipped, “would be the Dark Curse.”

Hook paled at the realization that there was no escaping the onslaught.

“Lucky you,” the imp muttered as the purple smoke began to descend and swirl around them. “Twice cursed in one day.”

Now here he was, nearly thirty years later with his True Love in his arms, and a son safely asleep
down the hall. Despite the earlier unpleasantness, the day had turned out to be a momentous one. He was engaged to his True Love, with another child on the way. Killian held Emma tighter and after a searing kiss to her lips he murmured, “Well, how about that. Twice blessed in one day.”

~Fin~ / The End

Chapter End Notes

Hollye's final note: I can't believe the journey is over! This has been an amazing experience, and I couldn't have asked for a better partner than Laura. Thank you all for every kUDO and comment! Your enthusiasm, feedback, and flails really kept us going when it seemed the Darkness of writer's block would win. I hope you all enjoyed the adventure as much as we did, and that you'll take the opportunity to check out our other works. Much love and CS kisses to all!! *mwah*... *and sniffles and sobs that it's over!*
**Authors' Note**

Chapter Summary

Dark Hook Comes to Storybrooke is now a Series!

Laura and I (Hollye) truly appreciate all the love we have received from you, our readers, for this fic. We are excited to inform you that the journey is not over! We have created a DHCtS Series. Part One is the complete fic, and Part Two will be a collection of additional scenes based on prompts we receive either here or on Tumblr.

We already have our first excerpt posted. A ~6k one shot of Henry and Killian's first meeting!

We hope you'll go subscribe to the series/DHCtS Additional Scenes, so you can continue on this journey with us. If you have a prompt in mind that you'd like us to flesh out, just let us know. We can't promise to fulfill them all, but we'll do our best.

Cheers!

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!