The Heart of Everything: The Gold Chronicles: Book 1

by cjmoliere, GoldsJRZGirl

Summary

Rumplestiltskin Strogoff-Gold and his cousins Azkadellia and Dorothish Ozopov, descendants of Greek and Ozian gods must reunite to defeat the darkness that has been trying to destroy their family for centuries.
The Darkest of Curses Was Taken

Chapter by cjmoliere

Chapter Notes

The Gold Chronicles was inspired by the Gold Standard written by my friend and co-author GoldsJRZGirl and I began posting it 2013 but after the direction the show started to take I took it down for a massive rewrite. Now that Kat and I have officially crossed over our two series in our current story How The Queen Stole Christmas, I am reposting the series starting with this story. This story also crosses over with the SyFy miniseries Tin Man so it is strongly advised that ALL parts of it be read or crucial plot points will be missed!

"Stay with me now I'm facing my last solemn hour
Very soon I'll embrace you on the other side

Within Temptation - The Heart of Everything"

Storybrooke, Maine 2011

A group of people stood frozen in the middle of the street. The person once known as Malcolm McDermott paced in front of them holding a small scroll in his hands. Centuries earlier he and his small son used a magic bean to travel to a place called Neverland. In that paradise Malcolm abandoned his son and his responsibilities as a father to become Peter Pan, an evil magician whose only love was power and to keep that power he needed the innocent heart of a descendant of the Ozian goddess, Lurline Diosa and the Greek gods Hades and Persephone. That heart belonged to Henry Mills Gold, his own great grandson.

He hadn't counted on his son Rumplestiltskin, who had been possessed by Alemedia Demonia, the mistress of the Ozian hell realm Ephesis and Hades' second born, to travel to Neverland with the boy's parents to take it and the boy back. They left Neverland confident they'd defeated him and he allowed them to, borrowing the body of his old accomplice to return to the land of his forefathers where his powers would be much stronger and he could conquer that world and make everyone in it his slaves, Not even his son could stop him now. The boy was nothing but the village coward without his powers.

"Look at you all. A captive audience. I could play with you like a pack of dogs, couldn't I?" he taunted. Among those frozen were his grandson Baelfire, his great grandson Henry, that silly girl Belle, the Evil Queen Regina, Emma the Savior who couldn't save anything without a roadmap, the former cricket Archie Hopper, a formerly possessed Ozian sorceress named Azkadellia Ozopov and Snow White and Prince Charming. "I think I'll start with these two." he said as he now stood before Bae and Belle. "Hmm. You both look so adorable. Hard to tell who to kill first. No, it isn't.
You. You first. " He pointed at Bae and was about to strike when he felt himself being pulled back.

"Stay away from them!" Rumple hissed.

It was time to end it. The most painful part was facing the ones he loved the most to say his goodbyes, even more painful to see them standing still unable to move or speak but their love for him made him stronger than he ever had been before.

"How about this? The worm has teeth," Pan taunted. "What, are you here to protect your wuved ones?"

"I'm not gonna let you touch any of them."

"Oh, I'd like to see that."

"Oh, you will. Because I have a job to finish, and I have to do whatever it takes. No loopholes. And what needs to be done has a price. A price I'm finally willing to pay," Rumple said bravely. He glanced over at his paralyzed son. "I used the curse to find you, Bae, to tell you I made a mistake. To make sure you had a chance at happiness. And that happiness is possible. Just not with me. I accept that."

"Pretty, pretty words," Pan was sneering.

Rumple ignored him. "I love you, Bae. And I carry a part of you with me...just as part of me will always be with you..."

Bae's cheek twitched and inside he was screaming, not wanting to lose his father now that they'd finally reconciled.

"Oh don't worry. You'll be reunited...in death." Pan laughed.

Rumple ignored him and glanced over at Emma. "Forgive my son Emma. He made a mistake, just as I did all those years ago. Forgive him for yourselves and for my grandson. Find the Tallahassee
you dreamed about together. This is the last thing I'm asking of you."

A tear slid down the Savior's cheek.

Now his eyes met those of his young grandson, the box containing what was left of his heart in Henry's hands, visible to all but Pan. "You will be a great man and a great sorcerer someday, Henry. You will be the man I wanted to be all those years ago of that I am certain. You were raised well." He smiled at Henry. He walked over to where his cousin stood beside her bondmate. "I'm sorry we didn't have more time to get to know each other, cousin but I leave you in good hands. Bury the sorceress in the past and become the woman you were meant to be."

He now turned to the man at Az's side. "Archie, be a comfort to my family. They'll need you now more than ever."

Now Rumple looked over at Belle, his own bondmate, horror and despair in her beautiful blue eyes. "And I love you Belle," he said as he fought back his tears. "I never thought I could love that way again until that day I came to your father's castle. You saw both sides of me and even when I gave you plenty of reasons to leave; you came back and fought for me. I will see you again...just not in this life as we hoped and I'll wait for you...in the next one. You made me stronger, strong enough that I now know what I have to do and can do it...without fear anymore. You all have. By believing in me even when I no longer believed in myself."

He faced his father again with grim determination. He had to succeed for his family. He no longer had a chance but he would give them one.

"Stronger, yes. But still no magic," Pan reminded him. "You removed it and the Dark One powers with that talisman, remember?"

"Oh, but I don't need it. You see, you may have lost your shadow but there's one thing you're forgetting." Rumple pointed out as he regained his composure.

"And what's that?" Pan sneered.

"So I have I," Rumple declared triumphantly. "I sent it away with something to hide." He raised his hand, willing his shadow to answer his call. The black specter flew toward him and placed his dagger into his hand and remerged with his body. He grabbed his father and held him to him, the blade of the dagger poised behind Malcolm's back, directly over their hearts.
"What are you doing?" Pan demanded as he struggled to free himself.

"Fullfilling the prophecy and protecting my family! You see, the only way for you to die, is if we both die. And now... now, I am ready!" Rumple snarled as he plunged the dagger into his father's back and through his own chest where what remained of the Dark One's essence was stored and twisted it to banish her back to Ephesis where she belonged as his father pleaded with him to stop, promising him that they could have their happy ending.

"Ah but I'm a villain and VILLAINS DON'T GET HAPPY ENDINGS!" he snarled and twisted the blade.

A gold wave shot out from around them and all across Storybrooke, knocking everyone who stood in front of them off their feet, Henry still cradling the box containing the remaining portion of Rumple's heart in his arms protectively. The light surrounded father and son and as it cleared Rumple held his aged father's now still form, sobbing quietly and giving the man he once loved so much a kiss farewell on the cheek as he pulled the dagger out. He gently lowered Malcolm to the ground and closed the older man's eyes. "T...The...darkest of curses by a Strogoff was taken... and with my sacrifice...in the names of those I love...let this curse and all those created by it at last...be...broken!" he whispered and slumped to the ground beside his father, the front of his suit stained with his own blood and his father's. The dagger fell out of his hand and there was a blank space where his name was once engraved.
Chapter Summary

Rumple's mother Lilliana makes a painful sacrifice to protect her son and Malcolm later abandons Rumple in Neverland.

Fly to a dream
Far across the sea
All the burdens gone
Open the chest once more
Dark chest of wonders
Seen through the eyes
Of the one with pure heart
Once so long ago
Nightwish - Dark Chest of Wonders

Oz (The Outer Zone). Nonestica
Centuries ago

In the beginning the primary protectors of Oz were the goddess Lurline Diosa and her consort Aramon. In his native land Russia, his name was Ivan Strogoff and he ventured into Oz by way of a portal. Lurline was the goddess of Paradise, the realm where the good people of Oz ascended when they made the transition from mortality to the afterlife. Her sister, Alemedia Demonia was the goddess of Ephesis, the realm where the wicked descended when they were cast out of Paradise. Although they could each lay claim to the souls of the mortals who have passed on into the afterlife, they could not walk the mortal realm themselves as their parents Hades and Persephone had forbidden it.

Each goddess had her loyal followers. Lurline’s followers, the Sons and Daughters of Light were human and the most loyal built a temple in her honor in the northern realm of Oz called the Temple of Lurline but in later years it would be known as the Grey Gale in honor of Dorothy Gale, another who crossed over from the other side into the realm and defeated Alemedia’s first vessel, Bastinda, known as the Wicked Witch of the West and her sister, Nessarose, the Wicked Witch of the East.
Any being who sought refuge on the grounds of this sacred temple would be under the protection of Lurline herself until the barrier was crossed. Alemedia's followers were mostly animals, specifically demons that were part monkey and part bat. Known as mobats, they were cast out of the mortal realm and given sanctuary by the dark goddess who made them into her own personal army that she could summon out of Ephesis through markings on the skin of her current vessel. Alemedia was not satisfied merely being the ruler of Ephesis. She wanted to take control of the mortal realm as well but in order to do this, she needed a vessel and there were none more powerful than her sister's human descendants, the Ozopov and Strogoff. When one of those could not be taken, she chose her vessels from among her human followers, the Sons and Daughters of Shadowlands by sending out a dagger that once held would allow her to take possession of the host's soul and use it to wage war on Lurline and the human race itself. The dagger would bear the vessel's name as long as she held its soul in her gasp. If the vessel was killed by the dagger, her essence would transfer to the one now wielding it. The only way a vessel could exorcise the demoness was to turn the blade on themselves...and that was never done. The vessels enjoyed the power the blade and the goddess gave them far too much to even consider freedom.

Lilliana Strogoff felt like she'd been walking forever. She sat down underneath a large oak tree and cradled her newborn son in her arms. "I'll never let them find you," she vowed. "And I'll die before I'll ever tell them where you are," she added as she kissed the infant's small cheek. He looked so much like her and nothing like his father, much to her relief. A stranger in the Enchanted Forest, Lilliana thought she'd found a savior in Malcolm McDermott only the teenager and his charlatan of a father had taken all of the gold and jewels she'd sewn into her clothing to sell to support herself and sold them to gamble away or spend on their luxuries. Despondent, Lilliana went on the run again only now she carried a child in her belly and sensed her pursuers had somehow arrived in the Enchanted Forest. Their powers, as strong as her own, would be able to sense the presence of a new member of their bloodline, one whose powers would be stronger than theirs if he learned how to use them. She could not let that happen. She would not let her son fall victim to the dreaded curse cast upon her family by their vengeful ancestress Demeter, all because Persephone chose to love Hades rather than the consort chosen for her.

Another tear cascaded down her cheek as she thought of her parents; Alexander and Glinda Strogoff, the famed Wizard of Oz and Glinda the enchantress of the Southern realm, a direct descendant of Lurline and Aramon themselves. They were dead, along with her cousins Queen Dorothy Gale and King Nicolai murdered at the hands of her twin sister Zorinda. Their child, a girl named Ozma went into hiding.

Lilliana reached around her neck and removed the ruby pendant she wore. It was the only piece of jewelry Malcolm and his father hadn't stolen because she'd disguised its appearance. To her pursuers Aramon's Talisman was a powerful weapon as it had the ability to render any magical user the wearer chose powerless temporarily and could also be used to remove their magic permanently if held to the victim's heart. She pressed the talisman against her son's chest, over his heart where his magic lay dormant.

"Rumplestiltskin," she murmured. The ruby glowed as it removed the child's magic. The only stone that could restore the child's magic or remove the talisman's spell was the emerald hidden in a
secure location in her land. Her pursuers began their search for it once they realized she had the talisman in her possession for as long as she wore it, she had another defense if her own magic failed her. The task completed, she refastened the talisman around her neck and stood up. It was not much farther to the small cottage Malcolm called home. It grieved her that she had to place her son in his custody but she held onto the hope that once he saw his son, he would change his ways and be a good father to the boy. She named him Rumplestiltskin, meaning spinner of gold in Ozian for that was one of Aramon's many known abilities, spinning straw into gold.

A chill went down her spine as she sensed her pursuers were close by. She conjured a basket and placed the baby inside, covering him with a blanket then conjured a letter to Malcolm explaining that they boy was his son and signed it with the false name she'd given him when they met.

This is your son. His name is Rumplestiltskin. Please take care of him. You are all he has now.

"Goodbye my Rumple, my precious one. I am hoping one day we will meet again and you will forgive me but I fear it may be too late for me." She kissed the baby's small cheek and knocked on the door before vanished in a cloud of purple smoke.

Malcolm opened the door and glanced down to see a basket on the doorstep. He pulled back the blanket and saw an infant inside, a letter pinned to the blanket. He unfolded it and read the words, unable to believe what he was seeing was real. A child? How could he have a child? He was still one himself and an orphan at that. His father was killed in a tavern two months earlier by one of the villagers outraged over being cheated out of his hard earned money by his and Malcolm's card scheme. The sheriff was also on the lookout for young Malcolm and if he didn't pack up and leave soon he was going to end up dead just like his father.

He looked at the baby again. There was no sense in denying the child was his...it had his look about him even though it was probably no more than a few days old. He picked up the basket and walked down to the orphanage. The matron opened the door and glared at him.

"What brings you here, scum?" she demanded angrily knowing well the boy's reputation...and his late father's.

"I found this on my doorstep and I thought you should have it." he said as he attempted to hand the basket to her.

"You won't be pawning your bastard off on me, scum!" she yelled. "If you'd kept it in your britches you wouldn't have it, now would you? And don't even think about dropping it off anywhere else in this town because it'll end up right back on yours. Now go on with you!" She slammed the door shut.
Malcolm groaned with frustration and started walking back to the house, laughing bitterly. "Well, you old son of a bitch, I bet you're enjoying this. Got myself in the same damned trap you did. Raising a babe without a mother. And what the hell kind of name is Rumplestilt...oh never mind? Oh well, guess I'll have to call it Rumple. Damn that witch! If I ever find her, I'll beat her within an inch of her life for this!"

Out in the forest a group of riders on horseback came to a stop in a clearing. Two of them dismounted just as a cloud of magenta smoke appeared before them taking the form of a black haired woman with grey skin and golden eyes. They bowed to her, Zorinda Strogoff, vessel of Alemedia, known throughout the land as the Dark One.

"Have you located her?" she demanded.

"No, Dark One but she is here...and she has given birth..."

"I think it's time to have a little chat with our prisoner. Bring him!"

The two soldiers dragged a haggard looking man over to where their mistress stood and threw him to the ground at her feet. He kneeled and raised his palm. There was an eye in the center of it. She reached into the seer's chest and pulled out his heart, squeezing tightly.

"Where is she!" she snarled.

"Right here Zorinda!" the girl called out as she appeared behind her. The Dark One sneered as she turned to face the spoiled brat she once called a twin. "Let him go."

"As you wish," the Dark One murmured and crushed the heart into dust. "Dispose of that," she commanded her soldiers, gesturing to the seer's corpse. "My sister and I have some matters to attend to."

They marched away dragging the corpse behind them. The two sorceresses faced each other. "You have no idea how long I've waited for this," the Dark One snarled. "Once I'm done with you I'll find that bastard you've spawned and crush him into dust too."
"You'll never find him," Lilliana taunted and pulled the ruby pendant out of the collar of her dress. "Zorinda," she chanted, waiting for the ruby's magic to work. Zorinda giggled and pulled a pendant out of her own gown. Lilliana gasped.

"You aren't the only one who knows its hiding place now, sister dearie. Mother thought she was so clever to hide that knowledge in her heart's memories but all I had to do was...dig it out." The Dark One waved her hand and the ruby pendant appeared in it. "Lilliana..." she purred.

Lilliana could only stand helpless as her magic was being stripped from her and her sister approached, thrusting her hand into her twin's chest to pull out her heart. As she attempted to access its memories a golden light shot out of it that threw the Dark One to the ground.

"W...What have you done?" the Dark One hissed.

Lilliana smiled with satisfaction. "You should've paid more attention to your lessons, Zori. Even the Dark One's powers or the talisman can't break a protection spell on a heart's memories," she said triumphantly.

"No matter. I'll find your brat without them," Zorinda crushed the heart into dust and waved her hand. Her sister's corpse vanished. "Zozo!" she called to one of the soldiers in her command.

"Yes, Dark One?"

"Go to the village and search every house for a newborn boy!" she said.

As she mounted her horse Zozo patted his saddlebag where the Dark One's prized dagger would soon be. She'd hidden it well but Zozo was a clever man and all he had to do was watch in the shadows to see where she hid it. As he suspected it, she concealed the weapon in a chest given to her by her beloved father. Once the dagger was in his possession he would have the ability to control the bitch but he didn't want to control her. He wanted her power for himself and never again would he be a slave to someone like her. He would keep up the pretense of looking for the bitch's nephew for a little while but if the brat no longer had any magic he wouldn't be of any use to them. As for the damned ruby and emerald she had around her neck, he wasn't able to use the damned things...only those of Aramon's bloodline could use them, meaning her, the now dead sister and the brat, even without magic.

She tossed an object onto the ground and opened a portal that would take her back to their land.
Zozo snorted. The trip could have waited until they were finished in the village but he knew she didn't want her precious daddy's charms within reach of one of her kin to be used against her. It wasn't one of her kin she needed to be wary of. Sometimes the worst enemy was one who pretended to be a friend and often the danger was not seen until it was too late.

Zozo stood over the corpse of the woman once known as the Dark One, Zorinda Strogoff, holding the dagger that once bore her name in his hand. As the dead woman's blood seeped into the blade, her name was replaced with his. He allowed her to return her father's precious trinkets to their hiding place before he struck. Had he not, she would have used them on him. The Dark One powers would not serve him well in Oz for there were other mages far more powerful than he in this land, particularly those of the Ozopov Royal Family, rumored to have been descended from the fairy goddess Lurline herself as had the Strogoffs been and his only other threat was now deceased. Lilliana's brat, wherever he was in the Enchanted Forest, would not be a threat as long as he didn't find the ruby and emerald. Without magic he would have no means to get to Oz to reclaim them either. The Dark One tossed a token onto the ground in front of him and a funnel cloud appeared before him. He stepped inside and and closed his eyes, willing the storm to take him back to the Enchanted Forest. The other mages there were fairies and ones who learned the craft through studies of ancient texts. The normal humans would be easy prey for the darkest of all evils. If there was one thing he learned from the bitch Zorinda, it was how pleasing feeding on the needs of desperate souls could be and the Enchanted Forest was rich with them.

And rooted deep within his soul, the dark goddess Alemedia eagerly awaited the day when she could finally take possession of the last Strogoff. Unlike his Ozopov cousins, he was a pure blood, having magic in both bloodlines though his paternal magic's origins were from the same land as Aramon's. It was no matter. Through him she would bring Lurline and Aramon to their knees and all the realms would be hers, just as she'd killed her mother and reduced her father to a powerless, pitiful shell of his former self in Ephesis’s worst places, The Realm of the Forgotten.

The Enchanted Forest

A small boy sat in front of the wall outside a tavern waiting patiently for his father to come out. Once in a while he would say hello to someone who passed by and most of them would look down, see who it was, snort in disgust and walk away, muttering "Scum" under their breaths. He'd been hearing that world for as long as he could remember but when he asked his father about it, he would just laugh.

"Ah, pay them no mind, Rumple."

"Why do they call us scum, Papa?"

"Sore losers," he replied.
It wasn't just the adults he would hear the word from, the other children in the village would say it too while they chased him away when he asked them if he could participate in their games and most of the time they called him a rat too.

"You're not good enough to play with us, rat scum! Why don't you go down to the tavern with your papa and steal some more of our fathers' hard earned money!"

"I don't steal!" young Rumple protested. "And neither does my Papa... he wins the money in games... he said so."

The boys laughed. "You really are dumb, aren't you? Your papa's a thief and a cheat. The whole village knows it and he deserves to rot in the king's dungeon."

"Stop calling my papa names!"

"What're you gonna do rat scum? Hit us? There's three of us and one of you. We'd make mush outta ya! Go on, git!" one of them said and shoved the smaller boy. Rumple fell to the ground, striking his head on a rock. The three other boys stood around the unconscious child terrified.

"Is he dead?" another asked.

"No, but we better get outta here before he wakes up and tells on us!"

The three boys fled unaware that they were being watched. A cloaked figure emerged from the shadows and kneeled beside the unconscious boy, waving his hand over the child's bleeding head and healing his wound. The boy lacked magic but there was something about him that called to the dark sorcerer. Perhaps it was his unfortunate upbringing... the son of a thief and a cheat, the grandson of a cowardly thief and a cheat. Ah, yes, an unfortunate upbringing was the ideal breeding ground for a desperate soul in adulthood as he knew from his own upbringing and his desperation made him Zorinda's slave. Now he feared no one and that was just how he liked it.

"I wonder what it will be that finally brings you to me, boy," he murmured. "You may not have need of me now... but you will... they all will for this land is filled with desperate souls."
The Dark One chuckled and vanished.

"Rumple...Rumple...Rumple! Come on laddie, let's get going!" his father said as he shook the boy awake. Rumple rubbed his eyes and pressed his hand to his forehead, stunned when he didn't feel a bruise. Hadn't he struck his head on a rock earlier? He was about to ask his father just that when he realized Malcolm had that look on his face again, the one that the boy knew meant that there was no time for questions. The door to the tavern opened and three men came running out.

"There's that cheating bastard! Get him!" one of them yelled. "You better run you coward because when I get my hands on you I'll string you from the tallest tree in Sherwood Forest!"

As Malcolm ran, pulling his tired and disoriented son with him, Rumple spotted the three boys he'd been arguing with earlier pointing at them and laughing. "Run along rat scum!" they taunted.

When they finally reached the shack that was their home, Rumple could barely keep his eyes open. He was also hungry...his father had forgotten to get them something for supper again. Thinking he would eat something later, Rumple lay on his pallet and fell back to sleep unaware that while he was asleep his father left the shack and went back into town again, angry when the money he'd taken from the patrons of the tavern would be just enough to buy something to eat for himself and the boy.

I'd have some left over if I didn't have him around, he thought angrily. That bitch. Drops this damned kid off on me while she's probably living in a grand castle somewhere with whatever's left of those fine jewels she had.

He woke the boy up a little later to eat. He wasn't much of a cook and the food tasted terrible but Rumple ate every morsel and washed all the dirty dishes. Had he not, they would've sat because his father never wanted to clean anything.

They'd been moving from village to village for as long as he could remember and always for the same reason: his father never could get a decent job and when he played his 'Follow the Lady' game in the taverns, someone would always accuse him of being a cheat. One day Rumple decided to go in the tavern with his father and watch him play the game. He shuffled the three cards around the table and flipped the middle one over to reveal a joker.

"What?" his customer demanded angrily.
"Don't feel too bad," Malcolm taunted. "You're not the only one who's been spurned by the lady tonight. She's been quite shy all evening." As he held up his arm, the customer noticed a card tucked under it.

"You tricked me!"

"What you gonna do?"

The man's reply was to deliver a hard punch to Malcom's face. As he hauled Malcolm up and shoved him against the wall with a hand around his throat and his other first ready to deliver another punch Rumple ran over to them and placed his hand on the man's arm.

"Please don't hurt him. He's my father!" the boy pleaded.

"You'd be better off without him!" the man said and punched Malcolm hard in the stomach. He fell to the ground and the man kneeled down, snatching the purse full of coins from his belt, an entire evening's worth of winnings that he wanted to use to have himself a pint. He assured the boy he would find a way to get back the money and sped off, leaving Rumple alone in the tavern.

The next day they traveled to a small cottage where the spinsters Moira and Tatiana lived. Rumple didn't want to stay with them, he wanted to be with his father. Malcolm assured him he would only stay with them until he got a real job only Moira and Tatiana knew this to be a lie. The man's reputation was well known even to recluses as they were and the poor child was better off without him. The only comfort the man offered his son was a straw doll Rumple named Peter Pan. The doll gave the child some comfort but the spinsters felt he needed more things to occupy his time. They started teaching him how to spin wool and were shocked when the boy proved to be a skilled spinner. It was his hope that he would be able to make money so that he and his father could be together.

The two women, difficult as it was, felt it was their duty to tell the boy the truth about his scoundrel of a father. Although he was a skilled wool spinner even at such a young age, his father's tarnished reputation would make earning a good living difficult for the boy once he became an adult. The only solution they had was a magic bean they found one day yet had no use for. They suggested the child use it to go to another land without his father yet Rumple loved his father and the prospect of going to a new land alone terrified him. He left the cottage and went to the pub, confident his father wasn't there only to be disappointed to discover that he was. Heartbroken, the boy fled the pub. Malcolm quickly caught up with him.

For a while it seemed that his father did want to make the fresh start he promised him in the place
he called Neverland...until he became obsessed with wanting to fly. Rumple, terrified of heights, preferred keeping his feet on the ground and he was growing tired of his father acting more like a child there and wanted to leave. Then the monster came out of nowhere and seized him.

"A child can't have a child, Rumple," his father said as the shadow held him in the air. Rumple screamed in terror, trying to reach for his father. The shadow flew higher and the doll Rumple held in his hand fell to the ground, gesturing to his father who was no longer a man anymore but the child he wanted to be. Then the two of them flew out of Neverland. The shadow said nothing as it dropped the child at the doorstep of the spinsters' home and disappeared. He reached for the knocker with a trembling hand and tapped it against the door. As soon as the women saw the weeping boy on their doorstep, they helped him inside and put him to bed promising him he would always have a home with them. As he lay there, he realized his benefactors had been right after all...he was better off without his father and he never wanted to hear the name Pater Pan again. His doll was gone forever...just like his father.

Although the pain of being abandoned by his father never truly went away, Rumple grew to love the two spinsters and to him, they were his family. The wool the three of them spun together sold well in the marketplace and Moira and Tatiana had their hopes that one day he would become the most sought after wool spinner in the village now that his foolish father was out of his life. Unfortunately, his father's reputation shadowed the boy and he was forced to prove he was nothing like his father constantly as he grew into adulthood.

The only bright spot he had was the day a beautiful woman approached his table at the marketplace, interested in buying some wool from him. For Rumple it was love at first sight. He was so captivated by her that he could barely get his name out when she asked for it.

"It's...ahh...Rumple...Rumplestiltskin," he stammered.

"Rumplestiltskin?" she mispronounced.

He chuckled. "No, no...it's Rumplestiltskin...but ahh...you can call me Rumple."

"That name's quite a mouthfull. Who gave it to you? Your father?"

"No...my mother."

"Oh. Well...I'll take some of this wool," she said and picked her selection, their hands brushing
against each other as he was putting it in the basket she carried with her. He lowered his head so that she couldn't see the blush in his cheeks. She handed him the coins for her purchase.

"Thank you...ummm..."

"Milah," she answered.

Milah, he thought. Her name sounded as beautiful as she was.

"Thank you, Milah."

He watched her walk away, wondering if he would ever see her again. When he walked home that day he felt as if he were floating on air and was humming a tune. Moira was at her wheel spinning more wool for them to sell the following day as well as some blankets they weaved while Tatiana cooked their dinner.

"Well, it sounds like someone had a good day," she remarked. "Why Rumple...your cheeks are as red as roses! Are you ill, lad?"

"No...I...uh...met someone at the market."

"Oh?" Moira smiled. "And by the looks of you I'd say it was a lass."

"It was," he admitted.

The two women glanced at each other, grinning. Moira sat down at the table and motioned for him to join her. "It's good to see that you're finally starting to take an interest in the ladies, Rumple. You're not a boy anymore and soon you should be thinking about settling down and having a family of your own."

"You are my family," he said softly.

"Yes but we're not going to live forever, lad." She reached across the table and took his hand in
hers. "Don't you want to get married and have your own children?"

"I don't want to be a bad father...like him," he said bitterly.

"You are nothing like your father!" Tatiana said firmly. "Because you have the one thing he doesn't...a good heart."

"Not according to everyone in the village," he said sadly. "Oh, they are polite to me in the marketplace and buy the wool I sell yet I can see the scorn in their faces...and I'm never invited to any of the festivals or dances. And I'll probably never see her again."

He was surprised at the end of the week when Milah approached his table just as he'd finished packing up for day, so nervous that he dropped his purse of coins. They both bent over to pick it up, their heads knocking together, sending them both tumbling to the ground.

"Oh! I'm so sorry...are you hurt?" he asked worriedly as he helped her to her feet.

"No, I'm all right," she insisted and handed him his purse. "I was hoping to catch you before you left for the day...I'm a bit late, aren't I?"

"Ummm...no, not at all. What would you like?" he asked, indicating the items he had for sale.

"I don't need anything today."

His face fell. "Right."

"I...I wanted to ask you if you wanted to go to spring festival with me tonight."

He was stunned. The most beautiful girl in the village wanted him to go to the spring festival? Him? He was the son of a coward and a cheat, an unknown mother, raised by spinsters and she could take her pick of men in the village far more handsome. Why was she asking him when she probably had so many far more tempting offers?
"You look shocked Rumple."

"Well I...ahhh." He cursed himself for his shyness. "I...I never go to the festivals and no one has ever invited me."

"Then it's time you did go," she said firmly. "I'll meet you over at the spinsters house in the evening...say around five?"

"Okay."

She smiled. "Great. I'll see you then."

Moira watched from the doorway of Rumple's bedroom with a grin as the nervous young man raced around his room trying to find something suitable to wear to the festival and constantly glanced at his reflection in the cracked and faded mirror. She knew if she didn't calm him down he would not be ready by the time Milah arrived and would miss the perfect opportunity to be out among people and perhaps a woman he could finally have the family he needed. She went into her bedroom and retrieved the new outfit she and Tatiana made for him weeks earlier. He was still trying to get his boots on when he heard Milah knocking on the door. Once again he was at a loss for words when he opened the door and saw her standing there, a vision in a white dress. His hands trembled as he handed her the bouquet of flowers he bought at another market on the way home that afternoon.

All eyes were on them as they walked into the tavern that was hosting the spring festival. He knew what they were thinking: what was a beauty like Milah doing with him, the son of a coward and a cheat? Part of him wanted to turn and run while the other couldn't bear to leave Milah's sight. She started introducing him to everyone she knew, praising his talent as a spinner and a weaver while he remained humble. Still the word spread throughout the tavern that if you were looking for the finest wool in the village, Rumplestiltskin was the one to go to and soon he found that people were willing to talk to him more.

"After a while, people aren't even going to remember your father," Milah assured him. "Come on, let's dance!"

"I don't know how," he confessed sadly.

"No better time to learn then," she said as she pulled him out to the center of the room where the
others danced gaily. He stepped on her toes several times yet instead of being angry, she simply
laughed it off and playfully stepped on his. "There...now we're even."

Now for the first time he found himself thinking that he could settle down and have a family...be a
better man and father than his father was and there was no other bride he wanted more than the
woman he was holding at that moment. Being at the spring festival was just the start. From that
night on, what time he didn't spend in the marketplace or at home was devoted to his courtship of
her. Every morning she would open her front door to find a bouquet of freshly picked flowers on
her doorstep and a note asking her to meet him somewhere. They would have picnics in the forest
and he would present her with gifts of shawls and blankets he weaved himself. Her parents didn't
approve of him because of his father's reputation despite Milah's insistence that he was nothing like
the infamous Malcolm. Her parents were forced to change their minds when Milah started inviting
him into their house. Although he was still a bit shy, it was obvious to both of them that he truly
cared for their daughter. They'd been courting for over a year when he finally worked up the
courage to propose marriage and ask for her parents' blessing.

Their wedding was a small, simple affair as were many in their village. He didn't mind. The only
thing that mattered to him was that he could finally be with the woman he loved and one day their
lives would be complete when she brought their first child into the world.

Every village in the Enchanted Forest was gripped with fear as the ogres marched across the land,
destroying lands, destroying lives as children lost fathers, wives lost husbands, and mothers lost
sons. Every able bodied man was being called to the front lines to fight, so many of them not
returning at all and very few of them returning barely clinging to life. In the small village where
the spinner and weaver Rumplestiltskin lived with his wife Milah, every day was much like the one
before it. They spent most of the morning in the marketplace selling the wool they spun and he was
teaching her to weave so that she could make her own items to sell and double their income. They
even talked about starting a family, holding off until they felt they were bringing in enough income
to support a child.

One day Rumple was minding their table in the marketplace alone when a soldier approached him.

"Are you Rumplestiltskin?" he inquired.

"Yes. Yes I am." he answered.

The soldier handed him a scroll. The spinner unrolled it and read the contents, smiling.

"You will report for training in the morning," the soldier informed him.
"I must tell my wife..."

"Then do so."

Rumple raced home with the scroll in his hand. This was the chance he'd been waiting for his whole life. If he fought bravely in the Ogre Wars he would no longer be branded the son of a coward and a thief and he would at last be given the opportunities for success that eluded him all his life. When he opened the front door he found his wife at work weaving.

"Milah," he greeted warmly.

"I'm almost finished," she said proudly as she held up the shawl she was working on.

He smiled. "Well, you learn quickly."

"I had a good teacher," she said and kissed him. "What is it? What brings you home so early?"

"Milah, my weaving days are behind us. I've been called to the front." He handed her the scroll. She frowned as she read it.

"The Ogre Wars..."

"I report for training in the morning."

"No, Rumple! I've heard the stories. The front is a brutal place." she said fearfully.

"Dear, I know, I know. And I can't say I won't be frightened. But this is the chance I've been waiting for. All my life. You know, I've lived under the shadow of my father's actions for far too long now," he reminded her.

"Just because your father was a coward that doesn't mean that you are."
"Oh, I know that. As do you. But to the world? Fighting in this war finally gives me the chance to prove that to everyone else," he said.

Milah beamed with pride. She knew this couldn't be easy for him but she was glad he was willing to take the chance. "Go. Be brave. Fight honorably," she told him offering him what little encouragement she could.

"I love you," he said softly.

"I love you too," she murmured as they kissed. "And when you return, we can live the life we've always dreamed of. We can have a family."

He was grinning from ear to ear as he made his way to the training camp. A family. There was nothing more he wanted than to have a child of his own. He didn't care if it was a son, a daughter or both. He would love his children and they would love him. They wouldn't have much in the way of material possessions unless his luck changed but what did it matter when you lived in a home full of love?

Learning how to use a sword and a spear was far more difficult than spinning and weaving and he was not having much success at it. No matter how hard he tried, he never could get his spears to reach their targets and his sword strokes were too weak. He could feel the commanding officer's eyes on him and imagined the thoughts going through his head. Still he kept trying. They decided to teach him how to shoot arrows and unfortunately he almost shot one of the other trainees.

"Don't worry about it. I'm a poor shot myself," one of them assured him. "Just keep trying and you'll get better at it."

The next lesson he had was at the catapult. He could barely lift the rocks to throw onto it so they decided to teach him how to operate it. He felt like dancing a jig when he managed to fire it without any difficulty.

"Looks like we've finally found something you are good at here, spinner."

"I'd like to keep trying the sword and spear lessons too sir," Rumple said softly.
"Maybe in the morning."

He was walking back to his tent when another of the commanding offers stopped him.

"I'm needed at the front. You guard this crate with your life." he instructed as he gestured toward a crate that was covered.

"What's under there?" Rumple inquired curiously.

"A prisoner that can help us turn the tide against the ogres. Careful. It's a tricky beast."

"Yes, sir."

Rumple walked toward the crate, curious to see what was inside until he remembered the officer's warning that it contained a tricky beast. He turned his back to it, following his instructions to simply guard it and nothing more.

"Rumplestiltskin..." he heard a female voice call out. He heard movement inside the crate and approached it slowly, fearing what he would find in there. What would the beast do to him? Would it seize him with his massive claws and tear him to pieces. He pulled back the canvas and gasped in shock when he saw a young girl inside...a girl who had no eyes!

"You're a child..." he murmured.

The child tilted her head and gestured toward the bucket at his feet. "Please. I haven't had a sip in days."

He was stunned. How could the child know there was a bucket of water there when she had no eyes? And how did she know his name?

"How do you know my name?" he asked.

"I'm a Seer. I see all," the child explained.
"No, no, no, that's not possible. You must have overheard someone speak."

She held up her hand with a bright blue eye in the center. "Rumplestiltskin, the son of a coward, raised by spinsters, scared of ending up just like his father. Did I overhear that? I told you. I see all, even what is yet to pass."

"You mean the future? You can see the future?" Rumple inquired curiously.

"Indeed I can, including yours," she replied.

"No, no, no. I won't indulge this... dark magic."

He'd had enough experience with magic to last a lifetime, magic that came in the form of the bean he'd used to take himself and his father to Neverland thinking that they could start over, only he'd been abandoned and his father was now a child again. No good would ever come from magic.

"Even if what I see concerns your wife? Milah?"

He flinched. Oh, this girl was a tricky one all right, knowing exactly what to say. He could hear a warning voice in his head telling him to just put the canvas back over the crate and walk away while another, stronger voice spoke.

Listen to her.

"Why? Has something happened to her?" he demanded.

The seer once again asked for water. He handed her a cup and asked her to explain herself, stunned when she informed him Milah was with child. He certainly knew it was possible but how could he believe this creature. Surely she was only telling him what he wanted to hear in exchange for comfort or possibly to escape her confinement. What she said next sent a bitter chill through his bones.
"Your wife will bear you a son, but your actions on the battlefield will leave him fatherless."

"I'm gonna die? No, no, no. You...you must tell me how I can stop that happening."

"You can't."

"Then I'm done helping you!" he said angrily.

"For now. Someday you'll help me again."

That's what you think, he thought bitterly.

"I'll bet Milah isn't even pregnant. You just said that so I would give you water, and now you're trying to trick me into deserting!" And that was one thing he didn't want to do. His father had been a deserter, not of the army but of his familial responsibilities...just like his mother and he would not repeat their mistakes. No, he would stay and fight with honor as Milah wanted him to. He would make himself a husband to be proud of. No longer would his father's shadow haunt him.

"You shall see. Tomorrow. When you see the army ride cows into battle, you will know I speak the truth," she insisted.

"Cows? And who's going to man the catapults? Milk maids? I have had enough with your fiendish lies."

"There is no escaping it. You will have a son, and your actions will leave him fatherless."

Rumple yanked the canvas down over the crate. "Crazy witch! Does she honestly expect me to believe we'd actually ride cows into battle when we have horses aplenty in this land?" he muttered and sat down. An hour later another soldier was sent to relieve him so that he could have something to eat. He tried to put the seer's words out of his mind.

Your actions will leave him fatherless...
The battle was over for the day and the survivors returned with the wounded. One man was missing an arm and he was added to the list of the few who would be returned home and Rumple was learning quickly that being disabled or dead were the only two ways anyone made it home. Their commanding officer returned.

"Fortune favors us! Fresh supplies have arrived from the Duke. Today, we will not be marching into battle. We'll be riding."

When you see the army ride cows into battle, you will know I speak the truth.


"What kind of question is that? A horse, of course. Now grab yourself a cow and get ready."

Oh no! No, no, no...she was right...I am going to die...and my son will be fatherless...just as I was!

"I'm sorry, sir. What did you say?"

"A cow. The saddles we just got in—made from the finest leather. We call'em "cows." Grab yours, so at least the ride into doom will be a soft one on your backside."

Rumple paled.

"Are you all right?" one of the other soldiers asked.

"Yeah. Yes. You...You go. I'll catch up." he said quickly and the other man left. "Oh, no. So it's all true. I'm going to have a son. And I'm gonna die? Answer me!" he demanded when he approached the canvas and pulled back the cover. To his dismay it was empty. He shook it frantically then backed away with exhaustion. Out of the corner of his eye he could see a hammer lying out.

I have to...for my son. Milah, forgive me...but I cannot leave my boy without a father...not like he left me.
He raised the hammer and swung in, screaming in agony as his ankle breaks. The noise brings a group of soldiers running to his side.

"Rum! Hell's fury, what happened?" one of them asked.

"I...I..."

"I saw the whole damned thing!" another growled. "I shoulda known. Your father was no good coward and he raised one!" He shoved Rumple. The injured spinner fell to the ground.

"Is this true? Did you deliberately injure yourself?" the commanding officer interrogated.

"Ummm..."

"Go on...lie through your teeth, coward!"

"Yes I did!" Rumple moaned.

"I won't have a coward in my regiment." the commander snapped as he walked away.

"They should kill you and put your head on a pike!" another yelled.

"Oh no...once word gets out what he's done, that'll be a far worse punishment."

"Hope it was worth it, Hobblefoot! Go on, get out of here!"

Rumple began the long journey back home, fighting back tears as he used the broken end of a spear for support. Yes, he would be branded a coward but if the seer's words were true, he would have a son waiting for him at home, a son who would have a father. For that reason alone, he had no regrets. He arrived home a week later, overjoyed when he opened the door to his home and found his wife cradling a baby in her arms.
"What's his name?" he asked.

"Baelfire."

"A strong name!" he said proudly and sank to the floor in pain.

She glared at him. "Something he'll need if he's to live with the shame of being your son," she said bitterly, berating him for injuring himself. She'd heard the news from the wife of one of the other soldiers sent home, one who received his own injuries in battle, accusing him of being just like his own father.

"I am nothing like my father. He tried to abandon me. I will never, ever do that to my son. That's why I did this...for him. All for the boy. To save him from the same fate I suffered, growing up without a father!" he defended. She would hear nothing of it. She thrust the baby into his arms and stormed out of the cottage. Rumple cradled his son to his chest, weeping softly. "Oh. Oh, it's all right, Bae. It's all right. Your Papa's here. And I promise... I will never... ever leave you."
Chapter Summary

Rumple succumbs to destiny and becomes the Dark One

He feeds on fear
He feeds on pain
He rules again
With growing hate
He will guide
Their faith again

No light in the darkness
Is too small to see
There's always a sparkle of hope
If you just believe

~ Within Temptation - Deciever of Fools ~

From that day on things were different between them. She banished him from their bed, forcing him to sleep on a cold pallet on the floor and barely spoke to him except in anger or to taunt him for running away yet he still loved her and he loved their son. He still went to the marketplace to sell his wool and weaving projects but did not earn as much money as he used to now that word got around that he fled the battlefield. He wanted to believe that another man in the same situation he'd faced would have done the same thing.

Milah's ill treatment of him hurt but not as much as her neglecting her duties as a mother. There were far too many days when he returned home from the marketplace to find his boy alone. He heard rumors that she was spending far too much time in the tavern like his father did, only she wasn't cheating at cards but drinking and talking with other men.

"Milah? Bae? I'm home," he called out, limping into the shack to find his son once again alone. "Where's mum? Well, she probably just lost track of time. Grab your cloak. We'll find her," he said when his son didn't answer his question. They found her down at the tavern playing cards with several men and drinking.

"Milah, it's time to go," he said gently.

"Good. So go," she said while the men around her laughed.

"Who's this?" one of them asked.

"Ah, it's no one. Just my husband."

The other man studied him, smirking. "Oh. Well he's a tad taller than you described."
Rumple was shocked. She'd been poking fun at him with these strangers? He would endure every insult she had to dish out...as long as she stayed and was a real mother to their boy. "Please. You have responsibilities," he reminded her.

"You mean like being a man and fighting in the ogre wars? Other wives became honored widows while I became lashed to the village coward. I need a break. Run home, Rumple. It's what you're good at," she said bitterly.

"Mama?" Rumple heard his son call out behind him, his heart sinking. The last thing he wanted his boy to see was his mother carousing in a tavern.

"Bae. You were supposed to wait outside, son," he said gently. Milah glared at her husband, rose from the stool and walked over to their son, taking him by the hand and leading him out of the tavern, glaring at her husband during the rest of the walk home.

"You enjoyed embarassing me like that, didn't you?" she snapped at him as she lay on her cot while he handed her a cup of tea. He shook his head vehemently.

"You don't really wish I'd died... during the ogre wars, do you?" he asked sadly.

She sighed. "I wish you'd fought. Don't you?"

"I would have, Milah...but I couldn't leave my boy without a father and well...I'm alive, and I'm here with you, with Bae."

"This isn't a life. Not for me. Why can't we just leave?" she suggested hopefully.

"We've talked about that."

"You don't have to be the village coward. We could start again, go somewhere no one knows us, see... the whole world beyond this village."

"I know this wasn't the life you wanted, but it.. it can be good here. At least try, if not for me, then... for Bae." Rumple said softly. They didn't have much where they were but starting over in a new place would be just as difficult.

"Okay. I'll try," she whispered.

The next day someone knocked on his door with news that terrified him. The same men who'd been in the tavern the night before had taken his wife. He made his way down to the docks as quick as he could with his injured leg and fell while trying to climb aboard a pirate ship named the Jolly Roger.

"On your feet for the captain!" one of the men barked and pulled Rumple to his feet in front of a man he recognized immediately. It was the same one Milah had been drinking with at the bar the night before.

"I...I remember you, fr...from the bar," Rumple said nervously.

"It's always nice to make an impression. Where are my manners? We haven't been formally introduced. Killian Jones. Now what are you doing aboard my ship?" the captain asked.

"W- well you have my wife," Rumple stammered.

"I've had many a man's wife."
"No, you... you see, we... we have a son, and he needs his mother."

"And see, I have a ship full of men who need... companionship," Jones said and smiled lasciviously.

"I- I'm begging you. Please let her go."

"I'm not much for bartering. That said, I do consider myself an honorable man, a man with a code. So... if you truly want your wife back, all you have to do is take her. Never been in a duel before, I take it?" Jones asked after he'd tossed a sword at the frightened Rumple. Part of him wanted to pick it up and fight while the other that reminded him he had a child at home spoke louder. He did nothing. "Well, it's quite simple, really. The pointy end goes in the other guy. Go on. Pick it up," Jones challenged. "A man unwilling to fight for what he wants deserves what he gets," he said coldly.

"Please, sir. What am I gonna tell my boy?" Rumple asked sadly.

"Try the truth. His father's a coward. Get this coward off my ship!" he instructed his crew members. They tossed the spinner onto the docks and released the lines securing their ship. Rumple watched it sail away, sobbing quietly then picked up his fallen walking stick and started back home.

"Papa? Where's Mama?" Bae asked him when he returned home.

"Mama's gone," he croaked. "Oh Bae..."

"You mean...she's not coming back?" the child inquired.

"No....it's just...just you and me now..." his father sobbed, drawing his son into his embrace. "And I will never, ever, leave you."

Little changed in their lives with Milah's absence. Rumple still went to the marketplace to sell his spinning and weaving projects and saw to it that his son was fed, clothed and had all the love he needed. The boy loved him, just as he loved his own father only unlike Malcolm, Rumple was determined to be the best father to the child he could possibly be. The Ogre Wars still raged and the villagers were more fearful than ever because the drafting age was being lowered every year. Now it was fourteen and in three days time Baelfire would be fourteen and once again, Rumple was forced to go on the run to save his child.

"Bae. Bae. Wake up, son. Come on. Wake up, son. We're going now. We're going now. Come on. Come on," Rumple cried ungently as he rose his son from his sleep and they fled the shack in the dead of night.

"It feels wrong to run away," Bae said.

"It's worse to die, son. I'm not having you taken away to the Ogre wars."

While they were walking, they spotted a beggar on the road.

"Alms for the poor? Alms for the poor?"

Yes," Rumple said and handed him a few of the coins from the pouch he'd been carrying. It wasn't a fortune but he hoped it would last them until they reached a safe place.

Zozo lowered the hood of his cloak and grinned wickedly. It was too much to hope for. His salvation would come at the hands of the last of the Strogoff bloodline just as the prophecy stated.
Although the man looked little like Berenika Strogoff and she'd removed most of his powers with Aramon's Talisman, some of them remained, lying dormant until they could be reactivated but they never would, not if he carried the curse of the Dark One.

You'll never sacrifice yourself in the name of true love, will you fool? No, you'll fall just as Zorinda and I will....when another of your blood turn your blade on you in desperation to want what you have.

'Are you sure there's no other way?' Bae was asking his father.

"Oh, I can't lose you, Bae. You're all I've got left, son. You don't understand what war is like - what they do to you." Hearing horses in the distance, Rumple attempts to move his son out of their sight. "Quick, hide! In the ditch - hide. Go, go! Go!"

Lord Hordor, the man who had been taking children from the villages pulled his horse to a stop. "Stop right there!' he commanded while they surrounded the father and son. "What are you doing on the king's realm?"

"We have some wool to sell at the fair at Longbourne." Rumple lied.

"I know you, don't I?"

"What was your name? Hmmmm? Spindlehanks? Threadwhistle? Hobblefoot?" Hordor asked after his dismounted his horse, his men chuckling.

"His name's Rumplestiltskin." Bae declared proudly.

"Hush, boy!" Rumple ordered.

"Rumple...ah, the man who ran. Is this your boy? How old is he? What's your name?"

"I'm Baelfire and I'm thirteen."

"When's your birthday?"

"In two days time."

"Hush, boy!"

"Did you teach him how to run as well, Rumplestiltskin? Did he tell you? Did he tell you how he ran and the ogres turned the tide of the battle, and all the others were killed, and he returned home to a wife who could not bear the sight of him?"

"Please…” Rumple moaned, not wanting his son to feel about him the way the others had. He couldn't bear it.

You see, women do not like to be married to cowards," Hordor went on not caring how wounded the other man was by his words.

"Please don't speak to my boy like that," Rumple pleaded softly.

"It's treason to avoid service. Take the boy now."

"No, no, no! What do you want?" Rumple asked frantically.

"What do I want? You have no money, no influence, no land, no title, no power. The truth is, all
you really have is fealty. Kiss my boot,” Hordor instructed maliciously.

"I don't understand...."

"You asked my price. Kiss my boot."

"Not in front of my boy," he begged.

"Kiss my boot!"

It's for Bae.....he thought sadly as he fell to his knees and kissed the lord's boot, trying to block out the laughter but his humiliation was not yet over. The lord delivered a sharp kick to Rumple's stomach making him fall to the ground,

"Papa!" Bae cried, coming to his father's side when the men rode away. They both froze in fear when they heard someone else approaching. Rumple's mind was at bit more at ease when he recognized the beggar from the road.

"No, no, no! No! It's okay. Let me help you. Let me help you home," he said.

"Thank you, old man," Bae said politely.

"I don't have any money to pay you," Rumple confessed as the man helped him to his feet.

"I can think of another way. You just leave me whatever you can spare, and I'll find a way to be your benefactor. Come," he said, following the pair down the road.

Foolish boy. You have too much of Berenika's goodness in you, Zozo mused. And the boy is your weakness. To have absolute power you must learn the lesson that Zorinda and I did...you can have no weaknesses that can be used against you.

His predecessor's first victims had been her own parents. She'd had Zozo and his men slaughter them in their beds while they slept then traveled to the famed Emerald City and eliminated their Ozopov cousins in the same manner. Demeter's curse was playing itself out nicely. It was just a matter of time before their bloodlines died out by each other's hands.

They returned to the shack. Rumple tucked his son into bed and set a pot of stew on the fire. He didn't think he was much of a cook but his son never complained and neither was the beggar, then again, Rumple thought the poor man probably hadn't had a home cooked meal in a long time.

"Another day gone. There'll be no fleeing, now," Rumple said despondently,

"No. You need to find another way. You need to choose a different path," Zozo insisted. And you will...it just won't be by choice.

"Choose? What choice do I have?"

"Everyone has a choice."

"I'm the town coward. The only choice I have is which corner to hide in. I'm lame, friendless… The only thing I've got is my boy. And they're going to take him away from me. If they take him away, I would truly, truly become dust," Rumple wept.

"Not if you have power."

"You may as well say diamonds."
"Get a hold of yourself! Think. Why do you think that someone as powerful as the Dark One would work for a useless fool like the Duke of the Frontlands?" Zozo hissed.

"Tell me."

"The Duke has the Dark One in thrall. He's enslaved him with the power of a mystical dagger and on the blade is written a name – the true name of the Dark One. If you steal the dagger, then you would control the Dark One yourself. And then no one would be able to take your son away from you."

"To keep a man like the Dark One as a slave? No, I… I-I can't. I'd be terrified."

"Then, perhaps, instead of controlling the power, you need to take it. In the Duke's castle is a dagger with the name of the Dark One engraved on it. Take the dagger and you control the Dark One. Or if you kill the Dark One with that dagger, you take his powers for your own."

"Then nothing would be able to hurt my boy…or take him from me?"

Zozo grinned. "Nothing."

The next morning Rumple set his son to work soaking wool that he wrapped around sticks to make torches.

"Keep that fire good and stoked, Bae. The sheep's fat needs to be liquid and get that wool good and soaked."

"Why are we doing this, Papa? This is good wool. We can spin and sell."

"These are our keys to the castle, son. And once I'm inside there's something I have to take."

"What do you need to take?"

"That old beggar? He told me a fine tale – about the Duke and his magical dagger."

"What does it do?"

"If I own that dagger, I control the Dark One. If I kill the Dark One with the dagger, I take his powers."

"By god's name," Baelfire whispered fearfully.

"Imagine me with those powers. Can you imagine me with those powers, Bae? I could get to redeem myself. I could turn it towards good. I'll save all the children of the Frontlands – not just you, my boy," Rumple said excitedly.

"I'd love to see that, but if the law says I'm to fight, I… I can fight."

"No, no, no! The law doesn't want you to fight, son. The law wants you to die. That's not battle – that's sacrifice, son. You look at that red in the sky. That's not the… The fires of the battlefields – that's the blood of our people, son. It's the blood of children. The blood of children like you. I mean, what sane person would want to get involved with that?"

"So, it's true."

"What?"
"It's true. It's true you ran," Bae accused.

"I had no choice, son.

"And Mother? Did she leave you like the knight said? You told me she was dead."

"She is dead."

"So, what do we need to do?" Bae asked, sitting down.

Rumple kneeled next to his son as he worked.

"The Duke's castle is made of stone, but the floors and the rafters are made of wood."

"Why does that matter?"

"Because wood burns and that's were these will come in handy," he said holding up a torch.

Later that night the two of them made their way to the Duke's castle. Using the lantern, they lit one of the torches, setting a bale of hay ablaze. As the fire spread through the wood in the floors and rafters, Rumple entered the castle in search of his prize, concealed behind a tapestry. He took it from its compartment and limped out of the castle, into the woods where his son waited.

"Papa!" Bae cried, jumping to his feet.

"Oh, Bae."

"I was so worried for you. Are… Are you burned? The castle..."

"I'm fine, son. I'm fine. I need you to go home and wait for me there."

"Come with me – please. I have a bad feeling."

Rumple removed the dagger and held it up into the light so that he could read the name engraved. Zoso! Zoso! I summon thee!" He was disheartened when nothing appeared and lowered the dagger. As he turned around he saw a hideous creature in a dark cloak behind him. He gasped in fright and dropped his torch, backing away.

"You were asking for me?" The Dark One inquired.

"Submit, oh Dark One! I control you," Rumple comanded, clutching the dagger tightly in his hand.

"Yes, you do. Wield the power wisely. You can wield it anytime now. It's almost dawn. That means it's your son's birthday. I bet Hordor and his men are already on their way to your house."

"No, they can't take him!"

"You don't control them. You control me. Have you ever wondered was he really your child at all. Unlike you, he's not a coward and yearns to fight and die in glory."

"No..."

"What a poor bargain that would be to lay down your soul to have your bastard son. So, I ask you, what would you have me to do?" Zozo taunted.

"Die!" Rumple snarled as he stabbed the Dark One with his own dagger, gasping in horror as he
recognized the beggar he'd been with earlier. "It's you. You are the beggar."

"Looks like you made a deal you didn't understand. I don't think you're gonna do that again," He laughed. "Just like her. Just like me."

"You told me to kill you!" Rumple cried.

"My life was such a burden. You'll see. Magic always comes with a price. And now, it's yours to pay."

"Why me? Why me?"

"I know how to recognize a desperate soul.....and it was your destiny.......the darkest of curses by a Strogoff shall be taken and through a sacrifice in the name of true love the curse by a Strogoff shall be broken....." Zozo mumbled.

"No! No! Stay! You have to tell me what to do! Tell me what to do!" Rumple cried frantically, seeing his skin changing colors as his name appeared on the dagger's blade, still soaked with Zozo's blood. Memories that weren't his begin to play through his mind along with knowledge, knowledge that he never had before...and power. That power would make sure that no one ever harmed him or his son again. He kept those thoughts in his mind as he walked back home, never giving a second thought to his dying predecessor's final words.

The dagger in his hand, the new Dark One walked back to his village, determined to protect what was his, his son...and gods help anyone who got in his way. As he suspected that bastard Hordor was already at his house trying to take his son away. He raised the dagger and plunged it into the soldier holding the bastard's horse.

"Dark One," Hordor said and kneeled then looked up, not recognizing the grey skinned man approaching him. "No....who are you?"

Perfect. Just where you need to be...on your knees...all of you!

"Have you forgotten me already?" Rumple asked in a high pitched voice as the curse surged through him. "What was it you used to call me again? Spiddleshanks...." He snapped his fingers. "Hobblefoot!"

Not hobbling now, am I you bastard?

"Papa?" Bae asked fearfully.

"Rumplestiltskin," Hordor answered, now terrified himself. There was nothing more dangerous than a Dark One that had control of his own dagger. And there was nothing he couldn't do without a master either.

"Wonderful. And now you shall know me as the new Dark One. How about a little fealty. Kiss my boot," he hissed. As Hordor bent over to obey, Rumple grabbed his neck and snapped it.

"Papa, no!" Bae screamed as his father went about dispatching the rest of the knights with his dagger. "What's happened to you?" he asked as he stared down at the dead bodies around them.

"You're safe Bae. Do you feel safe, son?" Rumple asked. The boy backed away.

"No, I'm frightened."
"I'm not," Rumple said calmly. "I protected what's mine and I'm not afraid of anything."

"Papa....what did you do? You took the power of the Dark One!"

"I had to!" Rumple insisted. "I did it for you, Bae! I couldn't let them take you from me too. You're all I have!"

"Why did you kill them?"

"What do you think would have happened if I didn't? I'll tell you, Bae. They would've found a way to take you from me to fight in those damned wars and I will not have it!"

"You said you would end the war. You said you'd free all the children!"

"And I will," Rumple vowed. "Even if I have to kill every ogre that breathes to do it," he said under his breath.

Years before he fled from the Ogre Wars to make certain that his son had a father. Now he returned to put an end to them. Some of the soldiers who had been in the same training camp with him watched in amazement as he walked out into the middle of the battlefield to call to an end of the wars and the release of all the children. Several of the giants made the mistake of thinking they could simply crush the little human under their boots. A few flicks of the wrist was all it took to convince them this one was more than he appeared, changing them all into snails and crushing them under his boots. Now it was the ogres turn to flee in fear.

It was a glorious day for the people of the Frontlands when the Dark One appeared in every village with a large group of children walking behind him. For those who had been injured, he healed what wounds he could with his magic and provided them with a comfortable carriage to ride home in and others brought home those who had fallen so that they could be buried with honors. All the insults given to the formerly crippled spinner gave way to expressions of gratitude as mothers and fathers welcomed their children back into their arms.

Rumple soon found himself in high demand. All hours of the day people were calling on him wanting to make deals in exchange for easing their burdens no matter how silly they may have seemed to him. Sometimes they didn't even have to summon him. Like his predecessor, he gained the ability to recognize a desperate soul and it wasn't always through their facial expressions, body language or how they spoke. They gave off their own aura that breached time and space.

He knew he was changing and his son would tell him often that it was not for the better. The boy confronted him about it after an incident where Bae had been injured by falling into the middle of the road where a man and a donkey were travelling. As soon as Rumple saw the bruise on his son's knee, he reacted in anger, turning the man into a snail and crushing him under his boot over Bae's protests. The people that once hailed the former Dark One as a hero for saving all the children now drew back in fear and warned their children not to play with Bae for fear they would invoke the sorcerer's wrath if he were harmed in any way. The only exception was Morraine although she tried to keep out Rumple's sight at times as well.

Still Rumple had his doubts that he wasn't yet powerful enough to keep his boy protected, those doubts fueled by the jumbled pieces of memories he now possessed from his predecessors....the first Dark One Zorinda and Zozo. There was one other weapon that could be used against him besides his own dagger and it was a ruby pendant that was called Aramon's Talisman. It had the ability to remove his powers forever if the bearer held it over his heart or temporarily. Fortunately both items were in Oz and he would make certain they and the last Strogoff would never enter the Enchanted Forest. His only option left was to keep his son safe at home.
He knew his son was not happy and thought that moving them into a larger home would be the solution to the problem, not seeing that the real solution was the same one he'd longed for as a boy...he needed friends. One day when he returned home, his son was missing. Furious that he'd been taken, he cast a tracing spell that led him to a nearby village where he was told that a pied piper was leading all the boys away with a flute made of magic that only they seemed to hear. Later that night Rumple perched himself on a rooftop and waited. Then he heard it...a song of loneliness and suddenly windows opened all over the village and boys climbed out, walking into the forest. He saw them dancing around a fire, their faces concealed by masks. He grabbed several boys but could not recognize his precious Bae among them. Finally he spotted the piper. He grabbed hold of the man and snapped his flute in half.

"Where's my son, piper?" he growled.

"Is that what they're calling me," he heard a familiar voice ask and the piper lowered his hood. "We both know who I really am."

No...no...not you, Rumple thought sadly as he came face to face with his now youthful father now using the name Peter Pan...for the doll.

"Been a long time, laddie. Glad you could make the show."

Not long enough.

In spite of all the power he now possessed Rumple felt like the frightened child he'd been when he tossed that damned bean that sent both of them into Neverland and destroyed any chance they would've had of being a normal family, if that had even been possible.

"Surprised to see me Rumple? I'm a bit surprised myself. Look who's all grown up and become the Dark One. Good for you."

"What are you doing here?" Rumple asked fearfully.

"It's lonely in Neverland. The only friends I have are the children who visit in their dreams. They can't stay. The boys I take back with me will."

"You're here for my son!"

"I am."

"It's gonna take a lot more than a magic pipe to take my son!"

"The only thing magic about this pipe is that only certain boys can hear it. Boys who feel unloved, boys who feel lost. I guess that's why you can hear it Rumple. Isn't it?"

"Don't pretend you know me. You don't. Not anymore!" Rumple said angrily.

"Oh I think I do," Malcolm taunted. "Beneath all that power you're nothing more than an unloved, lonely lost boy! Hey, I like the sound of that. It's what I'll call my new group of friends. The Lost Boys! It has a nice ring, don't you think?"

You're the one who made me feel as I did, you bastard and now you want to forget about me and take my son! It will never happen. I'll see you die first!

"You can call them whatever you like. Baelfire will not be part of it!"
"Oh, he's already a part of it. The question is: what are you willing to do to get him back?"

Everything. He's mine and I will not let you take him from me and make him into what you are!

"I'm gonna make you regret ever asking that question," Rumple sneered.

"Oh, I understand you're upset. Most parents' worst fear is that their child will be taken away from them but that's not yours is it, Rumple? No, you're not afraid Baelfire will be taken from you. You're afraid he'll leave. After all, being abandoned is what your good at, isn't it? Everyone you've ever known has left, haven't they? Like Bae's mother, Milah...your mother, not to mention your own father. Why should Baelfire be any different?"

"You're wrong!"

"Am I? Well, let's find out, shall we? You ask Baelfire if he wants to come to Neverland with me or stay here with you," Pan challenged. "if he wants to stay I'll leave and never return. Deal?"

"I don't have to make any deals with you!"

"But why wouldn't you if you're so sure he'll stay."

The truth was he did have his doubts based on his son's behavior as of late. He walked among the dancing boys, still unable to find his son.

"You don't even recognize him, do you Rumple?"

"Well how could I when he's wearing a mask!"

"Well he might but wearing a mask but that's not the reason. Look at him. Playing with other boys out in the world. He's happy Rumple. That's why you don't recognize him."

Rumple approached his son and pulled the mask off his face. "Bae...Baelfire. Are you all right?"

"I'm fine," Bae insisted coldly. "Why are you are."

"I know you don't think I care about you son but I do! And I'm here to prove it."

"How?" Bae demanded.

"Go ahead Rumple," Malcolm urged.

Rumple embraced his son. "Papa, what are you doing?" Bae cried.

"I'm protecting you," he declared, making the boy vanish in a cloud of smoke.

"You're gonna regret not taking my deal, Rumple!" Malcolm yelled as Rumple vanished.

"Don't touch me!" Bae yelled, shoving his father away from him. "Get away!"

"It's all right Bae.. You're safe."

"Safe? I was never in any danger. The piper was my friend!' he insisted.

"He may have wanted you to think that but believe me..he would hurt you."

"Why? Who is he? Another person that you abused with your power?"
"His name is Peter Pan. I've known him since I was a boy," he began, unable to find the courage to tell the boy the actual truth. He wouldn't have believed it anyway since it seemed that Pan had most likely told him terrible things to turn him against him. "Growing up, we were incredibly close." As close as the naive child I once was believed.

"So you're saying he's immortal too."

"He wasn't always. He went to a place called Neverland. He betrayed me, Bae. He can't be trusted."

"What happened?"

He traded me to be young forever. "All that matters is that I was fooled by him for a long time before I finally saw his true nature and it is darker and far more repulsive than you should ever be exposed to!"

"He can't be any worse than you."

He can't be any worse than you. Rumple felt as if the boy had taken his dagger and plunged it into his heart. "I had to protect you, Bae! I didn't have a choice!"

"Stop lying because I know that you did!" Bae hissed as he approached him. "I know about the deal Pan offered you! He said all you had to do was ask me if I wanted to come home," he went on, close to tears.

"He told you," Rumple whispered, cursing the bastard in his mind.

"He said that way I would know if you really trusted me. If you really cared."

"No, please Bae," Rumple begged.

"You didn't need to! I would've chosen to come home. I would've chosen you! If only you'd asked. Maybe we would've found a way to be a family," Bae went on, stepping away again and driving the invisible knife in deeper.

"We can be!" Rumple insisted. "Bae! Bae!" he cried. The boy ignored him and walked out the door.

Rumple sank down in a chair and buried his face in his hands. Oh, his father had set him up nicely by preying on his greatest weakness....the fear of losing the only person left in the world who loved him leaving him no other option but to strike the most important deal he could ever make. If his son found a way for him to be rid of his powers and go back to the man the boy once knew and loved, he would follow through.

One night while he was at his spinning wheel Bae returned home and announced that he'd at last found a way. With the assistance of the Blue Fairy the boy obtained a bean...a bean like the one that had been the source of his own misery years before...a bean that would take them to a land where magic didn't exist.

"A place without magic," he scoffed. "I'd be powerless. Weak."

"Like everyone else. It wouldn't matter," Bae pointed out. "We'd be happy."

"We could be happy here."
"Father, please. You're getting worse. And you promised! This can work. It can. You made a deal with me. Are you backing out?"

He thought for a moment. "No."

Later on that night they walked deep into the woods.

"Where are we going, boy? What kind of world is this we're going to? What kind of world is without magic?" Rumple demanded, unable to mask the fear in his voice.

"A better one," Bae declared, holding up the bean and throwing it on the ground, a portal opening.

"My gods boy, like a tornado!" Rumple cried, backing away.

"Papa, we have to go through!"

"No, no, I don't think I can!"

"You must. It's the only way!" Bae insisted, grabbing his hand.

"No, no, no! It's a trick. It'll tear us apart!" Just like my father and I were, he thought fearfully.

"No, it's not. I'll be okay," Bae insisted, having never seen his father so terrified in all his life. What was he truly afraid of? Losing his power or losing him? "I promise!"

The portal expanded, dragging his son into the glowing emerald hole and they started sinking.

Rumple removed his dagger and thrust it into the ground, gripping it's handle with one hand and his son's hand with the other.

"We have to go through! What are you doing? Papa, it won't stay open for long, let's go!"

"I can't. I can't...."

"Papa, please, it's the only way we can be together."

"No, Bae. I can't!"

"You coward. You promised. Don't break our deal!" Bae yelled.

"I have to!" The boy's hand slipped out of his and he fell into the hole, screaming for him. Once the portal vanished and only a hole filled with dirt remained, Rumple gazed down at it, his heart breaking. What had he done?

"Bae! Bae!" he screamed, digging frantically in the dirt. " I want to come with you!"

But it was too late. His son was gone and it seemed that there was only one person who could help him. The Blue Fairy.

"You will never make it to that world," she said after she appeared and saw for herself that he'd stayed behind.

"I will find a way. There must be other paths." He started naming off other methods of portal making until he heard her gasp when he mentioned a curse.

"So it is a curse!"
"Of course you would think of a curse instead of a blessing," she said bitterly. "Your magic is only limited by its rotten core Rumplestiltskin. Anyway, it can't be done. Not without a great price."

"I've already paid a great price."

"So you'd be willing to sacrifice this world for the next because that's how great the price is."

"Well, what do you think?"

"Then I'll comfort myself knowing the such a curse is beyond your abilities."

"Oh, for now. But I've got all the time in the world. I will do nothing else. I will love nothing else! I will find a way. You took my son but I will get him back!" Rumple vowed.

"I didn't take your son!"

"You took my son!" he cried brokenly. "And I will get him back!"

"You drove him away," Blue hissed. Rumple lashed out at her with his dagger. She flew away.

"I will find him!" Rumple yelled at her retreating form. "I will find him! I will find him!" he chanted as he walked back to the shack that no longer felt like a home to him anymore.
Chapter Summary

Rumple faces off against Hook as the Dark One and makes a deal to find the caster of his curse

True to his word, Rumplestiltskin vowed that he would do nothing else until he found a way to get his precious son back. Listening to local gossip gave him a spark of hope. There was man named William Smee who was said to be able to obtain hard to find objects...for a price. He could certainly pay that. He had more gold than he could ever spend in a lifetime and that should suffice. Smee conducted most of his business in taverns and Rumple sent word out that he was looking for a specific item...a magic bean hoping Smee would take the bait and be willing to deliver. There had to be more beans. If they weren't in the Forest, they were either in Oz or Wonderland. Finally word got back to him that Smee was willing to meet with him. He went down to the tavern and waited patiently for the man to approach him.

"It really is you. The Dark One, in the flesh. Or whatever that is," Smee said.

"You've gone to a lot of trouble to meet me. You better hope I agree it's worth...my...time." Rumple said menacingly, expecting his tone to send a message to this wharf rat that he was not a person to trifle with...if he wanted to live to see the next day that was.

"I've heard you've been looking for something, and as luck would have it, I'm a man who trades in hard-to-find objects. Like a bean. A magic bean that can transport you between worlds." He said the last part in a whisper so that the others around them wouldn't hear. A magic bean fetched a pretty penny in the Forest but no one could pay the price the Dark One could.

"I've been told they no longer exist in this land."

"Not in this land, no. But the ships that dock here often return from far off lands with treasures they don't always understand. "

"And yet you do." Rumple said, ready to throttle the braggart.

"It's my job, as is knowing the rumors of who might pay the highest price for said treasures."

"And what rumors could they be?" Rumple inquired curiously.

"That you were once a great coward but that you became The Dark One to overcome that and protect a...a son who you lost despite all..."

Rumple was furious. The last thing he wanted to do was discuss his greatest failure as a father and unfortunately, despite how backwards it was, rumors did travel fast in the Forest and everyone now knew what he'd done thanks to that damned fairy. When he saw her again he was going to enjoy tearing her wings from her body and watching her crash to the ground. He waved his hand and the man fell silent. "It's not nice to spread rumors," he chastised. "A bean! Where is it?"
"I don't have it. But I can get it. I...I swear. You haven't heard my price."

"I spin straw into gold. Price shouldn't be a problem."

"Oh, I don't want money. I want eternal life."

And so does every other fool but we're all not fortunate enough to get it and the price can be too high, Rumple thought bitterly and laughed mirthlessly. "Only The Dark One has life eternal. Tell you what, my son. What I can do, what about youth? Spin the clock back till you're a little boy again," he tempted.

"Close enough. Deal."

"But remember, you fail to deliver, I spin the clock forward and turn you into dust."

"Thank you. Thank you."

A young woman approached with a cup of beer on her tray. "You sure you don't want anything?"

"Where's my scurvy crew?" he heard an all too familiar voice boom out and looked up to see the wife stealing pirate himself in the pub.

"Ah! Here we be, Cap'n!" his crew members called out.

"Where's my beer?" Jones was asking his crew and one of them handed him a mug.

"You know, I suddenly find myself quite thirsty." Rumple told the server. She set a mug in front of him.

"Cheers." Killian clinked glasses with his crew member while Rumple watched.

Rumple took a long swig and rubbed his hands together, giggling. It was time to deliver a long overdue punishment for depriving his son of a mother and him of a wife. They may have had a chance had she not met that damned pirate.

It seemed that Jones and his band of rats were in the tavern half the night and could've cleaned the place out of alcohol. Fortunately for Rumple being the Dark One made him immune to the dreaded hangover. He'd had quite a few beers himself and wasn't feeling tipsy at all, just eager to have his fun once the pirate left the tavern. Finally they all stood up, paid their tab and started walking down the alley. Rumple conjured a beggar's cup in his hand and brushed past Jones to provoke him into a confrontation.

"Hey, you! Stop. Even gutter rats have more manners than you just displayed," Jones scolded.

"No, I'm so sorry, Sir." Rumple said in a deep voice

"Ah. I was wrong. Not a rat at all. More..." Jones leaned forward and hit the cup causing the coins to spill to the ground. He kneeled down to pick them up as Jones continued his taunts. "more like a crocodile. What's your name, crocodile?" Jones asked, kicking him with his foot.

Showtime! Rumple threw off his cloak and giggled.

"You. I remember you," Jones said.

Oh, of course you do. But I'm not that poor lame spinner you terrified before, now am I?
"Always nice to make an impression. Where are my manners? We haven't been properly introduced. Rumplestiltskin, or as others know me, The Dark One," he announced and bowed, enjoying seeing the terrified look on the pirate's face. "Oh! I see my reputation precedes me," he said excitedly watching the crew members scatter like rats.

"It does," Jones replied, unable to hide his own fear.

"Good! That's gonna save us time during the question and answer portion of our game."

"What is it you want to know?"

"How's Milah, of course?" Rumple inquired.

"Who?"

"Only too happy to, uh, dig out the memory, but it gets really messy."

"She's dead. Died a long time ago. What is it you want."

Rumple froze for a moment, scolding himself for not being strong enough to fight for her. Perhaps she would have been willing to try again after all.

"We didn't get a chance to finish our duel," Rumple reminded the pirate. Jones got ready to draw his sword when Rumple raised his finger, making the pirate's hand pause "Ah! Not now. Tomorrow at dawn," he said with a flourish. "I am not a cruel man. Get your affairs in order. Also, you can spend tonight knowing it'll be your last," he added as he approached, pointing his finger at the man's chest and giggling. "Maybe I am cruel. And don't think about trying to escape, because I will find you, and I will gut your entire crew lika the fish," he finished in an Italian accent although he didn't understand why he used it when he wasn't from the other side and the place called Italy. Still, it had the desired effect.


"See you then," Rumple laughed and vanished.

The next morning at dawn Rumple situated himself on an archway and waited for the pirate to return to the alley. When he finally spotted him, he tossed an old, rusted looking sword onto the ground. "Pick it up, dearie, and let's begin."

"There's no need," Jones said confidently and reached for his own sword and to his horror it was not in its scabbard. When he turned around, Rumple held the prized sword in his hand.

"Sorry, but killing a man with his own sword was just too delicious to pass up. Hmm?" he asked, crossing blades with the pirate with a skill that matched his perfectly. Ah, the perks of being the Dark One. "Ships that pass in the night. Well, at least one ship. "He threw him into a stack of barrels thinking that would be the end of it but the pirate wasn't giving up yet. No matter, he would just keep at it until the man tired out. Seeing his opportunity, Rumple struck, reliving the pirate of his sword and stepping on it as the pirate tried to pick it up and pressed the tip of his sword at the pirate's throat.

"Go on. I'm ready for the sword," Jones challenged.

"No. Do you know what it's like to have your wife stolen from you? To feel powerless to stop it? It feels like having your heart ripped from your chest. Actually, let me show you," Rumple hissed and plunged his hand into the pirate's chest.
"Stop!" a hauntingly familiar female voice cried out and Rumple turned to see his wife garbed as a pirate.

"Milah," he gasped and pulled his hand out the pirate's chest. "Milah. How?" he demanded.

"Milah, you have to run," Jones pleaded, glancing over at Milah.

No. I'm not leaving without you." she said firmly.

"Oh, how sweet. It appears there's more to this tale than I know. Tell it to me, Milah!" Rumple commanded.

"Please don't hurt him. I can explain," she begged.

"Tick-tock, dearie. Tick-tock!"

"That first night, when Killian and his crew came into the tavern, he told stories about the places he'd been, and I fell in love with him." Oh, did you? Rumple thought bitterly. So you left our son for this bloody pirate? In his anger, Rumple thrust the blade of the sword into the pirate's side.

"I didn't mean for it to turn out this way. I didn't know how to tell you the truth. I'm sorry."

"And so here we are. You've come to save the life of your true love, the pirate. I didn't realize the power of true love before. It is impressive. I'd hate to break it up. Actually, no. I'd love to," he said, plunging the sword in deeper.

"Wait. I have something you want."

"Well, I find that very difficult to believe." Still he was curious and decided not to kill the pirate...for now. He removed the sword, stunned when he saw Smee's hat in her hand. "Where did you get that?"

"You know who I took it from. I may not know what The Dark One wants with a magic bean, but I have it."

"Oh, I feel a proposal coming on."

"The magic bean in exchange for our lives. Deal?"

"I wanna see it first."

She led them all back to the pirate's ship, the Jolly Roger, barking out orders as she helped Jones onto the deck.

"And get me that prisoner from below deck along with the booty he carried. Now!"

"Bring up the prisoner!"

"Well, well, seems like you finally found the family you could never have with me," Rumple observed while Milah took the bean from Smee and held it up for Rumple to inspect.

"You asked to see it, and now you have," Jones said after she threw it to him and he caught it in his hand.
"Do we have a deal? Can we go our separate ways?" Milah asked.

"Do you mean, do I forgive you? Can I move on? Perhaps. Perhaps. I can see you are truly in love," he said the last bit with a touch of sarcasm.

"Thank you."

"Just one question."

"What do you want to know?"

How could you leave Bae?" he hissed. "Do you know what it was like walking home that night..."

"Rumple..."

"...knowing I had to tell our son..."

"Please."

"...that his mother was dead?"

"I was wrong to lie to you. I was the coward. I knew that."

"You left him! You abandoned him!" Rumple shouted. Just like my father, just like my mother!

"And there's not a day that goes by that I don't feel sorry for that."

"Sorry isn't enough! You let him go."

"I let my misery cloud my judgment."

"Why were you so miserable?"

"Because I never loved you," she sneered. Now in a blind rage, Rumple thrust his hand into her chest and pulled out her heart.

"Milah!" Jones cried attempting to reach her. Rumple threw him against the mast and secured him there with rope. "No!" The pirate snatched a hook off the deck and cut through his bonds, falling on his knees at Milah's side. She looked up at him.

"I love you," she whispered to him.

Those three words were like daggers in Rumple's heart. His hand tightened around the organ he held in his hand, squeezing until it was nothing more than dust.

"No. You may be more powerful now, demon, but you're no less a coward," Jones cried in grief.

"I'll have what I came for now."

"You'll have to kill me first."

"Ah-ah! I'm afraid that's not in the cards for you, sonny boy," Rumple sliced off his hand that held the bean at the wrist. The pirate collapsed with pain. "I want you alive because I want you to suffer like I did." He turned to walk away but the pirate rushed forward and stabbed him with a hook.

"Killing me is gonna take a lot more than that, dearie."

"Even demons can be killed. I will find a way!" the pirate vowed.
"Well, good luck living long enough," Rumple said as he vanished.

When he returned home with his prize, he smiled at the drawing he made of Bae on the table. "Soon Bae...I'll be with you again and I won't let go again. I promise." He pried apart the fingers of the severed hand angry to find it empty. "No. He tricked me! Follow the Lady...Follow the Damned Lady!" he howled, knocking the table over and sending everything on it crashing to the floor. He picked up the picture of Bae and cradled it. "I'm sorry Bae...but I will not stop looking!"

Months later he stood in front of the house he once shared with his son, using his magic to make it disappear. It stopped being a home to him the night Bae disappeared. He would find a new home...the palace he once offered to give his son and would prepare a room for the boy, the grandest room possible.

Small fragments of Zozo's memories led him to a castle high up in the mountains. The Duke attacked the palace years ago and stole the prized dagger, thus gaining control of the Dark One. One of the areas that attracted Rumple's attention was the library. Fortunately he knew how to read. Many people in his old village hadn't but Moira and Tatiana took the time to teach him how to both read and write and he did both well. Now it seemed that he also acquired knowledge of other languages. Most of the books in Zozo's library were Ozian, written in the ancient Ozian picture language. That didn't surprise him since Zozo was Ozian. Still Ozian magic was the most powerful magic in all the realms. He spent days and nights in that library perusing the old texts, finally coming upon something that showed promise. He reached into his chest and pulled out his own heart. While every other heart he held was red, his was blackened from his misdeeds as the Dark One.

The heart division spell, considered one of the most powerful forms of Ozian magic allowed a person to remove their own heart and divide its essence, allowing pieces of it to be shared with those they held dear for strength and to locate each other across time and distance. Rumple waved his hand over the blackened organ, chanting the words that would activate the spell. When he looked down, his heart was still intact.

"I'm a fool," he said sadly and returned it to his chest, wishing that it hadn't been true that a heart plagued by darkness could not be divided, yet it was. He still had all the time in the world and he would not give up until he was with his son again.

Years passed and still he was no closer to finding a solution to his dilemma. He held a small ceremony celebrating his son's birthday every year by lighting a candle, holding his son's shawl in his hand. He still had the rest of Bae's clothing, preserved by his magic. He finally decided to seek out the Seer who caused all the trouble.

"I've been expecting you," she said.

"Then you know exactly why I came here."

"What I foretold during the ogres war has finally come to pass."

"Well, in a manner of speaking. I, uh, hobbled myself on the battlefield, was branded a coward. My wife ran away and left me. Then my son was called to the front. Oh! Then I became the Dark One... Then Bae left me. So, yes, my actions of the battlefield left my son fatherless. But... it would've been nice to know about all that pesky detail."

"Knowing would not have made a difference. You still would have been powerless to escape your fate."
Rumple giggled. Just... like... you." He reached out with his magic and started strangling her. "Now you know exactly why I came here."

"You want to find your son."

"Indeed," he said and released her.

"You will... find him."

"How? And this time don't leave out a single detail," he said angrily.

"It will not be an easy path. It will take many years... and require a curse. A curse... powerful enough to rip everyone from this land."

"Yes, yes, there's more. I know it. Tell me."

"You will not cast the curse. Someone else will. And you will not break the curse. Someone else... will."

"Tell me!"

"I don't know. Even my powers have limits."

"Ah-ah-ah. Not good enough, dearie," he said and started choking her again.

"If you want to see the path you must take, there is only one way." She held her hands out to him. "Take this burden from me."

"Mm-mm gladly." He took her hands in his and she began screaming as the power transferred from her to him. "I can't... see... anything. It's too much. It's nothing but a jumble," he mumbled.

"The future is a puzzle with many pieces to be sorted. In time, you will learn to separate what can be from what will be." She cried out again when he released her and she fell to the ground.

"This is why you wanted to give me your power—To free yourself from this torment."

"In time, you will work it all out." He started to walk away. "Wait. As gratitude, I offer you one piece of the puzzle. You will be reunited with your son, and it will come in a most unexpected way."

"How?"

"A boy... a young boy will lead you to him. But beware, Rumplestiltskin, for that boy is more than he appears. He will lead you to what you seek. But there will be a price. The boy... will be your undoing. The darkest of curses by a Strogoff be taken...and a sacrifice in the name of love by the last Strogoff the curse shall be broken." she whispered and fainted.

"So this boy is the last Strogoff. Then I'll just have to kill him."

He walked out of the forest with hope renewed. So it would have to be a curse after all. Now all he needed to do was find someone to cast it.

Time passed by, quickly for others, slowly for the man in the castle atop snow covered mountains known as the Dark One, for every year that passed was another without his precious Bae. Yet every year, on his birthday Rumple would go to his library, set out the shaw he made for the boy, a shaw he wore almost every day out on a table and light a small candle.
"Two hundred years Bae...but for you, where you are...it could be only five...or ten...Time moves differently in this land without magic."

You coward! You promised! Don't break our deal!

"I didn't want to Bae...but how could I protect you there...without magic? There are probably far worse dangers in that world than this one, no, I know there are. Becoming the Dark One, taking all this power. I didn't do it for myself. It was for you...it was always for you!" he sobbed. "And I failed you...but I'll make it right. I'll find a way."

He still concentrated on finding a way to be reunited with his son while answering the calls of the desperate souls all across the realm. Zozo had been right about one thing, the Forest was full of them, himself included, and most of the time their demands were far less honorable than his. Nothing angered him more than those who summoned him to relieve them of the burden of another mouth to feed. Although he and Bae barely had enough money he always found ways to keep his son fed, clothed and housed even before he was the Dark One. As the years went on he was noticing that some of people of the Enchanted Forest were starting to become shiftless and lazy, more willing to take the easy way out now that they knew all they had to do was summon the Dark One to make things better. Oh, he did...but his price was not pleasant. As for the children surrendered to him in exchange, he kept them at the Dark Castle until his visions told him in which new home they belonged.

One night while he was at his spinning wheel, once again pondering the issue of how to find his own child, he was given a vision of a young woman at King Xavier's ball, a simple miller's daughter who boasted she could spin straw into gold...yet there was something more to her. He concentrated harder and had his answer. Her child...it would be her child, her daughter that would unite him with his...if she lived past tomorrow. She now stood in a tower room looking out the window...ready to dive into the waters below to escape...only she'd be dead. No, he couldn't let that happen.

He appeared in the tower room behind her, giggling with a piece of straw in his hand. "That's never gonna work. I mean, you'll escape but you'll be dead. Kinda defeats the purpose, doesn't it?"

"Who are you?"

"Who are you?" he asked a bit flirtatiously. She was a pretty one.

"Cora," she answered coldly.

"Not a very pretty name is it? Sounds like something breaking." It was also a derivative of the name Kore, another name that was used to refer to a goddess by the name of Persephone, the queen of the Underworld in this land without magic as he'd learned through his studies of the Ozian texts and one of the original creators of the Enchanted Forest and the realms around it that became known as Nonestica.

"How did you get in here? If you got in, I can get out," she said excitedly.

"If I understand your situation, this is your way out," he said, pointing at the spinning wheel and sitting down. "And what a marvelous coincidence that spinning straw into gold just so happens to be something that I like to do. It's almost like...like fate."

"Nobody can spin straw into anything and no one can make..."

"Oh, well well would you look at that," he said triumphantly, holding out a piece of newly spun
golden thread. She took it in her hand and studied it, stunned to see that it was real gold.

"You want to help me?"

He giggled. "I want you to help me. And you will because the future is my gift. Well, in a manner of speaking." By providing me with the person to cast this curse I need, when I do find it.

"What could you possibly get from me?" she demanded.

"Funny you should ask, can you read?" he said and waved his hand, conjuring a contract and handing it to her. She perused it and frowned.

"My firstborn child?"

"She is quite important."

"She?"

"Yes. I see the future. Weren't you listening?" he asked impatiently. "Anyway, I only get my payment if you live past tomorrow."

"You can turn all this straw into gold by morning?"

"And you can parade in front of the royals and demand the hand of the dimwitted prince and have them kneel before you. That's what you want eh, you want them to kneel...I..."

"No."

"What?" he asked, stunned.

"Teach me. Don't just do it. Teach me. Make it part of our deal," she suggested with a smile. Oh, she was by far the most fascinating desperate soul he'd ever encountered. He giggled.

"You are a spicy one, aren't you? Oh well. Rumplestiltskin," he said and bowed.

"What?"

"My name. I do believe you just earned it," he answered, waving his hand and amending the contract to include instruction on how to turn the straw into gold herself then removed a quill from his coat. "Now...let's begin."

She made several attempts only to fail miserably, grumbling with frustration. "It's not happening!" she complained.

"You just need to stop thinking about it," he instructed. "Magic is about emotion. Summon up that moment that made you so angry you would've killed if you could."

"You do that?"

"I do." Most of the time now, anymore.

"What's your moment?" she inquired softly.

He smiled. "Once a man made me kiss his boots in front of my son. Now in my mind, I go back and I rip out his throat and I crunch his veins with my teeth. And that, dearie, is how magic is made."
"Bloodlust," she said softly. He grinned. "I like the phrase." And he was feeling lust all right...not for blood but for her. It had been such a long time since he'd been with a woman who looked at him and didn't see a coward. "Let me help you," he said, asking her to tell him what her moment was and it was similar to his own, being forced to kneel in front of those who thought them her betters. They worked all through the night. Try as she might, the girl simply couldn't make the gold herself.

"They'll kill me!" she cried.

"Maybe not."

"What makes you so confident?"

"The king. You having the ability to spin straw into gold will make him a very rich man. If he's desperate enough perhaps he'll be willing to wait a while longer. Here is what you're going to do..." he said and began instructing her on what she would say and do when the king came for her the following morning. Per Rumple's instructions, the girl was able to gain two more days to complete her task and still producing the gold herself was not easy. Finally Rumple was forced to cast an enchantment spell on the wheel so that it would make the gold for her. On the third day she sat at the wheel before the entire court and spun her way to the prince's hand in marriage though the marriage itself would not take place for another few months. The king wanted to use the riches she'd spun for him to repair the failing kingdom first.

Rumple remained in the shadows by day and at night she came to him to resume her magic lessons. She was not powerful enough to spin straw into gold but she was starting to show promise in other forms of magic. He gave her a book of spells he'd written himself that she could practice casting on her own and reviving his hope that someone could love him again. He believed he felt it when he kissed her yet he dared not make any further advances. Her maidenhead belonged to her husband alone whomever it would be. If she chose him...it would not be much of a life...only darkness and isolation. Finally on the day before the wedding she made her decision. She would leave with him and he amended their contract. She would give him a child, his own...on their wedding day but first...she wanted to punish the king by taking his heart and making him watch while she crushed it.

They agreed to meet in the forest later that night. The hours went by...slowly, increasing his concern when he didn't see her. At last he heard footsteps and she approached with a box in her hands. He turned to her and smiled.

"I was starting to grow concerned."

"Well, here I am."

He placed his hands on her arms and kissed her, sensing a coldness in her that he never had before and backed away. "Something's not right," he said and pointed at her.

"Yes, you're correct," she said, the coldness now in her voice.

"Well, what happened? Couldn't you take the king's heart?" he taunted.

"No I was able to do it. I chose not to."

"Ah."

She reached out and touched his cheek, her touch now as cold as the rest of her. What had she done? "I'm sorry my dear Rumple. I'm not going with you. You see, I have a wedding to go to. My
own."

"Who's heart is in the box?" he demanded. Surely she wouldn't have...even he couldn't bring himself to do something so callous.

"Don't make this harder..."

"You lied to me! Whose heart?!

"Mine."

He backed away again, shocked. Didn't she understand the cost of such an act?

"I had to!" she insisted. "You told me not to let anything stop me until they were on their knees. My heart was stopping me."

"You never loved me," he said angrily. "Never! You're not gonna get away with this. We have a contract. I'll take your baby!" he threatened.

"You changed the contract Rumple. You only get your own child. And any baby I have, it won't be yours." she declared.

"We'll see about that, dearie!" he hissed as he glared at her. "You don't understand the cost of what you've done, do you? Removing your own heart will prevent you from loving anyone...including your own daughter! Is that what you want? Because if you cannot love her, she won't love you in return."

"You're wrong. You're just say these things to make me change my mind."

"No I'm not. You'll see in time. Well, go on then...marry your dimwitted prince and have your baby by him, making the kingdom kneel before you and eventually all the power you seek will be your downfall. Enjoy it while you can," he added before he vanished.

When he returned to his castle he went about searching for anything that reminded him of her and piled it in the ballroom. He conjured a fireball in his hands and tossed it at the pile, watching his hopes once again go up in flames.

"No one will ever love me, he thought sadly.

A year later word reached him that Princess Cora had just given birth to a daughter, the news he'd been waiting for. He appeared in Xavier's castle while Cora stood before the throne cradling a newborn in her arms.

"Princess Cora. Tell me, daughter, what is her name?" Xavier asked.

"Her name is Regina. For one day she will be queen!" Cora announced proudly as she held her newborn daughter up high, smiling in triumph as the people bowed to the new princess. Rumple watched from the shadows nodding to himself. Indeed this girl would be queen and do what he needed her to do...as long as Cora wasn't around to interfere. And interfere she would for the girl would have the throne Cora sought most of her life. Carrying her daughter in her arms, Cora retreated to her chambers.

"Such a joyous occasion! " Rumple called out, giggling maniacally as he appeared behind her. Cora spun around, her dark eyes blazing with fury.
"Get out of here!" she hissed, cradling her daughter against her chest protectively "You're not taking my daughter from me."

"That child should've been mine!" he raged. "You betrayed me. You broke our deal!"

"No I didn't, Rumple. You changed the contract." she reminded him again.

"And what do you have now, dearie? A dimwitted prince for a husband, a line of succession you'll never reach the top of unless you plan on eliminating your predecessors and a daughter who is never going to love you because you don't have a heart to love her," he sneered.

"And I suppose you could? Hah!" Cora spat.

"You forget, I do have a child of my own."

"A child you gave up to keep your power, remember?"

"And I've regretted it ever since just as I regret being foolish enough to believe you loved me! Now give me that child."

"Never!" she hissed, conjuring a fireball and throwing it at him. He caught it in his hand and absorbed it while the infant Regina screamed in fear.

"Never play with fire around a child, dearie," he said angrily and focused with his magic, making the child appear in his arms. He gazed down at her angry face. She screamed for a few seconds more then quieted down, looking up at him. "As I said before you were born, dearie, you are very important to me, not for who you are, but what you'll do for me."

"Give her back!" Cora yelled. "You can give her nothing. I can give her a throne!"

"So you've decided to accomplish your goal with bloodshed after all, have you? Better think about it dearie. It'll come with a price. The question is: are you willing to pay it?"

"I want them all on their knees before me."

"You already got that the day she was born," he reminded her.

"It's not enough. I want them on their knees for the rest of their pathetic lives. And there'll come a day when you'll join them Rumplestiltskin," she threatened.

He giggled. "Confident, aren't we? It'll never happen, dearie."

"Give me back my daughter!"

He ignored her and walked around the room cradling the infant princess in his arms. In the back of his mind he thought he should take the child away and give her to another family. Cora would never be a proper mother to the girl, only try to live her dreams through her. He was distracted by his thoughts so much that he hadn't felt something hit him on the back of the neck. He cursed under his breath as his limbs froze. "Where did you get that?" he growled.

"The important thing is that I have it," Cora said with a smile, stepping in front of him and detaching her daughter from his embrace. She waved her hand and the spellbook he'd given her appeared in it. "Quite useful this has turned out to be...it seems that there are quite a few places where Neverland's squid ink can be found. You just have to know where to look."

"Bitch," he hissed. "I should've left you jump off that damned tower."
"Ah, but you didn't. And I told you before: any baby I have won't be yours."

"You may have think you've won, but you haven't. Your daughter will be mine and serve my will eventually and you, dear Cora, will learn the price for breaking your deal with me," he cautioned.

"No, what I will have is everything I wanted," Cora said triumphantly as she left the room with her daughter in her arms.

They never spoke again after that day but gossip traveled in the Enchanted Forest, even to the ears of the Dark One. Cora had forgotten one of the most important lessons he'd taught her, all magic came with a price...and she was paying hers, bit by bit. The first strike was when King Xavier's kingdom was conquered by the forces of her rival Princess Eva. With the help of the fairies they trapped the dark sorceress and banished her, her husband and child to a small cottage far away from her own palace, their lands and titles forfeited to the crown. Cora seethed, vowing one day that she would have her revenge. She would take it in the name of her father-in-law, who in spite of their differences had proved to be a fierce ally until he met his end on the battlefield.

In the meantime Rumple watched, and waited and at last he heard the call he'd been waiting centuries for. It had taken years but he'd had all the time in the world to wait.

"Rumple...shstiltskin, I summon thee," Regina said nervously.

"That's not how you say it dearie, but then...you didn't have to say anything," he said as he appeared on a chaise behind her. He could sense the magic dormant inside of her, magic her mother hadn't dared teach her how to use because she feared the girl's powers would exceed her own. It was a well founded assumption and that would only happen if she allowed him to train her. As long as Cora was around, that would never happen and he now possessed the means to rid himself and the girl of their little problem. He had no use for Wonderland but it would be the perfect place to banish Cora to as only certain portals could travel to that land. Magic hats, looking glasses and a certain rabbit species' holes. On her wedding day Regina presented the gift to her mother. Cora, as if sensing some sort of trap froze her daughter in place, reminding her that she was stuck with her.

Rumple appeared inside the mirror, making a shoving gesture at Regina. It was all she had to do and her problem would be solved...along with his if the girl actually had the courage to do it. He could feel the girl's anger building. She howled with rage and shoved, sending her mother through the portal. The glass shattered.

He decided to wait a bit before he paid Regina another visit. The girl was reluctant to admit it at first but she'd enjoyed having that power and now it was time for him to teach her how to use it. She'd taken the book and the deal was struck. She was now his student.

"Soon Bae, soon." he murmured as he stood in the library at the small shrine he'd made for his boy.

"Bastard!" he heard a familiar voice hiss from a mirror behind him. and turned to see Cora standing in front of a throne in the land known as Wonderland, a crown on her head.

"Well, well it looks you've gotten a throne through bloodshed after all...haven't you?" Rump asked with a giggle. Cora glared at him through the mirror. "Not the one you wanted but it will have to do, won't it?"

"You gave her the portal that sent me here," she accused. "Why?"
"Because no one breaks a deal with me, dearie. Least of all you. I must find my son and your daughter is the only one who can take me to him...and she will only do that without your interference. And she wanted rid of you. I simply provided her with the means to do so."

"I won't be trapped here forever, Rumple. If she does cast her curse, I'll find a way to escape here and find you in this new land. When I do, your dagger and your power will be mine and I'll have everything I want," she threatened.

"Choose your battles wisely dearie because if you try to fight me again, you won't survive. I'll make certain of it...one way or another," he vowed.

"We'll see," Cora sneered. Rumple threw a tapestry over the mirror and went about covering the rest of them. He would not have Cora or any other mages spying on him again.
Chapter Summary

Rumple meets Lady Belle Lavalliere

Take me, cure me, kill me

Bring me home

Every day, every way I keep on watching us sleep

Relive the old sin of Adam and Eve

Of you and me

Forgive the adoring beast

Nightwish - Ghost Love Score

Lady Belle Lavalliere paced the floor of her chambers nervously, a book clutched tightly in her hands. It was a text on all the most powerful creatures in the known realms. She'd been reading the chapter on the most powerful of them, the Dark One. Legend said that he had successfully ended one of the ogre wars centuries earlier. Would he do so again? Her father and the other lords of the Frontlands were confident they could defeat the ogres with the might of their armies but now the rivers of their lands flowed red with the blood of their people. There was no other way. They had to summon the Dark One.

"It is out of the question!" Maurice barked when she made her proposal. "The Dark One is not to be trifled with."

"What choice do we have, Father?" Belle asked. "None. Our people are dying, our villages are being destroyed. The Dark One stopped the wars before. He can do so again. Please!"

"She may be right, my lord," her fiance Gaston Valmont agreed. Their betrothal had been arranged in the cradle but the pair had little in common. Gaston felt a woman's place was in a man's bed, bearing his children. Belle believed a woman could be as intelligent as a man do some of the same things a man could such as fight in battle. And they had...during the previous ogre war, the one the Dark One ended.

"All right," Maurice sighed. "I'll send a message. Gods help us all."

The ogres had returned to once again cut a swathe through towns and villages and men were being taken from their homes to fight on the front lines. It had been centuries since the Dark One walked into the middle of the battlefield, put an end to the previous war and led all the children home. His sight, inactive for so long was sending him strange visions again, this time of a beautiful young woman in a golden gown with blue eyes and long brown hair.
"It's nothing...just another vision that makes no sense," Rumple muttered as he awoke from his trance and went back to work at his spinning wheel yet he couldn't seem to accomplish anything. Frustrated, he got up and took a walk outside. When he reached the gate he was surprised to see a pigeon sitting there with a message tied around its leg. He conjured a pile of seeds for the bird to feast on while he read the message. Unlike people, animals never feared him. Along with many other abilities, the Dark One dagger had given him the ability to speak to them even if it was only through his mind.

They're desperate, the bird informed him as it ate.

Everyone who comes to me is.

Will you compose a reply?

No, I think I should deliver my answer in person. In the meantime you are welcome to stay as long as you'd like.

Thank you Rumplestiltskin.

He vanished in a puff of smoke.

It had been a week since they'd sent out their message via pigeon and still there was no reply. The people, terrified that the ogres would soon be marching on their town began to flee in fear. Even Maurice's own servants began fleeing in the middle of the night, taking some of the lord's own goods with them. General Lancelot came to the castle one afternoon with devastating news while he was sitting in the war room with Gaston, Belle and his top military commanders to plan strategy.

"Sir, there's news from the battlefront. Avonlea has fallen." he announced.

"Oh my gods," Maurice moaned. Avonlea was only a day's march from their own town.

"If only he had come," Gaston said.

"Well he didn't!" Maurice said angrily.

"He may be on his way right now, Papa," Belle said hopefully when she kneeled beside him.

"It's too late my girl. It's just too late."

Suddenly there was a loud banging on the doors.

"It's him! It has to be him!" she exclaimed.

"How could he have gotten past the walls? Open it!" Maurice commanded his guards. They opened the door but could see nothing out in the hallway.

"Well, that was a bit of a letdown!" Rumple giggled as he appeared in Maurice's chair. They all turned to face him even the girl he'd seen in his visions. Now he understood why. Summoning him had been her idea. A bold move, but admirable.

"You sent me a message. Something about...Help! Help! We're dying. Can you save us? Well the answer is...yes, I can. Yes, I can protect your little town. For a price," Rumple said as he got out of the chair and tossed the object he was holding to one of the guards and smacked down the sword the foolish boy was pointing at him. Didn't the fop understand it couldn't harm him?
"We sent you a promise of gold," Maurice said.

"Ah now you see I ummm...make gold. What I want is something a bit more special. My price...is her." He gestured toward Belle, unsure why he was doing it but there was something about this girl that appealed to him.

"No!" Maurice cried.

"The young lady is engaged...to me." Gaston declared, shoving Belle behind him. Rumple scowled.

"I wasn't asking if she was engaged. I'm not looking for love. I'm looking for a caretaker...for my rather large estate. It's her or no deal," he said coldly.

"Get out. Leave!" Maurice shouted. Gaston continued to push Belle further away from him.

"As you wish."

"No, wait!" he heard the girl's voice cry out.

He turned around. Bravely the young woman stepped forward and faced him. "I will go with him." she declared.

"I forbid it Belle," Gaston commanded.

"No one decides my fate but me!" Belle argued. "I shall go."

"It's forever dearie," Rumple cautioned her, daring her to refuse him.

"My family, my friends...they will all live?" she asked.

"You have my word," he said.

"And you have mine. I will go with you, forever!"

"Deal!" he giggled

"Belle, Belle you cannot do this! Belle, please! You cannot go with this.. beast," Maurice pladed.

Rumple looked at him in shock. Him a beast? Now that was gratitude for you!

"Father, Gaston. It's been decided." Belle reminded them.

"You know," Rumple said from behind her. "She's right. The deal is struck. Oh, congratulations on your little war!" he giggled, escorting the girl out of the castle where a carriage with no horses awaited them. She climbed in and sat on the seat across from him.

"You really do need a caretaker? I'm...I'm afraid I haven't much experience with it..." she said nervously.

"That's obvious," he said, gesturing toward her clothing. "You had servants to do it for you. Well, you'll be the only servant in my house dearie and my advice is that you learn how to do it, quickly."

"Yes...Master."

"Rumplestilskin," he corrected her. "I do not allow most people to know my name but you,
dearie...are quite...different.” he murmured and still he couldn’t explain how. He sensed some form of magic surrounding the girl but whatever it was, it had some sort of cloak on it. It was best if she learned her place and quickly.

He led her through the hallways of the Dark Castle and into his main dining hall in silence. It was more of a showroom than a dining hall as there was only one chair at the large table.

"Where are you taking me?" she asked

"Let's call it...your room," he answered waving his hand and opening the door to the dungeon. She peeked inside, horrified. There was only a small pallet on the floor inside.

"My room?" she cried

"Well it sounds a lot nicer than dungeon," he teased and gently shoved her inside, locking the door and giggling mischievously.

"You can't just leave me in here! Hello! Hello?" she shouted, pounding on the doors until her fists were sore. Exhausted she crawled onto the pallet and curled herself into a ball, sobbing softly. It was all for her family, she kept reminding herself.

She was uncertain how long she'd been in the dungeon when she heard the door open. She looked up and saw her new master standing in the doorway staring at her with oddest expression on his face. "Naptime's over, dearie. There's work to be done," he sang and waved his finger at her to follow him. She stood up, smoothed the wrinkles out of her gown and followed him up the stairs and into the kitchen. "Since you're not accustomed to doing these things yourself, the kitchen will assist you."

"What do you mean, assist me?" Belle asked.

"Magic, dearie, magic!" he declared with a flourish. "Prepare my tea," he called out. Doors opened and a tea service floated out onto the table. The large stove heated up and a tea kettle filled with water floated onto it. Once the kettle finished boiling it poured the water into a teapot and mixed with the leaves.

If the castle can do these things for him, why does he need me here? Is it just to humiliate me? she pondered.

"Bring that in to the dining room and I'll explain your duties." he instructed and left the kitchen. She nodded.

"You will serve me my meals and you will clean the Dark Castle," he explained once she walked into the dining room carrying the tea service.

"I understand," Belle said shakily as she poured the tea into one of the cups to serve to him.

"You will dust my collection and launder my clothing," he went on.

"Yes."

"You will fetch me fresh straw when I'm spinning at the wheel."

"Got it."

"Oh, and you will skin the children I hunt for their pelts." She cried out in horror and the cup she
was about to hand him fell to the carpet. "That one was a quip. Not serious."

"Uhhh...right," "My. I'm so sorry but, uh... It's.. it's chipped. You—you can hardly see it." she insisted fearfully while he simply stared at her. What did the girl think he was going to do...beat her?

"It's just a cup," he said indifferently to put her mind at ease. She set the cup back back on the tray and poured him another cup of tea from a different cup then handed it to him. He sipped it in silence, wondering what sorts of stories the girl had been told about him.

Why does it even matter? It isn't as if she would ever come to care for you. She's here because of her family and friends, nothing more. You don't deserve to have anyone care for you. You're not worth caring about. Haven't you learned that by now. Everyone you love leaves you.

Belle slipped out of the dining room and took the tea service into the kitchen to be washed.

Speak your wishes, mistress and we will guide you she head a voice saying in her mind, sensing it was the kitchen itself speaking to her.

"I...I'm sorry...I really don't know what to do."

Listen and learn, young mistress.

She sat down at the table, listening as the kitchen explained that it and every room in the house was enchanted, not by Rumplestiltskin's magic but by the magic of his predecessor to obey any command given to them and they in turn would teach her how to command them so that it would make her own duties less difficult. Once nighttime came she was led back downstairs to the dungeon. That night as she had every night, she lay on her pallet weeping loudly, remembering everyone she left behind and how much she missed them. The door to the dungeon was thrust open and Rumple walked in, irritated.

"When you so eagerly agreed to come and work for me, I assumed you wouldn't miss your family quite so much!"

Belle stood up and glared at him. "I made my sacrifice for them. Of...of course I miss them, you beast!" she cried.

"Yes, yes, of course. But the crying must stop. Night after night! It's making it very difficult for me to spin. You know, I do my best thinking then!" He conjured a pillow. "Perhaps this'll help?"

She was stunned by the sudden gesture of kindness. "For me?"

"Not so beastly now am I," he grumbled and threw it at her to catch.

"Thank you. Maybe now I can actually get some sleep," she said sarcastically.

"No, no, no. It's not to help you sleep, dearie. It's to muffle the cries so I can get back to work!"

Upstairs they heard glass breaking. Rumple's blood boiled with fury. Who dared to invade his home and how had they gotten past the wards!? When they entered the dining hall Rumple spotted a cloaked figure taking the fairy godmother's wand from its stand.

"Are you sure you wanna do this, dearie?"

"Pretty sure," the thief answered.
"If you don't know how to use that wand, it can do nasty things to you."

"Well, then... I'll stick to what I know works. Do you know what this arrow can do to you?" he asked, loading an arrow into the bow.

"Has to hit me first." Rumple taunted and vanished to another spot in the room.

"Shouldn't be a problem. An arrow fired from this bow always finds its target. Don't you just love magic?"

He vanished again, The arrow whizzed through the air and buried itself in his chest.

"I know I do." the thief said confidently

"As do I! But don't you know? All magic comes with a price! And in your case, that's me," Rumple said threateningly as he pulled the arrow out of his chest and giggled. He waved his hand and the thief found himself chained in another part of the dungeon, his hands raised above his head. "Now then, how did a simple thief obtain Artemis's bow?" Rumple asked as he conjured a chair and sat down.

"W...What?"

"Only one bow like that is in existence. I've been trying to acquire it myself as part of my collection yet I couldn't seem to locate it and you have. And you're going to tell me how...and what you need that wand for. Who are you?"

He's the last Strogoff...he has to be! a voice in his head warned. Get rid of him.

He's just a thief. A simple thief, nothing more. That wand can't harm you. Only the dagger can...or Aramon's Talisman.

Fool. He'll use the wand to find it. Destroy him!

"I just need magic...you wouldn't understand."

"FOR WHAT!" Rumple shouted.

The thief stayed silent, much to his frustration. Rumple stood up and glared at him. "You won't kill me, Strogoff. If you could, you would've done it already but you seem to be missing the one weapon that would allow you to do the job, the talisman. Now, where are they?!"

"I don't know what you're talking about!" the thief insisted.

"Don't lie to me!"

They argued back and forth for hours, the thief denying any knowledge of the talisman or the emerald. Frustrated, Rumple picked up his old walking stick and shook it in front of the man's face. "You will not stop me from finding my son, do you understand me!?!" he hissed. "I'll see you in hell first! You can think about that while you rot in here!" he added and vanished.

Belle was sweeping the hall when he appeared in the dining room. "Take our guest something to eat. I need to make a trip to the village."

Once he was gone Belle hurried down to the dungeon with the keys to the shackles and started unlocking them.
"What? Did he send you to finish the job?" he asked her.

"Uh-no, no. Not at all. Here, drink this. I couldn't let this continue, it's inhuman, being chained in a
dungeon." she said as she handed him a cup of water.

"I-I couldn't agree more. But I fear now he'll turn his wrath on you."

"If he does, I'll stand up to the beast that he is, because no one... no one deserves to be tortured."

"Well, he may beg to differ."

"Well, I don't care. He doesn't frighten me. Hurry up. He'll be back soon. Hurry."

"But he will... he will kill you. Unless...unless you run away with me."

"I can't run. I made a deal to serve him, in exchange for him protecting my kingdom and my family
from the ogres If I were to leave, I might survive, but my family surely won't."

"All I can do is wish you luck."

"Thank you. Now go. Go!"

She returned to the dining room and settled down to read a book, unaware that her master had
returned until she heard him shouting her name as he came up the stairs.

"Where is he?" he demanded.

"Gone. I let him go," she answered.

"What? He was a thief." he exclaimed.

"Which doesn't give you the right to cage him up like an animal," she argued.

"It gives me every right!" he raged. "Ohhhh let me guess: you think he's a hero, stealing from me
for some noble cause. You read too many books, dearie! There, maybe that'll stop filling your head
with poisonous thoughts!" he yelled, waving his hand and making her book vanish.

"I didn't free him because of what I read in my books. I saw good in him. That man only wanted to
escape with his life."

"Oh, is that what you thought? Our thief escaped with more than his life," he said, showing her the
empty holder where the wand once rested. "You were tricked, you foolish, gullible girl!"

"There must be some explanation. We don't know why he wanted the wand!"

"He took the wand because he wanted magic! People who steal magic never have good intentions!"
he cried storming over to the table and leaning on it as fear gripped him. The thief was loose, he
had the wand and would find some means to destroy him before he had the chance to find Bae. He
couldn't let it happen.

"No, no! You can't tell what's in a person's heart until you truly know them!" Belle insisted,
wondering if she was still referring to the thief or her master.

"Oh we'll see what its in his heart... when I shoot an arrow straight through it! Because I am a
showman, it'll be with his bow," he said and conjured the bow. "And because this is your fault get
to come with me and watch, knowing that as the blood drips from his carcass, it'll be you and your
rags to wipe it up!" he raged.

They took the carriage into the forest. "I'm losing track of him. This forest is too thick," he complained.

Belle smiled. "Maybe we should return home."

"And let the thief escape? What would people think if I spared the life of someone who stole from me?"

"That there's actually a man hiding behind the beast."

"There isn't."

"Then why didn't you kill me when I freed the prisoner?" she interrogated.

"Well, I would have but good help these days is very hard to find."

"I think you are not as dark as you'd like people to believe. I think deep down there's love in your heart and for something more than power."

"You're right. There is something I love," he said as he leaned down to look at her. My son. "My things!" he sang, making her jump back. She glared at him.

"You really are as dark as people say!"

"Darker dearie, much darker," he said and brought the carriage to a stop. There was a group of horsemen waiting for them. The leader dismounted holding a whiskey flash in his hand. As Rumple approached he could smell the alcohol on the man's breath.

"What are you doing in my woods?" the man asked drunkenly. He was the Sheriff of Nottingham.

"Pardon the intrusion Sheriff. I'm looking for a thief. He attacked me with his bow. I tracked him as far as these woods and then he vanished."

"Yes, I know exactly who you're after," the sheriff said as he studied the bow. "I also know who you are...Rumplestiltskin." He then proceeded to offer to give Rumple information about the thief in exchange for Belle. Rumple was outraged. He dared to call her a wench? He would give the drunk a lesson in manners he wouldn't soon forget.

Filthy drunken wretch, Rumple thought angrily, flicking his wrist and casting a spell to remove the man's vile tongue before he could say anything more disgusting to the girl. Even he in his darkest moment would never dare to speak about a woman in such an abhorring manner. Once he was convinced the drunk had gotten the message, he gave him his tongue back and headed into Sherwood Forest in search of the thief, Belle pleading with him to stop as he aimed the bow at the man he knew knew as Robin Hood. Seeing the thief's companion with child stayed his hand as did Belle's passionate pleas that there was good in the thief as there was good in him, something he no longer believed anymore. Lies, all of it. He waved his hand, burying the girl to her waist in the ground.

"You are not the kind of man to leave a child fatherless!" she cried.

But he had. His own. Could he bring himself to repeat his own mistake with someone else's child? He raised the bow and took his shot as Belle yelled out, the arrow burying itself in a chest on the wagon per his direction. The lovers, now knowing someone was after them fled into the woods.
"What happened?" she asked.

"I missed," he muttered and waved his hand again to remove her from her trap. "Get back to the carriage. I'm bored of this forest."

"You're...you're not going after him?"

"He's not worth the efforts."

"You spared his life."

"What? I did nothing of the sort," he denied as he turned his back to her.

"That bow has magic in it. It never misses its target," she reminded him.

"Well perhaps the magic simply wore...off..." he said as he turned around and caught her looking up at him with those wide blue eyes. Then she did something that threw him completely off guard...throw her arms around him. He couldn't even remember the last time someone dared to take such liberties with him. Only certain people had ever been allowed to. She'd only held onto him for a few seconds yet it felt like it lasted much longer to him.

"Aren't you coming?" she inquired softly. He retrieved the bow and followed her back to the carriage, a small smile on his lips, the ride back to the castle much more pleasant as she seemed pleased with him. "Looks like you won't be needing that bow anymore," she said.

"Actually I think I'll hold onto it," he said as he draped it over the back of his chair. "You never know. It could come in handy someday."

"Well, if you don't need me for anything else...goodnight, Rumplestiltskin."

"No, wait. There is something else," he said, wringing his hands nervously as he escorted up the stairs to his library. He'd collected so many books over the centuries and was certain she would enjoy reading them as much as he did. "Temper your excitement dearie. This is merely another room for you to clean."

"It's...it's beautiful. There's more books here than I could ever read in a lifetime," she exclaimed and picked one up.

"Well I hope you can clean faster than you can read."

"Did you do all of this for me?"

"I'd better not see a single speck of dust gathering on any of these books! What are you smiling at?" he demanded.

She approached him slowly and took his hand in hers. "You're not who I thought you were...and I'm glad," she said softly, her touch oddly comforting.

Stop it, you fool! She's just grateful, that's all. Don't mistake it for anything more or you'll only be hurt again. No one can love a beast. Remember that!

"Well...ummm...you'd best be getting to bed. Don't want to oversleep and get behind on your chores."

"Of course not. Goodnight, Rumplestiltskin."
"Goodnight...Belle."

One day while Belle was cleaning the west wing she discovered a closet with many beautiful items in it, just thrown in it. She'd gotten used to finding rooms like this all over the castle and started organizing them because the clutter attracted dirt piles and she disliked having to pick the clumps out of her broom. She heard footsteps and Rumplestiltskin was beside her.

"What is all that?" he asked her.

"You don't know?"

"No. I never had a reason to be in this room. Too cluttered," he quipped.

"There are so many beautiful things in here, Rumplestiltskin. Shouldn't they be on shelves instead of scattered all over the floor?"

"Ah. Perhaps you're right." He waved his hand and sets of wooden shelves lined the walls of the room. "Well then, this will be another room for you to clean. Keep this collection dusted and polished," he instructed.

"Oh, look! This cup has a chip in it like the other one," the girl said softly as she held the cup up for him to inspect. "Can we put it and the teapot downstairs with the others?"

"No...I prefer the other one. You can use them and the candleholder in your room if you wish."

"My room? The dungeon?"

He waved his hand and a box appeared in it. "Put those in there and I'll show you to your room. Unless you want to stay in the dungeon? Come along then dearie. Taking time away from your work," he said and giggled. The girl followed him down the hall. The double doors opened revealing an elegant bedroom.

"It...It's beautiful," she exclaimed as she threw her arms around him. "Thank you."

"You'll be expected to keep this room clean too, Belle," he said wondering why she insisted on hugging him so much as of late. It was...unnerving to say the least.

"Oh I know but I'm thankful nonetheless." She opened the box and set the candleholder, teapot and chipped cup on the stand beside her bed then walked over to the closet and found it full of clothes, just the right size. The skirts were shorter, making it easier to get around the house and do her chores. She loved her gold dress but it was impossible to clean in.

"What are you doing?" Belle inquired one afternoon watching Rumplestiltskin in the middle of the ballroom with an odd looking stick in his hand, hitting small balls into holes he made all over the room. He swung the stick and struck another ball, hissing in frustration when he missed a hole due to Belle's foot being in the way.

"You're standing on my next hole, dearie," he scolded.

"This is how you make use of a ballroom, conjuring little holes you can hit balls into with a stick?" she asked.

"Well it's not like I'd be hosting a party," he said sarcastically. "No, people only come to me when they need something and they're not likely to stay to dance. Now, if you would move your foot, I'd like to finish my game."
"I've never seen a game like this before. What is it called?"

"I don't know...I just know I like it," he said. "And you...should be working," he sang, wagging his finger at her. "Castle's not gonna clean itself, dearie."

"I've finished all my work on this floor," she said. "Can you show me how to play?"

Teach me. Don't just do it. Teach me.

"No!" he said sharply. "Get back to work!" he snapped. The last thing he needed now was another damned Cora in his life working her charms on him until she got what she wanted from him then abandoning him so she could make her future what she wanted it to be. He would never be fooled by another woman again. If there was manipulating to be done, he would be the one doing it.

"Good gods, did someone get up on the wrong side of the bed this morning?"

He glared at her. Did she not realize that he could kill her where she stood? But, she was an excellent caretaker and good help was hard to find.

"Did you not hear me? Get back to work."

"Ooooh...you...you...beast!" she raged, spinning on her heel and storming out of the room.

"That is what I am dearie, and you'd be wise not to forget it!" he shouted after her retreating form. He heard a door slam in response and found himself giggling in spite of himself. Why was it that he found her displays of rage so appealing? He turned around and was getting ready to make another shot when the stick was snatched out of his hand. He turned around and saw her standing behind him.

"If you think you can break me Rumplestiltskin, you've got another think coming," she said, waving the stick in the air while he stood speechless. "I may miss my family but you will not ever see me cry in front of you again! I refuse to give you that satisfaction since I know you thrive on other peoples' misery."

"Your tongue is sharper than my claws," he muttered. "Were you this difficult at home?"

"Difficult? You haven't seen difficult...yet!" she threatened.

Just like Cora...spicy...and just as dangerous.

He waved his hand and his stick was returned to him. "Are you finished?"

"Are you finished being such an ass?"

"You...you called me an ass!" he sputtered. "You dared to call me an ass? How would you like to be sleeping in the dungeon again, dearie?"

"I got used to it before, I'll do it again," she said calmly. "As I said: you won't break me."

"I'll just have to make you work harder then," he teased.

"Oh, you do that already by making this castle so cluttered. Hasn't anyone told you that you're not supposed to shove things into corners? They attract dust and dirt." She retrieved her broom and waved it in front of his face. "Look at this. Do you know how irritating it is to pick this out of my broom?"
"Yes." He waved his hand and she found herself confined in a pile of what would later be called dust bunnies by housewives around the world.

"You are not funny Rumplestiltskin. Get me out of here!" she cried and sneezed as she inhaled dust and dirt while he stood there giggling. "Ohhhh you just wait til I get out of here!" she threatened, and started sweeping herself out of the trap with her broom. She then walked behind him, swung the broom and smacked his backside with the bottom of it...hard.

"You...you...spanked me! With a broom!" he cried.

"You deserved it," she said matter of factly. "Now if you'll excuse me, I'll go finish my work now." She sauntered out of the room, grinning. He was starting to banter with her more often now, it was a good sign. He, on the other hand had suddenly lost the ability to speak. No longer able to concentrate on his game, he returned to his library to work only hours later she burst into the library and asked him to take a walk around the grounds with her.

"You finished your chores a bit early today, Belle. Rushing through them, dearie?"

"Of course not but it's a beautiful evening and I'd hate to walk alone. And you look like you could use a break," she added.

"Perhaps another time," he muttered and lowered his head to read the ingredients for the potion he was working on. She reached out and slammed the book shut, just missing catching his nose in it.

"Are you mad, girl? I was reading that!" he cried.

"You can work on it later," she said and snatched the book away from him. He glared at her.

"I haven't the patience for your antics tonight, Belle. Now, give me that book."

"Why don't you just take it from me? We both know you can," she challenged, her blue eyes clashing with his.

"You'd just steal it again!" he cried. "Fine. We'll go for your walk!" He summoned his cloak.

If he thought accompanying her on her nightly walks satisfied her need for more of his company, he'd had another think coming. She was constantly creating excuses for them to be in the same room together and damned if he didn't obey her requests as if she were in possession of his dagger.

"Rumplestiltskin, come quickly!" Belle cried out urgently one evening from the dining room. He appeared in the room in a puff of smoke.

"Belle? What's wrong?" he asked frantically. "Are you hurt?"

"No...he is," she said and turned around to show him the white and grey kitten she was cradling in her arms. I...I found him lying on the steps."

"Let me have a look at him," Rumple said softly as he took the cat from her. It growled and swatted at him with its paw. "Settle down...I just want to see." he said and carried it over to the table. Upon closer inspection he could see that the cat's hind leg was in an odd position.

"Is there anything you can do?" Belle asked sadly.

"I'm going to try. Would you stay here please? He seems calm with you here." He glanced down at the cat.
I'm going to try to heal your leg. This is Belle. She's going to stay with you while I do this. I'm going to put you to sleep while I do it so you won't feel any pain. Just lie still.

I can do that...hurts so much...I was afraid no one would find me. Th...thank you...the cat said as it drifted off to sleep. Belle gently stroked its back while Rumple focused his magic on the cat's broken leg as he'd done with his own, setting the bones back into their proper places. Occasionally Belle would look up at him and smile.

He does have love in his heart, it's just hard for him to show it, she thought, touched by how tender he was with the kitten.

When he finished with the cat, Rumple conjured a bed for it. "I want you to keep him with you in your room at night but let him out during the day so he can walk around. It will help strengthen his leg," he explained.

"I'm surprised."

"By what, dearie?"

"I didn't know you loved animals so much."

"There's a lot of things you don't know about me," he muttered and walked away.

From that moment the kitten became part of the household. Belle had named it Lucky because she said she'd been lucky to find it. Rumple only thought about keeping the cat until they found it a good home but the cat made it quite clear it wasn't going anywhere both by what it would say to him in his mind and through its actions and he was starting to like having it around, even if it did sometimes have a bad attitude. Also it was another companion for Belle when he was too busy.

It was almost spring and Belle felt the castle was simply too dark. She fetched a ladder from one of the closets and set up against the window so that she could climb up it and open the drapes.

"Why do you spin so much? Sorry. It's just that you've spun straw into more gold than you can ever spend," she said him while he was sitting at the wheel.

"I like to watch the wheel. Helps me to forget."

"Forget what?"

"I guess it worked," he giggled while she laughed. "What are you doing?" he inquired as he approached her.

"Trying to open these. It's almost spring. We should let some light in." The curtains refused to budge. "What did you do? Nail them down?"

"Yes."

She gave the curtain a yank and lost her footing, falling down the ladder and directly into his arms, her eyes meeting his. They'd been in close proximity before but never this close and it was invoking emotions in her that both intrigued and terrified her. With every passing day she was seeing the side of him she knew was there but he was reluctant to show it, the side that was the man and not the beast, the man who had love in his heart...perhaps for her?

"Thank you," she murmured.
"No matter," he said nervously and set the girl back on her feet.

"I'll uhh...put the curtains back up."

"There's no need. I'll get used to it," he said and returned to his spinning though he found it much more difficult to concentrate as thoughts of how right it felt to hold her kept occupying his mind.

Not again! he scolded himself. Remember the last time you were foolish enough to let your heart rule your head. She doesn't care for you. She can never care for you.

Frustrated, he rose from the spinning wheel and walked over to the table to pour himself a cup of tea. He drank it from the chipped cup.

"Why did you want me here?" she asked him when she sat down on the table.

"The place was filthy."

"I think you were lonely. I mean any man would be lonely."

"I'm not a man."

"So, I've had a couple of months to look around, you know. And, uh, upstairs, there's, uh, clothing, small, as if for a-a child? Was it yours or... or was there a son?"

"There was. There was a son. I lost him, as I did his mother," he confessed sadly.

"I'm... I'm sorry. So you—you were a man, once. An ordinary man. If I'm never going to know another person in my whole life, can't I at least know you?"

"Perhaps. Perhaps... Perhaps you just want to learn the monster's weaknesses! Nah, nah nah!" he chastised, wagging his finger at her.

"You're not a monster. You think you're uglier than you are. That's why you cover all the mirrors up, isn't it? Hmm?" she asked with a smile.

No, it's to keep bitches like Cora and her daughter from spying on me.

There was a loud knocking on the door and when he went to answer it Belle's foppish suitor stood on the other side demanding her return. He snapped his fingers and turned the annoying man into a rose, thinking it would be the perfect gift for her.

"Who was that?" she asked.

"Just an old woman selling flowers. Here, if you'll have it," he said as he brought the rose out from behind his back.

"Why, thank you." She curtseyed to him as he bowed.

"You had a life, Belle. Before... this...friends... family. What made you choose to come here with me?" he inquired when he returned to his chair.

"Heroism. Sacrifice. You know, there aren't a lot of opportunities in this land for women to show what they can do. To see the world, to be heroes. So, when you arrived, that was my chance. I always wanted to be brave. I figured, do the brave thing, and bravery would follow," she explained as she trimmed the rose to fit into a vase.
"And is it everything you hoped?"

"Well, uh... I did want to see the world. That part didn't really work out. But, uh, I did save my village."

"And what about your, uh... betrothed?"

"It was an arranged marriage. Honestly, I never really cared much for Gaston. To me love is—love is layered. Love is a mystery to uncovered. Yeah, I could never truly give my heart to someone as superficial as he. But, um, you were going to tell me about your son."

I'll tell you what... I'll make you a deal. Go to town, and fetch me some straw. When you return, I'll share my tale."

"But... town? You trust me to come back?"

"Oh, no. I expect I'll never see you again."

Belle was walking along the road when an elegant carriage came to a stop beside her and an equally elegant lady stepped out, asking to walk with her to stretch her legs. Belle didn't know who she was but the lady seemed friendly enough and it was nice to have someone else to talk to, another woman.

"You carry very little," the woman said as she glanced down at Belle's basket.

"I don't want to be slowed down."

"You're running from someone. The question is: master or lover? Oh...master and lover." the woman said with a smile. Belle suddenly felt uneasy.

"I might take a rest. You...you go on ahead."

"So if I'm right, you love your employer...but you're leaving him."

"I might love him. I could...except something evil has taken root in him."

"Sounds like a curse to me and all curses can be broken. A kiss born of true love would do it."

Belle's eyes sparkled with hope. She knew very little about the Dark One and any books he may have had on the subject were off limits to her. He'd made that quite clear. Was it possible that true love would be strong enough to break such a terrible curse?

"Oh, no child. No! I would never suggest a young woman to kiss a man who held her captive. What kind of message is that?"

"Right."

"Besides, if he love you, he would've let you go. And if he didn't love you, well then the kiss wouldn't even work."

"Well, he did let me go." And he had. Were all these feelings she'd been having...the beginnings of love? The only things she knew about the love between a man and a woman came from her books and all of the sensations she'd been having were exactly what she read about.

"Yes, but no kiss happened."
Yet other things had even before she'd fallen off the ladder. Their eyes would meet often across the room and neither one of them would speak at first. When the words did come, there was a softer tone to them. Once in a while, their hands would brush against each other if they reached for items at the same time. He always pulled away first. He was making more of an effort to spend time with her. He didn't say much during their nightly walks or when they both sat in front of the fireplace and read their separate books but he never needed to. She was content knowing he was there.

"And a kiss, a kiss is enough. He'd be a man again."

"An ordinary man. True love's kiss will break any curse."

He was on edge from the moment she left, pacing the floors.

Will you please stop that pacing? I'm trying to sleep!

"You be quiet...and get off there!" he snapped at Lucky who was lying across his worktable. "How many times have I told you my table is not your bed? Scat!"

Quit taking your worry out on me! And just why are you worried? She'll be back.

"No she won't She has her freedom now and she'll enjoy it...perhaps find someone she can love more than me."

Jackass. You can't see what's right in front of your face, can you? She loves you.

"Who in her right mind would want to love a beast?" he mused.

It's not the beast she sees, it's the man you are underneath. The man you've always been.

"The coward? The crippled ugly spinner? Oh, what a fine husband I'd make! She belongs in a castle with a crown on her head, not a run down shack...if I lose my power that is all I would have to offer her!"

Yet he'd had nothing before but his heart was full of love, even for a wife who despised him. No, he could love her with all his heart and still not have it be enough. Milah certainly didn't think so and neither had Cora. Perhaps it was best if she had left him.

He gazed out the window, his heart leaping into his chest when he saw her walking towards the front doors. She'd returned! He made a mad dash down the steps and into the dining hall to wait for her. She was back and his hopes were raised that she'd returned because she did love him and there was no longer any point in denying it...he loved her in return.
Chapter Summary

Belle attempts to break Rumple's curse with heartbreaking results

My fall will be for you
My love will be in you
You were the one to cut me
So I'll bleed forever...

Nightwish - Ghost Love Score

Author's Notes: I based Belle's captivity by the clerics on descriptions of witch persecutions during the Middle Ages. I was disgusted with the part in Lacey where it was suggested Rumple tried to skin Robin alive so I cut that out and took a different approach and I figured there had to be some truth to Regina's story about the clerics which was why Rum reacted so violently in Skin Deep.

He was sitting at his wheel, making a concentrated effort to appear busy when she walked into the room carrying the basket of straw.

"Oh, you're back already. Good. Good thing. I'm, uh... I'm nearly out of straw."

"Come on, you're happy that I'm back." Belle teased, setting the basket down.

"I'm not unhappy," he confessed.

"And you uh, promised me a story."

"Did I?"

"Mh-hmm. Tell me about your son."

"I lost him," he said. "There's nothing more to tell, really."

"And since then you've loved no one and no one has loved you?"

"Why did you come back?" he whispered as he leaned towards her, his heart racing again.

"I wasn't going to but then something changed my mind." Belle leaned forward, her own heart beating faster and pressed her lips to his.

"Oh..." Rumple whispered. "What's happening?" He could feel his darkness slipping away along with his hideous appearance yet he couldn't bring himself to pull away from a kiss that was more like fire than Cora's ice.
"Kiss me again, it's working!" she cried

"What is?" he asked, shocked when he heard his human voice again.

"Any curse can be broken."

"Who told you that? Who knows that?" he shouted, his cursed appearance returning as his rage surged through him. Betrayed again!

"I-I-I don't know. She, uh... she...she..." she stammered.

"She," he hissed, stalking over to the mirror in front of the wall and removed its cover. "You evil soul. This was you! You turned her against me! You think you can make me weak? You think you can defeat me?!"

"Who are you talking to?"

"The queen! Your friend, the Queen! How did she get to you?"

"The-the Queen? I don't understand..."

"I knew this was a trick. I knew you could never care for me. Oh, yeah. You're working for her. Or is this all you? Is this you being the hero and killing the beast?" he hissed.

"It was working!"

"Shut up!"

"This means it's true love!"

"Shut the hell up!"

"Why won't you believe me?!"

"Because no one...No one could ever, ever love me!" he screamed, shaking her. He grabbed her arm and led her back down to the dungeon, shoving her inside her old cell and locking the door.

"Rumplestiltskin, no! Don't leave me in here...please.." she pleaded, battering the door with her fists.

"I won't be a pawn in your game...or hers!"

"This is no game...I love you! Let me prove it to you!"

"You've proven nothing more than that you're just like all the others!" he snarled from the other side of the door and returned to the dining hall, picking up his old walking stick and attacking anything in his sight...the cabinet, the walls, the mirrors. He then stalked over to the table, taking the tea cups and smashing them against the wall. When he found the chipped cup in his hand, he got ready to throw it but changed his mind and set it back down on the table.

"So... what are you going to do to me?" Belle asked him when he opened the door to the dungeon two days later.

"Go!" He pointed toward the door and turned his back to her.

"Go?"
"I don't want you anymore, dearie."

Belle stood up, prepared to walk away but she stopped and faced him. She'd told him once before that he would not break her nor would he ever see her cry again."You know, you were freeing yourself. You could have had happiness if you just believed that someone could want you. But you couldn't take the chance."

"That's a lie."

"You're a coward, Rumplestiltskin. And no matter how thick you make your skin, that doesn't change," she said coldly

"I'm not a coward, dearie. It's quite simple, really. My power... means more to me than you."

"No. No, it doesn't. You just don't think I can love you. Now, you've made your choice. And you're going to regret it. Forever. And all you'll have... is an empty heart...and a chipped cup," she said, her voice breaking and it took every last ounce of strength she had to hold back her tears. She retained her brave facade until she was well beyond the castle walls, the silence of the night broken by her anguished sobs.

When Rumple returned to his library Lucky was perched on his table, his fur sticking up as he growled and hissed.

"Get off that table...now!" he ordered and reached out to grab the cat. It hissed again and dug its claws into his arm. "What did you do that for?" Rumple asked angrily, waving his hand over his arm to heal it while Lucky continued to growl and hiss at him.

Because you're a jackass, that's why! How could you let her go!? She loved you!

"She was working for the queen, tricking me...just like Cora."

If that's the case then explain this to me: why did her kiss start turning you back into a man again? Because it IS true love and she IS your true love. She loved you and although you are too muleheaded to admit it, you loved her. You still do.

"She doesn't love me. No one can love me," he said sadly as he sat down in his chair. The cat crawled onto his lap and rested its head on his thigh.

I don't love you but I do like you, even if you are a jackass who just let the best thing to ever happen to him walk out. Hopefully she'll come back and beat some damned sense into you.

"She won't return, Lucky. I...I was terrible to her."

Jackass.

"Stop calling me that!"

Well you are...and a coward!

You're a coward, Rumplestiltskin. And no matter how thick you make your skin, that doesn't change.

Oh, you're right about that, Belle. And you're better off without me.

Suddenly the castle, like the shack so many years ago no longer felt like a home without her in it. He missed her bright smile, her laughter but more importantly, he missed her. The long walks he
took about the castle grounds in the evenings seemed dull without her there to talk to him. He stopped sitting in front of the fireplace to read because he couldn't bear to see the empty chair across from him, gone from his life, just like Bae... and it had been his fault.

The door to the dungeon of Castle Lavaliere opened and Maurice entered followed by two of his guards and several clerics. "Take her to the tower," he instructed the guards.

"Papa... Papa, please don't do this," Belle begged as the guards seized her by her arms and dragged her out of the room. "Papa!"

"I'm sorry my girl... this is for the best. Fetch the lady Angelique!" he commanded the guard captain. He nodded and raced down the road to the home of the town's resident midwife. She packed what she needed into a bag and followed the guard to the castle.

"Is someone about to give birth, my lord?" she inquired.

"No. My daughter... Belle... was enslaved to the Dark One and I fear he has tainted her. You will examine her to determine whether she is still a maid or if she has indeed fornicated with that monster."

"My lord!" Angelique cried, astounded that he would make such a request yet she was not able to refuse him. When she was taken to the tower room where the girl was being kept she was horrified when she saw the clerics examining her for evidence of the Dark One's mark. Maurice had also called on the Blue Fairy for assistance to set up wards around the castle preventing the Dark One from attempting to reclaim his daughter while the clerics prayed to the gods to banish the evil from her body and soul.

Belle lay curled in a ball in the corner of the tower room, unable to believe her own father could betray her so cruelly. She was not tainted, she'd only been in love. Although Angelique had informed both Maurice and the clerics the girl was innocent, they hadn't believed her. She was now known in their town as the Dark One's Whore and no one wanted to associate with her for fear of incurring the Dark One's wrath, laving Maurice no other option but to keep his daughter locked away for her own safety but Belle was not going to be a prisoner. While her father and his clerics were discussing the methods that would be needed to restore her soul to righteousness, she was plotting her escape.

Her meal was delivered once a day. The woman sent to do the task always tucked the key to the cell inside her dress pocket. Belle was not a violent person by nature but she knew the only way she would be able to obtain the keys from the servant was to incapacitate her in some form and one morning when the food tray was being delivered, Belle made her move. She struck the woman over the head with the teapot and retrieved the keys.

"I am so sorry," she said to the unconscious woman. "But I will not be a prisoner in my own home any longer!"

She was shocked when she discovered that her father hadn't even posted any guards around the tower, however, she did see them patrolling the rest of the castle grounds. While she was sneaking past two of them she heard her name being mentioned.

"He's never going to let her out of that tower. The midwife says she's still a maid but the Dark One could've tricked her and no man in a village for miles would want his leavings. Probably made her do all sorts of things that even a tavern wench wouldn't do," one of them said and went into detail, making the bile rise in Belle's throat. How dare they suggest such things? Rumplestiltskin was not like that!
"Better if he put the word out she is dead."

She made the decision then and there that she was never going to return home again. There was no point anymore. When people looked at her they would see her as a whore and Rumplestiltskin as a monster despite any protests she would make to the contrary.

She wasn't sure how long she'd been walking but she was exhausted and in need of food and drink when she spotted a tavern. While she was having a drink she could hear a group of dwarves talking, one of them talking about some strange feelings he'd been having, feelings she knew well.

"It's not in his head, it's in his heart. You're in love," she said softly. "Trust me, I know love and you're in it."

"What's it like?" he asked as he sat across from her.

"It's the most wonderful and amazing thing in the whole world. Love is hope. It fuels our dreams. And if you're in it, you need to enjoy it. Because...love doesn't always last forever," she concluded sadly.

"But if love's so great, why do I feel so bad right now?"

"You need to be with the person you love."

"Yeah but how do I know she feels the same way? All she talked about was going to see some fireflies, not loving me."

"What did she tell you about these fireflies?" As the dwarf explained, Belle realized the woman in question was hinting around that he should join her, however, he hadn't gotten the message. "She wasn't telling you about the fireflies. She was inviting you to be with her."

"You think so."

"I've had my heart broken enough to know when someone is reaching out. Now, go. Find your love...find your hope...find your dreams."

The dwarf rejoined his friends while Belle sat alone at the table again, brusing tears from her eyes. Why couldn't I reach you, Rumple? We were so close...but that curse, that horrible curse, as long as you hold onto your fear, you'll never truly be happy.

She had a few coins in the pocket of her old housemaid's dress to afford a room at the inn above the tavern. As she lay in her bed looking up at the ceiling, she thought of Rumple again and could see the anger in his eyes after their kiss.

No one, no one could ever, ever love me!

Who made you believe that, Rumple? She sensed his bitterness came from much more than his curse. He'd said his wife and son were lost to him. Did she leave him and take their child with her? Was that why he was so reluctant to open his heart again? She'd taken the chance, placed all her hopes into a single kiss and it had gone terribly wrong, making her fear she'd left another scar on his heart and been given one of her own through his rejection.

Rumple reached into his chest and pulled out his heart. As he gazed at it he was stunned to see that a small portion of it was glowing red again while the rest of it was consumed by darkness.

Just once more...please allow it to work this time...I have to find her and bring her back to me...if
she'll have me, he thought desperately as he closed his eyes and waved his hand over the darkened organ. When he opened them again, he moaned in agony when he saw the heart still intact, still consumed by darkness. He wept in silence and placed it back inside his chest again. He was a fool. She would never come back. No one ever did.

The next afternoon while Belle was having her lunch she could hear a group of men talking. "...A fearsome beast, ravaging a far away kingdom. It's eyes burn with fire. They call it the Yaoguai. No man has been able to kill it, but we will! There's room on our wagon. Who's gonna join us?"

"Looking for an adventure?" the dwarf asked her when he approached her table.

"Dreamy, right?"

"Yes. I came to thank you. That advice you gave me last night, it worked. Nova and I are running away together."

"That's wonderful."

"Why don't you sign up?" Dreamy asked, indicating the group of hunters.

"Yeah, I've always dreamt of heroics but I think it's safer I stick to my books. They're the only adventures I know that have happy endings," Belle scoffed.

"Well maybe this one will have one too."

"Well yeah, I doubt it. Last time I faced a beast it didn't end well."

"What are you talking about?"

"Men! Follow me! Yaoguai awaits," she heard the leader of the hunting party call out before she could answer.

"Get on that wagon. Go! Take a chance."

"Thank you." She stood up and started to leave.

"Wait! Belle! Wait. It's fairy dust. It might come in handy," Dreamy explained, handing her a pouch.

"Uh, no, thank you... I've seen what magic does to people."

"You've seen what dark magic does. Fairies use this for good. Now go be a hero."

Belle smiled. So he had known who she was or were she'd been but at least he didn't judge her harshly as so many others had. Before she did, she stopped by the bookshop and found a book on the Yaoguai. It was written in the language of the creature's origin.

"What's that?" the leader of the hunting party, named Alistair asked her. The man didn't even know what a book was?

"Uh, a book. I trust you've seen one before?"

"You expect to beat the fiercest creature in the land with a book?"

"Maybe she means to bore it to death." another man said and they all laughed.
"It will tell us how to find the Yaoguai."

"These are just scribbles," Alistair said as he snatched the book out her hands.

"It's called another language. One that I know how to translate. Hmm."

"What?"

"Oh I thought it was just, scribbles?"

"We are here to protect the land, girl. If that book tells us where to go you shall share it with us."

"It says we'll find the Yaoguai by the lake."

"The lake you say."

"Yes."

"You heard her, Claude. We're going to the lake." They threw her off the wagon.

"Wait!"

"Don't forget your book!" Alistair called out and threw the book out.

"Enjoy the lake!" Belle yelled after them while she picked up her book and read aloud while she made her way into the mountains. It was still daylight and she hoped it would be asleep. "The Yaoguai prefers mountain habitats to all others. The Yaoguai hibernates by day and hunts by night. Please be asleep." She pulled her dagger out and broke into a run when she heard a noise from inside the lair and the fiery beast emerged, stalking after her. Her foot caught on a rock and she fell to the ground as the beast approached. Another woman emerged from the woods and shot an arrow at the beast. It scurried off.

"However can I thank you? You saved my life," Belle exclaimed as she rose to her feet.

"And you ruined my hunt. It took me weeks to track the Yaoguai here."

"Yeah, I found it in a day."

"You have luck on your side."

"No not luck, it was this." She showed the woman the book. "I could, uh, I could help you find it again."

"You've done enough damage already. If you really want to help. Stay out of my way," the woman said angrily and continued her pursuit.

When she reached the town, the hunting party was waiting for her.

"The Yaoguai wasn't at the lake," Alistair said angrily as his companion grabbed her and attempted to dump her into the well while she was trying to get herself a drink of water.

"I'm - I'm sorry. I must've misread that one," she cried.

"Hmm. You know what I think happened? I think you sent us in the wrong direction on purpose," he said then something caught him around his throat and pulled him away from her. His companion also released her. Belle looked up to see a soldier approaching.
"Let her go."

"This isn't your fight, soldier," another man spoke up and challenged the soldier, who fought him off. Belle was stunned when the soldier's helmet came off. It was the woman she'd seen in the woods.

"Wait. You're a..." the man said, stunned while the woman punched him.

"Yeah. I know." She stood up and held her sword out. "Go!" she ordered them. The men quickly obeyed.

"I... didn't expect to see you again. Thank you," Belle said to her.

"I had to put up with brutes like them when I served in the emperor's army. Fools who think we have no business holding a sword. I only wish there was someone there to stand up for me." She looked down at her leg as did Belle.

"You're, uh, you're bleeding."

"I'll survive. The sun should be setting soon. We need to move out."

"What- what- what do you mean "we"?"

"You tracked the Yoaguai in a matter of hours. It took me weeks. You track the beast, and I'll kill it."

"I'd be honored to help you."

"My name is Mulan."

"I'm Belle," Belle said and shook her hand. They talked while they walked, Belle was curious about Mulan's life as a soldier in the emperor's army and Mulan described her experiences and also the issues she'd had. Belle admired her, seeing in her a kindred spirit. They were both women trying to make it in a world where the men felt their place was in the home.

Belle noticed that Mulan's injury seemed to be getting worse as they approached the lair.

"It's just ahead."

"You found it. Your books serve you well."

"Mulan, your leg's getting worse."

"No. I have to protect my village."

"You can't even walk! How are you going to kill the Yaoguai?"

"I'm not. You are."

"Me. I-I'm not a soldier."

"You have good instincts. You tracked down that beast faster than I ever could."

"Tracking it and killing it are not the same thing."

"There was once a time when people thought I didn't have what it took either, but I proved them
wrong."
"How?"

"I showed them I had the warrior spirit. Once I found something worth fighting for, I fought for it with everything I had. I never gave up. Belle, the fate of my village depends on you. Don't be afraid," Mulan advised, handing Belle the sword. The sword in hand, she approached the lair.

"Over here!" she yelled. The beast darted out of the cave and after her. She led it into the village toward the well. She grabbed a bucket and doused the creature's fiery head. She approached it with the sword, ready to deliver the final blow when she saw the creature writing something in the dirt.

"You're writing something. Jiu Wo. Save me. You need help. Let's uh, let's give this a try, shall we?" She took the pouch of fairy dust out and sprinkled some of it onto the creature to reveal a man.

Just like Rumple...a man under the beast.

The curse.. you broke it," he said gratefully while she helped him up.

"Someone did this to you?"

"Maleficent An evil sorceress from my kingdom, determined to do everything in her power to keep me apart from Aurora, my true love. So she exiled me to this land and turned me into a monster. I tried to warn the villagers, but no one understood what I really was. Except you."

"Well, you're not the first beast I've faced."

"I am forever in your debt. Please tell me how I might repay you."

"My friend's hurt. She needs a doctor. As do you. Help me bring her back to the village."

"It would be my honor."

"My friend's over that ridge." Belle said and Mulan was reading the book when they approached. "There she is." Mulan rose to her feet and limped over to them.

"Belle! Oh, you're alive."

"And I did it. I defeated the Yaoguai. With a little help."

"Who are you?" Mulan asked Phillip.

"I was the Yaoguai."

He was cursed. So I helped him, now he's going to help you," Belle explained.

"What, you're not coming?"

"I have another beast to face. And I won't need this to face him," she added, handing Mulan the sword back while the other woman handed her back her book. "Goodbye."

"Goodbye Belle."

While she was walking, she turned and looked back at Mulan's village.
Once I found something worth fighting for, I fought for it with everything I had. I never gave up. And neither will I. Rumple is worth fighting for. He may not believe he is, but I do. There is good in him. I know it in my heart.

"I'm coming back, Rumple."

"Isn't that sweet? Still fighting for true love. Even to the bitter end."

"How did you find me?" Belle asked angrily as she faced the queen who'd been the cause of the mess that was now her relationship with Rumple along with the members of the hunting party.

"You really should be nicer to your travelling companions. Right Claude? Take her to the tower."

"What? No! What are you-what are you doing? I-I- can save him! Just let me go to him! I-I can break his curse!" Belle cried as they dragged her toward a wagon with a cage on it.

"You've already tried and failed. That monster's beyond saving. I'm sparing you a lifetime of pain and misery."

You're wrong, bitch!

"You can't keep us apart forever. I'll fight for him. I'll never stop fighting for him!" Belle screamed as the queen rode away while she was taken to another prison.

Rumple was at his spinning wheel when he heard the dining hall doors open and the last person he wanted to see had walked in, the Evil Queen herself.

"Flimsy locks. I have a deal to discuss. A certain...mermaid."

"I'm not dealing today," Rumple said bitterly.

"Are you angry with me? What is it this time?" Regina asked, pouring herself a cup of tea.

"Your little deception failed. You'll never be more powerful than me. You can keep trying, dearie, but you're never gonna beat me."

"Oh. Is this about that girl I met on the road? What was her name? Margie? Verna?"

"Belle."

"Right. Well... you can rest assured I had nothing to do with that tragedy."

"What tragedy?" Rumple demanded, approaching her, wanting to rip her heart out.

"You don't know? After she got home... her fiancé had gone missing. And after her stay here, her... "association" with you, no one would want her, of course. Her father shunned her, cut her off, shut her out."

"So she needs... a home?" he asked hopefully. He would give her one, even if she didn't love him as long as she was back in his life.

"He was cruel to her. He locked her in a tower and sent in clerics to cleanse her soul with scourges and flaying. After a while, she threw herself off the tower. She died," Regina taunted.

"You're lying."
"Am I?"

"We're done." he said firmly, opening the doors with his magic.

"Fine. I have other calls to make. Hmm. The place is looking dusty, Rumple. You should get a new girl," she added as parting shot after running her finger along the table while he stood at the doors trying to hold back his temper. When she was gone he opened the cabinet and took out the chipped cup, taking it over to a pedestal and replacing the gold chalice that sat on it with the cup, weeping silently and barely hearing Lucky come into the room.

Rumplestiltskin...what's wrong?

"Belle...she's...she's gone," he sobbed.

That's obvious. She's been gone for weeks because you were a stubborn jackass. I thought you were going to try to find her. You're too afraid to, aren't you?

"No...she's...she's dead..."

WHAT?!

"She...she was tortured by clerics...and threw herself off a tower...to end her pain."

No...that's not possible. Our Belle...she wouldn't do that! They're lying to you! They have to be! You need to find out.

"I will...and if I find out she's lied to me, Snow White will be the last of Regina's worries!" Rumple said and vanished in a puff of smoke. He reappeared in Belle's village disguised as a merchant. When he approached the castle he could hear several guards talking.

"Unbelievable. Threw herself off the tower...over him! He couldn't have been that good in bed."

"Probably had some spell on her, the poor thing. The clerics said she was beyond salvation. He'd poisoned both her body and her mind."

Rumple sank back against the wall, his body trembling. It was true, oh dear gods, it was true! She was gone...forever!

"You okay over there?" one of the guards asked him.

"Yes...I...ahh...must've been the heat," he lied. "I...I'll be going now..." he added and ran off into an alley where he vanished. The two guards looked at each other.

"Send a message to the queen," one said.

"You think that was him?"

"Did you see his face when we said it...it was him. Inform her the story has been circulated and the Dark One believes."

Lucky was perched on the table waiting impatiently when Rumple returned.

What did you find out?

"They've even seen her do it. She's gone...she's gone forever!" he cried, running upstairs to the room she once occupied and laying down on the bed, her scent still lingering on the covers. The
cat jumped up and sat beside him.

You never should've let her go.

"Belle," Rumple sobbed, burying his face in her pillow. Lucky curled up beside him, his mournful meows joining those of his heartbroken master until they both fell into an exhausted sleep.
The Dark Curse

Chapter by cjmoliere

Chapter Summary

The Dark Curse's origins are revealed

A year prior to the Dark Curse

Rumplestiltskin waited impatiently for the Hatter to return from his excursion to Oz, disappointed when he learned the silver slippers he sought were no longer in the realm and the crystal ball they had given him would not work.

"They're willing to make a trade. They have another crystal, one that locates an individual by a blood link," Hatter spoke up.

"And what does Jeb Mysticos want in return?" the sorcerer quizzed, referring to the man known as the Wizard of Oz but his true name was Jeb Strogoff.

"Dragon's blood. Mates, preferably. Can't he get that in Oz?"

Rumple smiled. "No dearie. Dragons are extinct in Oz. It just so happens I have what he needs." He crossed over to the locked cabinet in his lab and took out the two bottles Jiminy had stolen for him sixty years earlier, handing them to the portal jumper. "Blue for male, red for female. Make sure he remembers that before he goes injecting the wrong blood into the wrong person."

"Why would he want to inject a human with dragon's blood?"

"Protection," Rumple murmured falling into a Seer's trance. "Fill his veins with the blood of the dragon and he shall become the dragon. When his mate calls for him, he will always answer…"

"Rumple…"

"The light's will be done when two are joined as one."

Rumple shook his head to clear. "Bring me that crystal ball. It's time to find my son!"

Wonderland

A week later

"You're getting careless Rumple," Cora chuckled as she spied on him through the crystal Jeff obtained in Oz. She had them in all the realms so that she could use them to spy on neighboring kingdoms to make alliances or root out any potential threats.

She glanced over at the cabinet where she kept all her treasures and took out a crystal ball shaped like a globe; a sharp needle on the top for the user to prick the skin to donate the blood used to trace one of their own. This was the only chance Rumple had of ever finding his son but she would never let him have it unless he gave her back what he stole from her…her daughter.
Nothing pleased her more than seeing the fury her former lover was in when he realized he'd been bested by her again. Oh she'd give him his prize back of course when the opportunity presented itself. Now his only option was to have Regina cast his curse and all she needed to do was wait for an opportunity to present itself when she could bargain the globe for her daughter's love. She would have him on his knees for the rest of his pathetic life or she would take his power for her own. With the power of the Dark One in her soul, her options were limitless.

With all curses and spells, the magic was all in the wording. It was also in making sure all of the pieces of the puzzle you intended to make fit into their proper places. It had taken him far too many years to count...but he'd counted every one and at last he'd found what he was searching for...the curse that would reunite him with his beloved son. That it would take all of them away from their world into another would not matter, nor would the fact that he himself would feel the effects of the curse. It was the price he was willing to pay.

His puzzle pieces in this case came in the forms of easily manipulated and desperate souls in the Forest, the most important one being the queen herself. Regina had inherited her mother's desire to bring others to their knees to achieve her own happiness. Some would say he was to blame for her evil but it was far from the truth. The girl had the darkness within her from the moment she was conceived. Of course showing her how to bring it to the surface was a necessary move on his part. A great curse demanded a great sacrifice, one even he could not bring himself to do since he wanted the curse cast to find the one person he loved the most.

The next two important pieces were Regina's hated stepdaughter Snow White and the poor shepherd turned prince David. Through his visions he learned that theirs would be a true love union and in that union a child would be produced that would break his curse...when she was twenty-eight. It was a long time to wait but time would stand still as long as the curse was active and none of them would be aware of it. Being a victim of his own curse was the price he would willingly pay to find his precious son.

The shepherd masquerading as a prince was due to marry the wealthy King Midas's daughter to bring her grand fortune back to his adoptive father's bankrupt kingdom, bankrupted due to Rumple convincing Regina to cut off financial ties to them so that they would be forced to depend on Midas's generosity. This in turn devastated the outlaw Snow White who was already in love with the false prince she called Charming and wanting to forget him. The wolf girl had planted curiosity about him in the princess's mind and soon she would seek him out...and he would be waiting. He appeared in her boat in a lake.

"How much for this?" he inquired, startling her.

"Excuse me?" Snow asked fearfully.

"Your boat. Exquisite craftsmanship."

"It's not for sale."

"Of course it is, dearie. No one comes to see me without a deal in mind."

"So you're Rumplestiltskin."

"Indeed, I am. I've been looking forward to meeting you." He said as he climbed out of the boat and walked toward her. "Ah. You really are the fairest of them all, aren't you?" he asked, cupping her face in his hands. He could already feel true love's magic working in her. "What can I do for you?"
"I need a cure."

"What ails you, child?"

"A broken heart."

"Ah, the most painful of afflictions. Well, I'm afraid if you want me to make him love you, no can do, and nothing can." And a broken heart is painful, but not as painful as a grieving one such as mine.

"No, that's not the problem. We can't be together."

"Well, that I can help you with." He took the vial he'd been carrying in his pocket out and dipped it into the water, casting the spell to create the potion that would allow her to forget her lost love...for the time being.

"That'll do it?"

"Not yet. No two loves are... exactly alike. We must make this... Personal!" he declared and yanked a strand of her hair out, placing it inside the bottle.

"Aah! So, if I drink that, I will no longer love him."

"The next time you see the object of your grief, you won't even remember who he is."

"I won't remember him?"

"Love is the most powerful magic. So the cure must be... extreme."

"Extreme sounds like an understatement."

"Don't doubt yourself now, dearie. Love makes us sick, haunts our dreams, destroys our days. Love... has killed more than any disease. This cure is a gift."

Love killed my Belle.

...Unbelievable. Threw herself off the tower...over him!

Probably had some spell on her, the poor thing. The clerics said she was beyond salvation. He'd poisoned both her body and her mind...

"What's your price?"

"These'll do," he answered, holding more strands of her hair he'd taken through magic.

"What do you need of my hair?"

"What do you need of it now it's been plucked from your head? Do we have a deal?" he pressed. She grabbed the vial. "Ohh. I thought so. Drink it in good health... Snow White," he said and walked away, waving back at her.

He reappeared in his library and stood in front of the small shrine, lovingly caressing his beloved son's shawl. "Soon Bae... soon. Just a few more pieces to move into place and my curse will be cast," he murmured.

Days later she returned to the castle with a very angry dwarf while he was at his spinning wheel in
his library. He couldn't bear to keep it in the dining hall anymore. All he could see when he went in there was Belle's cup...and remember their kiss...their last and only kiss.

"That potion you gave Snow...it changed her. She's not the same!" the dwarf said angrily.

"Well, of course it changed her. It took away her love. Left a big hole in her heart. There is not cure for what she's got. The person she was...there's no way to bring her back. No potion can bring back true love," he explained while he was browsing his potion collection. "Love...is the most powerful magic of all. The only magic I haven't been able to bottle." That and a magic equally as powerful...Ozian magic. "If you can bottle love...you can do anything. But you don't care about that, do ya?" he inquired of the now heartless girl. "Now what is it you really want?"

"I want your help...to kill the queen."

Not going to happen, dearie. At least not until she serves her purpose and reunites me with my son!

"Now we're talkin', dearie."

"Snow don't!" he heard the dwarf plead while he retrieved Artemis's bow from its storage place. He'd once told Belle he would hold onto it, thinking it would come in handy and now was the time. "This...is how you kill the queen," he said excitedly, casting a small enchantment on it.

"How will that help me get into the castle?" she demanded suspiciously.

"No, no, no. That's impossible. You have to kill her when she's on the move. When she's on her way," he said, waving his hand and making a map appear in it, "to the Summer Palace. Fire the arrow from this spot here." He indicated a location on the map. "And you'll be hidden from sight. An arrow fired from this bow will get you exactly what you need."

She rolled up the map.

He grabbed the arrow. "It always finds its target!"

"I can't stand by. If you take that weapon, you do it alone!" the dwarf warned her.

"That was always my plan," was Snow's icy reply. Rumple giggled when she snatched the bow and arrow out of his hands.

"So what do I have to do in return?"

Oh, you learn quickly dearie.

"Do? You don't have to do anything dearie."

"Everything comes with a price with you! Last time you took a strand of my hair. What's in it for you this time?"

"Let's just say...I'm invested in your future."

The next piece of the puzzle had been moved into its proper place. Now it was time to move the other. Word got around that Snow White was planning an assassination attempt against the queen. Eventually it would have to find its way to the ears of certain prince...a prince who would then come to him.

"Rumplestiltskin! Show yourself!" the shepherd prince demanded, storming through the doors of his castle.
"Still dressing like a prince I see," Rumple said from behind him. "Even though you ran away from the life I gave you. How's that for gratitude?"

"You gave me a prison sentence," David said angrily.

"Yeah, one that you've now skirted. Careful, dearie. King George is a vengeful man."

"I'm here about Snow. Rumor has it she's after the queen and she came to you for help."

"Yes, indeed," he said with a smirk.

The prince drew his sword. "What did you do to her?"

"What did I do to her? You mean what did you do to her?" he asked. There were now circling each other like reluctant partners in a dance. "You caused her pain. Without that pain she never would've drank that potion to forget about you. That's what changed her," he snarled.

"Undo the potion. All magic can be broken."

"Oh yes...with twuuueee loooove," he mocked.

"So that's it then. True love's kiss will awaken her?"

"Most certainly but it's gonna be hard to kiss her when you don't know where she is," he said and swatted the sword the boy was pointing at his chest away and started walking away to let the boy do a little thinking.

"Name your price."

Magic words.

"How about...your cloak?" Rumple suggested, turning around.

"My cloak? Why would you want my cloak?"

"It's drafty in here," he replied and giggled.

The boy looked at him as if he were insane then tossed the cloak onto the table. "Where is she?"

"On her way to the queen's highway." He conjured a duplicate of the map he'd given Snow. "This is the route she's taking." The boy grabbed the map. "But you better be quick! Because if she kills the queen, she becomes as evil as the woman whose life she takes."

"She could never become that evil," David said.

"Evil isn't born, dearie. It's made. If Snow starts down that road, you'll never get her back!" he called after the boy when he rushed out of the castle. He grabbed the cloak and held it up, giggling again. Later on, after he heard of the failed attempt on the queen's life, he took a magnifying glass and examined the coat, excited when he discovered a small strand of hair on it. He carefully extracted it and took it back to his lab, inserting it into the bottle with Snow White's. The hairs began to glow as they entwined in a sort of embrace and formed the potion he needed.

He sat down at his worktable, the shawl beside him and began writing on a small piece of parchment. "A lock of hair from those with the darkest souls...and the heart of the thing you love the most..."
He waved his hand and the vial of true love potion appeared in it. Opening the stopper he held the vial of the potion over the parchment.

"Through the child born to the ones this potion did make

Let this curse on her twenty-eighth natal year break!" he chanted as a drop fell onto the parchment. The parchment glowed for a second then returned to normal as the spell took hold. He then rolled the parchment up and conjured an elegant holder to place it in. Now all that was left was to deliver it. He appeared in Regina's castle. She'd just captured the shepherd boy and was now holding him prisoner.

"How's your new pet?" he inquired and giggled.

"Miserable...just the way I like him," Regina said. "What are you doing here?"

"I come bearing gifts." He took the scroll out.

"What's that?"

"Oh...just a little curse," he said nonchalantly. "Might come in handy."

"What kind of curse?"

"The darkest of all curses, dearie. One with the power to cast everyone from this world into another...a land without magic."

She frowned. "What need would I have to be in a land without magic? Not interested. And if I was...what do you want for it? Everything always comes at a price with you."

"Your mother's spellbook," he said. "I know you have it."

She flicked her wrist and the book appeared. "I have no use for it now."

"You'll take the curse then?" he asked, taking the book from her and handing her the scroll.

"Why not. I doubt I'll ever use it anyway."

"Oh, I wouldn't count on that, dearie," he taunted and vanished in a puff of smoke.

Now all he had to do was wait for the final pieces of the puzzle to fall into place. There were two more deals he would have to make with Snow and Charming, the first with Charming so that he could get him to hide the true love potion until the curse was broken and he would use it to restore his power so that he could resume his search for his son and be able to protect him. In exchange he would help the boy find his true love and at last they could produce the child that was crucial to everything. Then there was the deal he'd made with Cinderella. She needed a way to break her deal with him and would conspire with the cursed Blue Fairy, Charming and Snow White to imprison him so that he could not take her baby. Little did they know they would be putting him exactly where he wanted to be when Regina finally decided to unleash the curse.

As he'd foreseen the shepherd prince now needed his help to locate Snow White, who unfortunately for her was under a sleeping curse Regina had traded the Dark Curse to Maleficent for. Regina sent the boy into the Infinite Forest. There was no change of getting out of there...except with magic...and he was more than happy to pop in to offer his services.

"Lost, are we?" he asked the boy when he appeared on a fallen tree log.
"What are you doing here?" Charming asked.

"I'm just here to help." Help make sure you do what I need you to do.

"Well, no need. I'll be fine," Charming said stubbornly, making Rumple want to box his ears...or turn him into something that crawled and he would have if the boy wasn't so damned crucial to his plan succeeding.

"No I don't think so. This is the Infinite Forest. There's no way out. Well, except... my way."

"I want nothing from you."

Rumple concentrated and summoned Ruth's ring from the purse the prince carried. "Not even this?" he asked and held it up.

"My mother's ring…it was just...How did you get it!?" Charming demanded furiously.

"The same way I get everything I want.. magic! The same magic that allows me to do../this," he said, tossing the ring into the air and catching it in his palm, casting a location spell on the stone. It began to glow. "This ring is now enchanted. The closer you get to Snow White, the brighter it will glow. Interested?"

"Give it to me." the boy demanded taking an imposing step forward.

"Ah! It's not something for nothing, dearie!" Rumple reminded him, closing his hand around the ring. "Time to make a deal."

"No! No more deals!" Charming drew his sword and swung it. Rumple leaned back before he was sliced in half. He swung it again and Rumple caught the blade between his fingers, giggling. He tried again,. Rumple vanished.

"Over here!" he taunted from behind the prince with a sword in his hand. He'd barely been able to use one as a mortal but had gotten quite skilled at it over the centuries. They engaged in a brief duel. Persistent. Had enough?"

"Never!"

The duel served two purposes. The first was to test the boy's strength to ensure he was up to the task he was about to perform and it didn't involve siring a child on Snow White...yet. Charming managed to slice his cheek open with the sword but a quick wave of his hand healed the cut and used his magic to throw the prince against a tree. He fell to the ground and Rumple stood over him, the blade of the prince's own sword at his throat. "Looking for this? So brave.. so gallant. So pointless. Bravery won't get you out of this forest, dearie. Magic will. Trust me. This is a deal you want to make, because we both want the same thing."

"What's that?"

"Why, you and your true love to be together, of course. Hmm?" He summoned the vial of True Love potion. "Behold. The most powerful magic of all... True love. Ah! Careful. This is all I have left of it," he cautioned when Charming tried to take it.

"What do you know of true love?"

That I had it...and lost it because I was a fool.
"Well, not as much as you, perhaps, but not so little as you might think."

"You? You love someone?"

"It was a brief flicker of light amidst an ocean of darkness." It was more than a flicker...only I was too much of a coward to let it be more.

"What happened?"

"She died. That's the thing about true love, dearie. It can slip through your fingers. It's the most powerful magic in the world, the only magic powerful enough to break any curse. It must be protected at all costs."

"I don't understand. What exactly is it you want me to do?"

"I want you to help me protect it by putting in a safe place for me." He summoned a golden egg case from his castle and locked the potion inside it.

"And where is that?"

"Why, inside the belly of a beast, of course!" Rumple exclaimed and tossed the egg at the prince.

"Why hide it?"

"Let's just say... I'm saving it for a rainy day. Come along. The longer we stand here, the longer it takes for you to find your precious Snow."

"How are we...?"

Charming barely got the question out before he and Rumple vanished and reappeared on a beach on the other side of an island where there was a castle.

"Welcome to the Forbidden Fortress...home of one of the most fearsome beasts in all the realms."

"It can't be any worse than you!"

"Well that was rude. But I'll excuse it...this time. Better get going, dearie."

While he waited, Rumple summoned the crystal ball he'd obtained in a trade with an Ozian wizard named Jeb Mysticos, brokered by Jefferson. He never wanted to venture into that cursed place himself and risk encountering an Ozopov or the Strogoff prophesized to be his undoing. The other item he wanted was the silver slippers, unfortunately those had somehow disappeared along with the crystal ball he needed to find Bae thanks to that bitch Cora who made a side deal with the Mystic Man for gods only knew what.

Using the crystal ball Rumple watched while sitting in front of the fire, impressed as the shepherd prince proved himself worthy of the task he'd been given and buried the egg containing the true love potion inside Maleficent's dragon form. Since she was Regina's friend he was certain the queen would take her to the new land as well. He finally spotted Charming swimming to shore.

"Impressive, dearie. Very impressive, indeed. Come warm yourself."

"I have done what you've asked. Return my ring to me."

"Of course, you're in a bit of a rush. How rude of me. With this...Prince Charming... you will find her," he said and held out the ring. The prince eagerly took it back.
"Thank you."

"Something's missing." He thought for a moment and conjured an elegant set of clothing for the boy and dried him. "Now you're ready for your big moment."

"Why do you want us together? What do you get out of it?"

"I'm a fan of true love, dearie, and, more importantly, what it creates."

The prince wasted no time and rode off to seek out his true love. Rumple smiled and returned to his palace. The next move in the game was made as Charming and Snow raised an army to defeat the combined forces of King George and Regina and Regina was scheduled for execution. It was quite a show, Regina expressing regret that she'd failed in her quest to kill her hated stepdaughter and Snow, predictable as ever, unable to bear putting someone to death. All that was left to do was cast a little protection spell with a clause added in that was all the fuel Regina would need to take back the Dark Curse from Maleficent. Using a strand of Regina's hair from the blindfold placed over her ears during her failed execution he cast a protection spell barring Regina from harming Snow White in the Enchanted Forest. Regina was then banished to her palace. He decided it was time to pay her a visit.

"You have a visitor," her father said as she stood glaring into a mirror.

"Who?"

"You need to ask?" Rumple asked, appearing on a chaise behind her. "What other friends do you have, dearie?"

"You're no friend," Regina sneered. "Have you come to relish my suffering?"

"I thought you'd want someone to help raise your spirits. Especially on a day like today," he declared as he stood up.

"What's so special about today?"

"Snow White and Prince Charming's wedding day, of course. Didn't you get an invitation? Me neither. Still, nice to be able to see them declare their twuuueee love in front of their entire kingdom. A happy ending after all."

"And, because of you, there's nothing I can do to stop it. No way to harm them in this land ever again."

"Yes. Yes, I suppose that's true... In this land."

"What?"

"The deal I made was explicit. You can never harm them in this land. Now, were you to bring them to another land... Well..."

Regina smiled. "That curse you gave me..."

"Told you I was your friend," Rumple said excitedly and disappeared.

"Father, bring my carriage. I have a wedding to get to!" Regina cried gleefully.

Now it was time to move the final piece into place...himself...through his deal with Cinderella. He was given a vision that Cinderella and Prince Thomas were conspiring with Charming, the
dwarves and the Blue Fairy to bind his magic and trap him in the mines using an enchanted quill that he would use to sign a new contract giving him custody of Cinderella's children in exchange for their lands' prosperity. When a bluebird showed up at the Dark Castle with a message to meet with Cinderella, he smiled. Little did they know being in that cell was exactly where he wanted to be when Regina stopped fooling around and unleashed the curse. What was taking the girl so long?

His cell was not like his grand suite of rooms in the Dark Palace and although he hated to admit it, he missed his daily bantering with the cat Lucky. He was hoping the cat would escape before the curse hit and someone would take him in. He could hear voices in the distance and smiled to himself.

"Rumplestiltskin. Rumplestiltskin! I have a question for you." the guard shouted, pounding on the bars of his cell.

"No, you don't. They do. Snow White—and Prince "Charming"! You insult me. Step into the light, and take off those ridiculous robes. Ah, ha-ha ha... that's much better," he taunted the cloaked figures. Did they honestly think he wouldn't know who they were?

"We've come to ask you about the..." Charming started

"Yes, yes, I know why you're here! You want to know about the queen's threat." Rumple interrupted.

"Tell us what you know," Snow White demanded.

"Ohh! Tense, aren't we? Fear not, for I can ease your mind! But it's gonna cost you something in return."

"No. This is a waste of time," Charming said impatiently.

"What do you want?" Snow White inquired. Oh, she was a smart one.

"Oh... the name of your unborn child?"

"Absolutely not!" Charming protested. Rumple wished he had his magic back. The damned shepherd prince was getting on his nerves.

"Deal! What do you know?" Snow White pursued.

"Ah. The Queen has created a powerful curse. And it's coming. Soon you'll all be in a prison, just like me, only worse! Your prison...all of our prisons...will be time. And time will stop. And we will be trapped, someplace horrible, where everything we hold dear, everything we love will be ripped from us while we suffer for all eternity, while the Queen celebrates, victorious at last! ...No more happy endings."

"What can we do?"

"We can't do anything!"

"Who can?"

Rumple reached through the bars and gestured to her abdomen. "That little thing. Growing inside your belly."

"Next time, I cut it off," Charming growled, slapping Rumple's hand with a sword.
"The infant is our only hope. Get the child to safety. Get the child to safety and on its twenty-eighth birthday, the child will return. The child will find you...and the final battle will begin!" Rumpyle declared and cackled.

"Heard enough. We're leaving," Charming said firmly and was leading his wife away.

"Hey! No! We made a deal! I want her name! We had a deal— I. Need. Her. Name! I want her name!" Rumpyle screamed. Oh, they weren't getting away that easily. The name of the child was the key. It would be his talisman to unlock his own memories in the new land.

"Her? It's a boy," Charming insisted.

Fool. You think you can fool a seer? It is a girl.

"Missy, missy…you know I'm right. Tell me. What's her name?" he asked Snow White softly. She at least had some sense.

"Emma. Her name is Emma."

"Emma." Rumpyle whispered. Once they left he took out the jar of squid ink he'd hidden in his cell and began writing the child's name on a parchment and touched it, allowing the ink to seep into his skin and activate the spell. Once he heard the child's name in the new land, his true memories would be restored.

Days later he noticed a new addition to the collection of rats that communed outside his cell and sensed one of them was using a transformation spell. The only other person capable of doing this was Regina. "It's just us, dearie. You can show yourself!"

Regina transformed in a cloud of smoke.

"Well, it seems you've finally mastered that spell."

"That curse you gave me… it's not working," she complained.

"Oh, so worried! So, so worried. Like Snow and her lovely new husband!"

"What?"

"They paid me a visit as well. They were very anxious. About you. And the curse."

"What'd you tell them?" Regina demanded, approaching the bars.

"The truth! That nothing can stop the darkness. Except, of course, their unborn child. You see, no matter how powerful, all cursed can be broken. Their child is the key. Of course, the curse has to be enacted first."

"Tell me what I did wrong."

"For that, there's a price."

"What do you want?"

"Simple. In this new land, I want comfort. I want a good life."

"Fine! You'll have an estate, be rich."
"I wasn't finished! There's more!"

"There always is with you."

"Yeah, yeah... In this new land, should I ever come to you for any reason, you must heed my every request. You must do whatever I say. So long as I say "Please". After all, it's good manners."

"You do realize that should I succeed, you won't remember any of this?"

"Oh well, then what's the harm?"

"Deal. What must I do to enact this curse?"

"You need to sacrifice...a heart," he said with a flourish

"I sacrificed my priced steed."

"A horse? This is the curse to end all curses! You think a horse is gonna do? Great power requires great sacrifice. The heart you need must come from something far more precious." Rumple said fiercely, reaching through the bars and grabbing her by the throat.

"Tell me what will suffice."

"The heart of the thing you love most."

"What I loved most died because of Snow White!" she growled and yanked his hand away.

"Is there no one else you truly love?" he asked, stroking her cheek. "This curse isn't gonna be easy. Vengeance never is, dearie. You have to ask yourself a simple question. How far are you willing to go?"

"As far as it takes."

"Then please stop wasting everyone's time and just do it! You know what you love... now go kill it!" he instructed. She vanished.
From The North He Is The Heart of The Soul Forgotten

Chapter by cjmoliere

Chapter Summary

Jiminy Cricket and his twin Jasper learn their fates will become intertwined with Rumple's and Jiminy learns from frightening information from the Blue Fairy

Chapter Notes

This story will now be crossing over with SyFy's Tin Man and for those who have seen it, most of these events take place prior to the start of the miniseries

The Enchanted Forest

Sixty years prior to the Dark Curse

Rumple sat in the audience late one evening, his face concealed from the rest of the crowd under the large hood of his cloak and watched as the two gypsies Martin and Myrna perform a puppet show while their adult son Jiminy moved through the crowd like a ghost and picked their pockets of their hard-earned coins, impressed with the man's skill. No one suspected a thing, not when the man had such an innocent face but Rumple knew a desperate soul when he recognized one and young Jiminy was as desperate as they came, desperate to escape his parents and a life of thievery or so his Sight was telling him but he didn't need his Sight to tell him the boy was better off getting away from those couldn't blame the boy; his parents weren't the loving kind either. His mother dropped him off on his father's doorstep when he was a newborn babe and his father gave him away for eternal youth. And he continued the cycle of abandonment by letting his son go into another world without him but once he found him that cycle would end and the hole in his own heart filled. This was not the first time he'd had dealings with the gypsy couple. They'd summoned him shortly after the births of their twin sons Jiminy and Jasper, desperate to ease the financial burden two children would place on them by asking him to take one of them away. Once he gazed down at the boys he was given a vision that their destiny was to spend most of their lives apart but one day they would be reunited. He took the younger boy, Jasper to King Hubert's court and last he heard the boy was doing well, rising to the rank of knight. Jasper knew he'd been adopted but he never attempted to contact his birth family feeling that they would not want to see him though Jiminy thought of his brother often.

Once the show was over, Rumple started walking back toward the road when he felt something brush up against him and reached out, seizing the young pickpocket's wrist.

"A bit careless there, weren't you dearie?" he giggled.

Jiminy felt his heart come up his throat when he heard that giggle and only one creature in all the lands addressed everyone by "dearie" whether he was insulting them or not.
"I…It was an accident….I didn't know…" he stammered. What would the Dark One do to him? Would he turn him into a snail and crush him under his boot as the young thief heard he did so to others who crossed him? Running was useless, the Dark One would find him wherever he hid but at that moment he thought the miserable life he had with his parents was far better than being dead. "I…did…I didn't take anything."

"Ah, but you planned to only you allowed yourself to be distracted by those crickets you were listening to long enough to get caught." Rumple pointed out, shaking a finger at the young man. "Your parents are going to be a bit upset with you that you weren't able to take a grand bounty from this fine gentleman."

"If you're going to kill me, kill me…" Jiminy said bravely, not wanting the torture to last any longer.

Rumple frowned. "Oh dearie, the tales you must have been told about me! Not all true of course. People have tendency to rewrite history to make themselves look better than others. There are only certain instances in which I have had to do what was needed but not in this case. No, the fates have brought us together for a reason my boy and I have a need for a man of your skill."

"You want me….to steal something? You're the Dark One. Aren't you able to get it yourself?" Jiminy inquired nervously.

"I could, but I have a pressing engagement this evening and the people I need you to obtain these items from have children who would enjoy your parents' show. That should give you enough time to complete your task. You will be paid when the job is done and the items are in my hands but be careful dearie. The contents are not meant for you…or anyone else…in this land."

He often went to these shows, recalling better times with Bae when they would sit in the audience and laugh at the silly things the puppets would say and do. It was one of the few entertainments the poor spinner and weaver could afford for his precious boy but once he became the Dark One, Bae was too terrified to go anywhere with his father, fearing Rumple would repeat the incident with the man who accidentally injured the boy.

Oh Bae, you saw what I refused to….how this curse has changed me, made me into a person I didn't want to be but it was the only way I knew how to protect you….only I lost you because I'm still that coward!

Burrowed deep within his soul, Alemedia enjoyed moments like this. The boy had been her vessel's weakness and needed to be removed. Killing him would have been far too easy. She had to give the blue menace credit, by sending the boy away without his father she ensured that Baelfire would never be a problem again even if Rumplestiltskin did succeed in casting his curse. The boy would despise him just as Rumple despised his own father.

"What are you sending me for?" Jiminy asked. "I've never stolen anything but coins before."

"Yes but haven't you learned from your…ahhh… experience that people tend to keep their other valuables in the same places they keep their coins?"

"Sometimes," he confessed.

"Then by all means…help yourself to a few trinkets if you so desire. They won't miss them."

"No….I don't need any of that."

"That's your choice. Just bring me back the items I require and the names I will send you and you'll
be rewarded."

"Why would you need the names…?"

Rumple held up his hand to silence the young thief. "Ah, don't concern yourself with that, dearie. Just bring back what I need," he insisted. "And please do try to avoid being distracted and getting caught again."

Jiminy sighed deeply. He knew he had no other choice than to do as the Dark One asked. Being stuck in that wagon year after year was paradise compared to what the Dark One could do to him. Still, Jiminy sensed there was some truth to the creature's words that stories about him had been exaggerated to some degree. He raced back to the wagon to talk to his parents about a sudden 'idea' he had. Myrna and Martin were pleased, thinking they'd finally gotten through to the boy. Early the next morning a dove flew out to where the family parked their wagon with further instructions for Jiminy written on a piece of parchment along with a map showing the location of the castle. He rolled it up and tucked it into his pocket. He would explore the castle while the family was distracted with the puppet show and he carried the umbrella little Geppetto had given him, believing it now to be his good luck charm. He wasn't carrying it the previous evening when the Dark One caught him but he would never leave the wagon without it again.

The castle belonged to a former knight in the king's army, a famed dragonslayer who kept parts of the beasts as trophies, including two vials of blood, taken from a dragon and his mate. The male dragon's blood was blue, the female's red. These were the items the Dark One wanted Jiminy to obtain for him. When the wagon approached the gates of the castle the guards refused them entrance.

"The lord's children will be missing out on a wonderful show," Jiminy said smoothly, the bile rising in his throat with every untrue word he spoke. His parents beamed with pride.

The lord approached the gate. "What seems to be the trouble here?"

"These people want to put on a show with puppets," one of the guards said coldly. "Shall I ask them to leave, my lord?"

"No, let them in. The children will enjoy the show."

Myrna smirked at her husband. "You heard the man. Set it up, son."

While he was getting everything ready, the lord's two children came out into the garden to watch him at work, asking him questions as Geppetto did only he wouldn't admit to them he wanted to do something else with his life besides running cons and stealing otherwise they'd all end up in prison. The castle was so well guarded that he feared completing his task would be impossible until he realized they all had two major weaknesses, a fondness for the ale and wenching. It made him cringe. When he turned eighteen his father had taken him into one of the towns they visited so Jiminy could gain some 'world experience' as Martin called it.

"Papa, I just want to sit outside and…"

"Listen to those damned crickets? Boy, how in the hell are you going to learn anything if that's all you want to do at night? Now come on and quit your grousing!" He yanked Jiminy's ear and pulled him in the direction of a tavern. Inside there were at least fifty men seated at the tables, drinking, playing cards and dice and flirting with the barmaids.

"'Ello boys," one of them said as she leaned over the table, giving both of them a view of her
bosom as she did so. "New in town 'eh? What'll ya have?"

"A pint of ale for me and my boy. It's his birthday."

"Oh….and how old are you, handsome?" she asked a nervous Jiminy.

"Ummm….eighteen…"

"Oh, a man now, are ya?"

"He's not a man yet, if you know what I mean." Martin said, winking at the barmaid.

"Papa!" The boy flushed scarlet.

"Well, tell you what: you bring him upstairs later on and we can take care of that."

"What's it gonna cost me?"

"Papa! I can't…you can't…!" Jiminy protested.

"Trust me honey, once I get through with you, you'll want to," the barmaid sniggered.

"No!"

"Jiminy, pipe down. You're making a scene!" his father hissed.

"Oh, he's just nervous. We all are the first time, aren't we? You just relax and have a few pints to calm yourself and I'll take good care of you."

"Do I have to…?"

Martin grabbed his wrist and squeezed it. "I'm putting our money down boy so you're gonna go up there and do it!"

"I don't know what to do…"

Martin shoved a mug of ale at his son. "Drink up and relax. She'll be doing all the work. You just lay there."

Jiminy was too drunk by the time they had to go upstairs that his father was practically dragging him. "Dammit, should have stopped you after the fourth one. You're not gonna be able to do a damned thing with the shape you're in!"

"Why….I …gotta….go upstairs….wanna go listen to crickets!" Jiminy slurred.

"We're not gonna listen to crickets now shut up!" He leaned his drunk son against the wall while he knocked on Agatha's door.

She stepped, took one look at the teenager and scowled at Martin. "Lurline's underdrawers, how much ale did you give him? He's not gonna be able to perform like that!"

"Well can't you do something with him?"

"Would have preferred him to be sober so I'm not doing all the work! Ah, forget it, just bring him in here and I'll figure something out."

Martin dragged Jiminy into the room and dumped him on the bed. He was sleeping. Martin
slapped him across the face to rouse him. "WAKE UP, DAMMIT!"

"Papa…..we gotta go on the road again?"

"Oh for the gods' sake, NO. Jiminy, you're not gonna pass out. You wake the hell up and do your duty boy!"

"He's not gonna be able to with you in the room and I don't like an audience! Go back downstairs or wherever the hell you wanna go and I'll send him down in the morning!"

Martin glared at her and stormed out of the room, slamming the door behind him.

Agatha sat on the edge of the bed and ran her hand through the young man's hair. "Your papa's an ass boy. I'd give you a good tumble but I'd rather you be awake for it."

"Tired…"

"I know and your head's gonna feel like somebody dropped a boulder on it in the morning but don't you worry. I got a tonic that can take care of that."

"Papa's tonics…just water…"

"Ohh…so he's one of those 'eh. Whadda ya say we run a little con on the old buzzard?"

"Huh…?"

"Bastard's probably standing outside the door wanting to hear something going on. He's gonna get a show all right, just not one he's expectin'. I'm gonna need the bed here so let's get you up and over on that sofa…."

She helped him to his feet and led him over to the sofa, covering him up with the blankets from her bed. She wouldn't need them right away, not for her charade. Jiminy was asleep the moment his head touched the cushions.

Agatha was grateful the poor boy was too drunk; the noise she was making as she thrashed about on the bed was loud enough to wake the dead. It was a trick she had to perform a few times when fathers brought their sons to her to 'break them in'. All of them were nervous and a few of them had gotten too drunk to perform as the poor boy sleeping a few feet away from her did and the bastards often did stand outside the door wanting to hear her screaming their heads off and cheering their sons on for doing a good job.

Later on Jiminy awoke and could hear the sounds of the headboard banging against the wall, the bedsprings creaking and Agatha moaning and screaming out some of the dirtiest words he'd ever heard and he could even hear his father on the other side of the bedroom door cheering him on. He threw the pillow over his head to drown out the noise.

"Damn, I forgot how exhausted doing that gets me," Agatha exclaimed breathlessly when she kneeled beside the sofa. "But don't you worry sweetie. If your papa wasn't convinced you got tumbled before, he will be now."

"W…What were you…doing over there?" he asked as he sat up.

"Didn't that ass ever talk to you about that?" Agatha questioned as she sat down beside him.

"About what?"
"Lurline's underdrawers! He hasn't had that talk with you, has he?" she pressed when she gazed at his face and noticed the confusion.

"Ummmm… I didn't think you could…without someone there to…" Jiminy said nervously.

Agatha rolled her eyes. "What is the matter with the parents in this goddessforsaken realm? You boys need to know this stuff or you'll be fathering bastards from here to Wonderland! Might as well get comfortable, sweetie. This is going to be a very long conversation."

I need to remind myself to whack that ass when I see him. What father in his right mind does not discuss these things with his son? I may regret it, but I better find out what the hell else this boy is ignorant about.

She wouldn't mind teaching the boy at all. He was a handsome one even though he was a bit on the shy side. As she suspected he woke up the next morning with a terrible hangover, barely able to get off the sofa. His father wanted them to get on the road as quickly as possible but she refused to let Jiminy leave, telling the boy's father he was in no condition to be travelling. He was feeling better the second night but now his father wanted to stay and see how well the boy could do sober.

Agatha tried to make the boy's first time as pleasant as possible but it wasn't easy. He was still nervous and worried that he wasn't doing it right though she assured him he was doing fine and it helped that they talked.

"I don't like having to do this all the time either," she confessed to him later on.

"Why do you?" he asked.

"Tried doing other things honey, ended up right back where I started but you can do a lot more for yourself than what that old buzzard wants. He's an ass and he's gonna drag you down with him."

"I want to do something else…"

She smiled. "I hope so. This kinda life isn't for you, Jiminy. You're the type that would settle down with a wife and children, just need to leave that ass you call a papa in the dust first."

They stayed in town for a week and Jiminy did enjoy spending time with Agatha though he always felt guilty that his father was paying her to sleep with him.

"I'm not doing this for the money, Jiminy."

"You're not?"

"No, I'm not. You're different from the other men who come in here…you actually give a damn about women, not treat us like we're just here for you to stick it in when you need to satisfy your lust. I know you feel guilty about it when we do it but trust me honey, one day you're gonna find a woman you'll want to do this with and you'll be as sweet with her as you are with me."

"Papa does this in every town we visit…and he's not supposed to because he's married to Mama."

Agatha sighed. "That's the problem with a lot of men these days; can't be faithful to their wives…but if your mama is like that buzzard, wouldn't want to be faithful to her either."

"I don't want to be like those other men…I would want to be faithful to my wife. I want to wait until I'm married to do this again."
She smiled. "You're going to be a fine lover to a lucky woman someday Jiminy. You know now what you need to do but the rest has gotta come from your heart."

"Can I see you again if we come back to town...just to talk?"

"You sure can honey...if that buzzard you call a papa doesn't get you run outta here first." She gave him a kiss on the cheek.

He knew she would be disappointed if she saw him now, ten years later and still running cons and stealing with his parents and he could hear the same foul sounds Agatha made that night when she tricked his father and what the men were doing was even more appalling as he crept past them in the halls of the castle until he located the room on Rumplestiltskin's map. The sorcerer had also given him a key that could unlock any door that he used on the heavy wooden doors that led to the knight's trophy room. Mounted on the walls were the heads of various animals including two dragons; one blue, one red as well as parts of their feet, large metal bands on them with intricate designs. Archie knew from reading the few books he was allowed that the bands marked the dragons as mates.

This wasn't how they wanted to spend the afterlife, he thought angrily. Though many of the dragons in their world were destructive, there were also some species that just wanted to live in peace as well as other animals but all of them were hunted for sport or driven from their homes in the forests to build castles and fortresses for the nobles. His parents laughed him when he spoke of this to them.

"That's your problem, Jiminy. You care too much about everything even when it's of no benefit to you," his mother said. "Not gonna get anywhere with that kind of attitude and if you have any brains in that head of yours, you'll snap out of it."

He located the cabinet storing the knight's valuables and saw two bottles in it along with some coins. Inside the bottles were liquids, one blue, one red. He picked up the bottles carefully, remembering the Dark One's warning that the contents were not meant for him and put them in his bag. The guards were still passed out or entertaining themselves with the servant girls when Archie returned to the main hall. His parents were packing everything up and thanking the former knight for his hospitality. Later that night he snuck back to the Dark Castle while his parents slept. He found the sorcerer in his lab sitting at his famed spinning wheel. Jiminy set the bag down on the table.

"Thank you very much. And the names? To whom did these treasures belong?" Jiminy took the scroll out of his pocket and set it on top of the bag.

"Gold thread, for your thievery." Rumple tossed him a piece of thread he finished spinning. "Thank you, you can go."

As Jiminy started to walk away Rumple sensed there was something else the boy wanted.

"But you want something else, don't you? Something with... magic?" He poured liquid from one of his bottles onto another string of gold, creating a transformation potion.

"Every year, I'm stuck in that damn wagon. I wanna be free. I wanna be someone else. But something keeps holding me back," Jiminy confessed.

"Something or someone?"

"It's my parents."
Then I have exactly what you need." He handed Jiminy the transformation potion. "This will set you free. Pour it, sprinkle it, put it in their curds and whey. Anything will work."

Jiminy reached out to take the potion. Rumple pulled it back and smiled.

"Ah! But you have nothing more to give to me. Tell you what-after the potion has… done its work, leave them where they are and I'll come collect them. It'll be my fee!" he giggled.

"What will become of them?" Jiminy asked worriedly, wanting nothing drastic to happen to them.

"Worry you not, they'll be in safe hands. And you'll be free."

In the back of his mind he wondered whether he was doing the right thing.

Rumple walked over to the tower window and gazed down at the young man, smiling softly.

"You have quite a journey ahead of you dearie and become a stronger man than you imagined you would be."

"…Look, can't we skip this tonight? We don't need the money!" Jiminy pleaded with his parents as they stood outside a small cottage a week later.

"Everything isn't about money, Jiminy. It's about the principle," his mother said.

Martin waved his hand, bringing out the bottle of their 'elf tonic'. It was their favorite con and one that had gotten them run out of quite a few villages across the realms. "A commitment to excellence."

"Excellence… at stealing money," Myrna added.

"Now and take the "elf tonic", Jiminy," his father instructed.

He would have sooner taken the initiative and gotten then hell out of there. His instincts were telling him that something was going to go terribly wrong that night yet he knew what his parents would do if he disobeyed. His parents were laughing as he took the bottle from his father.

"Oh! Such beautiful young people," Myrna exclaimed when a young couple opened the door to them. Jiminy felt his father kick his boot.

"Pardon me. Do you have a place at your hearth for an honest man and his…elderly parents?" he asked, feeling the bile rise in his throat every time he had to go along with his parent's schemes. It was a speech he gave in many villages and those who opened their doors to him were taken in by his kind face and soft voice, both his blessing and his curse.

"Of course," the man said. "Come in."

"I'll heat up some broth," his wife offered.

"Oh, we love broth," Myrna said excitedly, she and her husband praising the young couple's home. Their names were Donna and Stephen.

Donna heated up some broth and handed it to Jiminy, the rainwater that his parents called their 'elf tonic' feeling like a rock in his pocket that would sink him in the deepest ocean of regret.

"Thank you for your kindness," Jiminy said politely.
"I just can't get it out of my mind, that family," Myrna began and Jiminy felt his heart sink. They were bound and determined to see their scheme through until the end.

"Terrible way to go."

"What? What happened?" Donna asked worriedly.

"Plague," Myrna answered knowing no other word struck terror in the hearts of simple villagers than 'plague. "The next town over, we just passed through. "

"The plague?!"

"Well, a plague, certainly."

"Is it coming here? Are you okay?" Stephen inquired, a bit concerned himself since they had a son.

Jiminy could only watch with disgust as his parents played the game, claiming their little miracle cure would prevent the couple from getting the plague, insisting they only had a small bottle that they needed for themselves, Martin giving Jiminy a kick under the table when he wanted the boy to play his part. They managed to swindle the couple out of a few coins and some of their food. Jiminy walked out of the house after handing them the bottle, feeling like he was going to vomit.

"Hey, those are good people. They would never hurt us like that," he protested.

"That's where they went wrong," his mother insisted

"It's better to be the kind of people that take," his father reminded him.

"Instead of those that get taken from."

Not me, Mama. Not anymore.

"I'm sorry. You've given me no other choice." Jiminy took the bottle out of his pocket and threw it on them.

"How frail do you think we are, son?" Myrna laughed.

"Rainwater won't hurt us," Martin added.

Oh no. NO! Jiminy thought, glancing down at the bottle. They were identical, easily switched.

"I'm pretty good at a sleight of hand, Jiminy, or have you forgotten that?" his father taunted.

"You switched them? So this is the elf tonic?" He was in a panic.

"Oh my! We must have given whatever you had to that family." Martin said with a hint of amusement.

"Oh, hope it wasn't dangerous," Myrna laughed.

Jiminy ran back into the house and found the bottle he'd gotten from the Dark One on the floor. The couple was no longer there, instead two wooden puppets dressed in their clothing sat on the bed when he looked behind the door.

"Oh gods!" he cried. "What have I done!" he sank into the chair.
"What is that boy blubbering about now," Martin grumbled. Myrna followed him into the house.

"Ohh, look at that," Martin said, amused.

"New puppets for the act," Myrna added with a smirk.

Damn you both! Jiminy thought angrily. It wasn't meant for them. It was meant for YOU!

He was even more horrified when he saw the boy who had given him his umbrella walk into the house.

His PARENTS! Oh gods….

"Who are you?" the boy asked Martin and Myrna. Jiminy shook his head, regretting every stepping foot in the Dark Castle, regretting taking that potion.

"Papa? Mama? Papa! What did you do to them? What did you do to them?" the little boy named Geppetto demanded of Jiminy.

"I didn't mean to…it was an accident!" he sobbed.

"You KILLED them!" screamed the little boy.

"Let's get the hell outta here!" Myrna yelled. "Jiminy…move your ass boy!"

"You killed my mama and papa…" Geppetto sobbed and ran over to him, striking him with his fists. "I hate you. I HATE YOU!"

"I didn't want to hurt anyone," Jiminy moaned.

"Awww…dammit, quit your blubbering and MOVE!" Martin hollered, pulling Jiminy to his feet and dragging him out of the cottage. He could still hear the child screaming as they sped off in the wagon.

"Stop the wagon!" Jimmy yelled when they were some distance away from the cottage, the noise spooking the horse. He jumped off and started walking down the road.

"Where do you think you're going? Get back here!" Myrna demanded.

"Go to hell! I'm not doing this anymore. I quit!" Jiminy threw over his shoulder. I'm tired of lying, I'm tired of stealing and I'm tired of YOU! I want to live my own life! I want to be free!"

Martin pulled up beside him. "You're not going anywhere, boy. And if you try, we'll just go to the magistrate and tell him what you did to that poor boy's parents…and what you tried to do to us. You won't be free in a cell or at the end of a rope, now will you? It's time you faced it. This is what you are, like us, and this is what you're always going to be. Now get back in the wagon and I don't want to hear any more of this nonsense!"

His head bowed, Jiminy climbed back into the carriage.

Later that night after they made camp, Jiminy got out of the wagon and went outside.

"I didn't want to hurt anyone," he wept. "I just wanted to live my own life." He glanced up at the sky, smiling when he saw a bright blue star glowing. He remembered hearing tales that if you wished on a star, a fairy would hear you and make it come true.
"I wish…." he said softly and sat down on the fence, closing his eyes. "I wish…." I wish I could take it all back….I wish that little boy had his parents back…

"I hear your wish, you don't need to wish it so loudly," Blue said gently as she appeared before him. He smiled. "But it is not possible. I cannot bring back the boy's parents."

"It's my fault. I have to make it right. I… I will trade my life to make it happen."

"What's done is done. There may be another way."

"Tell me please," he pleaded.

"The little boy, he will grow up to face many challenges. Do you want to help him?"

"Ummm, I can't get away from these people, my parents, they're who I am."

"But if you didn't want to be that, what would you like to be?"

And in the silence, Jiminy heard the sound that always brought him comfort, the chirping of crickets.

I wish to be like them….the crickets.

"I hear your wish." She waved her wand and he was transformed into a cricket wearing a brown coat and carrying his trusty umbrella. He started to laugh, feeling free for the first time in his life.

"How do you feel?"

"Free," he chirped.

"Find the boy, Jiminy. You will live as many years as you need to help him. Just find him."

"How will I? I don't even know his name."

"His name is Geppetto."

The Court of King Hubert

The next morning

"...What in the HELL has happened to me!" Sir Jasper raged as he gazed into the mirror in his bedchamber and saw not a human but a cricket staring back at him.

"You have been turned into a cricket," he heard a voice say from the open window and turned to see a fairy flying toward him. "I am sorry...I didn't realize that the spell would affect you as well."

"You did this?"

"I granted a wish. Your brother's wish."

"Jiminy did this to us? Why?"

"It was a mistake...a terrible mistake. He never meant to harm anyone," the Blue Fairy said quickly.

"Change me back. Now!"
"I'm afraid I can't."

"Nonsense. You're the Blue Fairy, the most powerful fairy in all the realms. Change me back."

"Once a wish is granted it cannot be taken back."

"So I'm stuck like this," Jasper said bitterly. The timing could not have been worse. His king was in negotiations to wed and expected his faithful knight to continue to serve him and his new bride.

"I am sorry Jasper. Had your brother known the wish would've affected you too he never would've made it. Perhaps you should go and talk to him."

"Where is he?"

"He is caring for a young boy named Geppetto in the Enchanted Forest."

"I will go to him."

"I know you're upset Jasper but please, try to understand that your brother never meant to harm you."

"This isn't how I wanted us to meet but it will have to do."

Raising a child as a cricket was not an easy task yet Jiminy was doing his best with it making a living carrying messages from the nobles of the realms and it was not long before he became known as the most reliable one in the Enchanted Forest. One afternoon he and Geppetto were travelling through the forest to deliver a message to King Hubert's court when he encountered another cricket wearing the garments of the King's guards taking a rest one one of the rocks.

"I am Jiminy. I have a message for your king," he said.

"Hello Jiminy. I'm Jasper. I...I'm your brother."

"Your brother is a cricket too?" Geppetto asked.

"Yes...but I don't understand why."

"We're twins Jiminy. What affects you affects me apparently. This isn't how I wanted us to meet but it will have to do."

"I am so sorry. I...I didn't know but I've wanted to meet you..."

"As I've wanted to meet you."

From that day on, the trio travelled together, delivering their messages to the kingdoms of the realm until Geppetto eventually married and began working as a carpenter and Jasper was recalled to King Hubert's court while Jiminy was given a place as a royal advisor in the court of Princess Snow White. The two continued to meet as they passed their messages through the realms but those meetings had become few and far inbetween in recent years and the bond between the brothers that had been severed at birth was reforged.

"His Majesty is dying and Prince Phillip is concerned about the threats he faces from Queen Regina and Maleficent." Jasper revealed to his brother at one of their meetings.

"Queen Regina's curse threatens all of us, brother but what is the threat you face from Maleficent?"
"A second curse, the same one that was given to Snow and Queen Briar Rose. The sleeping curse. Phillip believes Maleficent will use it on Aurora and her daughter Rose."

"I am not surprised. Maleficent feels her mother stole Stefan from her but he wanted nothing to do with her."

"I will go to the Dark One."

"Oh Jasper, why? Trifiling with dark magic is the reason we're like this!"

"I must protect Rose! Phillip and Aurora have trusted me with her safety from the day she was born and I will not let her fall victim to that witch's malice. Whatever price the Dark One wants, I will pay it!"

"You may regret it my brother," Jiminy said sadly.

"I will do what I must to protect those I care for as will you."

"Her Highness Princess Snow is expecting as well."

"Once the Queen hears of this she will cast her curse," Jasper predicted.

"And we will all lose those we love."

"I will not let Rose go to the land without magic alone! I will find a way to stop it." Jasper said angrily and flew away. Jiminy sighed, fearing his brother's deal with the Dark One would come to no good as he had all those years ago.

"...Rumplestiltskin I summon thee!" he called out when he returned to the castle later that evening.

"Well this is an unexpected surprise. The last time I saw you, you were a babe in my arms. Oh dearie dear! Sometimes being a twin has its problems, doesn't it Sir Jasper," Rumple giggled when he appeared in Sir Jasper's quarters. The cricket snorted.

"Enough jokes. Queen Regina's curse threatens all the realms, my master has disappeared and my mistress is under a sleeping curse. I will pay the price you require, all I ask is for your help in keeping Princess Rose safe."

"Regina's curse will come. There is no stopping it." Rumple informed him coldly.

"You want it cast, don't you?" the cricket accused. "Why?"

"That is my business. But this curse...ahhh this curse is your destiny Jasper, as much as it is Jiminy's. It will take you down different paths but the connection you have will come in handy."

"You're not making any sense. Have you been imbibing in the ale?"

"Are you aware that I could crush you beneath my boot for your insolence?"

"Are you aware that I don't fear you?" Jasper retorted.

Rumple laughed. "You're a bold one Sir Jasper. It is that part of your personality your brother will need when he begins the path that has been chosen for him as well as those fighting skills you've been forced to neglect in your current form."

"Why are you so interested in us? What's in it for you?"
The sorcerer thought for a moment. "Things I've Seen, Cricket. For some strange reason your destinies are intertwined with mine...your brother's specifically. He will do his own battle with the darkness as you will see the horrors the darkness leaves behind. But be warned. Maleficent's curse is a generational one. All the females in your princess's bloodline will fall victim to the curse. The Princess Rose will only be awakened by the kiss of a knight...a white knight in blue."

"What does THAT mean?"

"You'll find that out in twenty-eight years Cricket," he giggled and vanished.

Jasper growled with frustration. "Impossible creature! Our fates intertwined with his? Rubbish!"

The Enchanted Forest

Twenty-eight years prior to the breaking of the Dark Curse

Ozmalita Diosa, the servant angel to the goddess Lurline was almost unrecognizable in her human form as Adora Kantrine Cain, the young bride of Tin Man in training Wyatt Cain. Yet her human form would serve its purpose for the difficult task ahead of her; locating the bondmate of young Ozian Princess Azkadellia Ozopov and making certain that he would not be swept away to the other side by Queen Regina's curse as the others, at least not yet.

Her portal opened outside a cottage in the woods and through the open window she could hear two voices, one of them raised in anger.

"I have to be with my boy!"

"You know only the Savior can go through the wardrobe now."

"There has to be another way!"

"Geppetto, there is no other way than the curse..."

"I am not going to be a part of that curse. I will find a way with or without your help!"

"All right...we'll keep looking."

"There is another way...if you are interested," Adora said from the window. "I couldn't help overhearing your conversation. May I come in?"

She walked into the cottage to see an older man speaking to a cricket sitting on his worktable. She approached the table and smiled at it. "Jiminy Cricket, advisor to their Highnesses. Your reputation precedes you."

"You have me at a disadvantage my lady. Have we met?"

"No...but I have heard of you. My name is Adora Cain. I've recently arrived here from Oz." She reached into her satchel and took out a travel storm token. "This is what you need. This token will create a storm that will allow you to travel between worlds, a storm like the one that brought our great Queen Dorothy Gale from this land without magic to Oz centuries ago."

Geppetto eyed her suspiciously. "Why would YOU, a stranger want to help us?"

"I know the pain of being parted from one I love too well and do not wish it on anyone else. Take this coin into an open field and toss it. Once the cyclone forms walk into it and think of where you wish to go. It will take you there."
Unfortunately, you are not the one it will take, she thought sadly.

Go to the Enchanted Forest and find the enchanted cricket named Jiminy Ozmalita. He is the bondmate you seek and make certain that the travel storm token is in his possession before Queen Regina casts her curse. The token will activate before the curse can reach him and bring him to us, Lurline had instructed.

"Can it take others?" Jiminy asked hopefully.

Adora shook her head. "The token will only work for those it is given to." She felt the bile rise in her throat as the lies rolled off her tongue. "The Savior must travel to the other side through the wardrobe that was created for her. And you can never speak of this gift I have given you or it will disappear," she cautioned.

"Jiminy…I can find my boy!" Geppetto wept joyfully.

She set the coin down on the table in front of the cricket. "Perhaps we'll see each other again very soon. May the goddess protect both of you."

She cast an invisibility spell the moment she stepped outside.

"I don't know about this Geppetto…the last time I dabbled in magic…"

"I'm sorry about our argument earlier."

"No, you never should've lost your parents. I should have walked away from mine years ago."

"Jiminy, please promise me we'll try to use this. I can't bear being parted from my boy!"

"Maybe we should speak to Blue about it."

"No! You heard what that woman said if we…look! The coin! It's fading! No! No! We won't tell anyone, we promise!" Geppetto cried fearfully. He scooped up the coin and tucked it into his shirt pocket. "Jiminy, promise me you won't say anything to Blue! I have to find my boy!"

"All right. We'll say nothing. But I still want to talk to Blue about the wardrobe. I can't bear the thought of the Savior and Pinocchio in that world alone."

"I'm afraid I spoke the truth Jiminy. The wardrobe can only take two…and one has already gone through. There's no way to alter the spell. Only one of the Ozian guardians has that ability, the West Guardian." Blue explained when they summoned her the following morning.

"Who are these Ozian guardians. How do we find them?"

"Only Ozmalita, the servant angel of Lurline herself would know the answer."

"Will she help us?" Geppetto asked. "Had I not been so selfish…"

"You were only trying to give your son his best chance," Jiminy soothed. "Is there a way we can summon this Ozmalita?"

"The Rhuel Ghorm summons thee
Ozmalita Diosa appear now before me!" Blue chanted. The trio waited for several minutes, their hearts sinking. Seconds later a cloud of silver smoke appeared in the room, Adora in her true form.
"It has been a long time Galaluna," Adora said softly, addressing the fae by the name given her at birth. Blue kneeled at the other woman's feet.

"Mistress I seek your guidance. The Evil Queen's curse threatens all in this realm and there is only one who can break her spell. We are forced to send her to the land without magic…alone."

"It was my fault….I sent my son through first…" Geppetto confessed.

"And the Savior will be the second to cross through. Alone. That is the will of Lurline. The life she leads on the Other Side will prepare her for the battles to come, the breaking of the Dark Curse, the preservation of the Strogoff bloodline and preparation for the Final Eclipse."

Blue gasped. "Then the prophecy…"

"…will come to pass, unless the proper order is restored and the Strogoff and Ozopov are united with their bondmates. Events must unfold as Lurline wills it Galaluna or a terrible price will be paid."

Geppetto sat at his workbench and buried his face in his hands. "Losing my boy….is this my price to pay…?"

"Your son will play a pivotal role in shaping the Savior's destiny and that of the strongest of the Guardians: the ones who stand at the East and West Gates, the keepers of the staff that summon the winds of change and the blade forged from the fires of a troubled past. He will have one advantage you will not; his memory unaffected by the curse. You will see him again Geppetto but you must be patient."

"We can't summon the guardians ourselves?" Jiminy asked her. She shook her head.

"One of them is held in the grip of Alemedia herself."

"The Dark One!? But that is impossible! Rumplestiltskin CANNOT be a guardian!" Blue protested.

"Rumplestiltskin and his son Baelfire are the last of the Strogoff bloodline, Galaluna. And the Savior will bear the child that will one day stand at the East Gate. That child must be protected for one day he will be the most powerful of all the Guardians."

"But…we'll be cursed, we won't know…" Jiminy stammered.

"The truth will be revealed at the proper time." And you will be the one to speak it, she thought. "What you have learned, you must keep to yourselves. Alemedia has been plotting to destroy the Guardians. Rumplestiltskin is no great threat as long as his soul is held tight in her grip. Once he is reunited with his son, his grandchild and his bondmate it will restore his humanity and weaken her control."

"There are four guardians. What about the other two?" Jiminy inquired.

"The Ozopov," Blue murmured. "Queen Lavinia and her daughter, Azkadellia. The second eclipse. It's about them, isn't it?"

"The majestic queen of the OZ

Had two lovely daughters she
One to darkness she be drawn
One to light she be shown
Double eclipse it is forseen
Light meets dark in the stillness between
But only one and one alone
Shall hold the emerald and take the throne…” Adora recited.

"What does that mean?" Geppetto demanded impatiently.

"It means that the Ozopov heirs will battle each other as they have for centuries," Blue replied. "Lurline's heirs, the Strogoff and Ozopov have been cursed to fight each other until their bloodline dies out."

"Cursed by whom?" Jiminy wondered aloud.

"A goddess on the other side named Demeter. Lurline and Alemedia are the children of her daughter Persephone to the god of the Underworld, Hades. Demeter did not want her daughter to be with Hades, limiting her to spending six months of the year with him but they came to this side, created our world as their paradise and Demeter cursed the children Persephone carried as punishment for their defiance. And since that day, their descendants have been at war with each other and the war will continue…unless the cycle is broken. That is what their bondmates must help them do. By anchoring them to their humanity. That is all you need know for now. As I've said, the truth will be revealed to you again at the proper time." The angel vanished.

"What is this prophecy she spoke of Blue?" Jiminy demanded.

"One so horrible that Aramon himself was stripped of his powers and banished to the Realm of the Forgotten for even speaking it," Blue answered, her own face pale. "And those who know of it quake in fear at the mere mention of it."

"What is it! Does it threaten my son?" Geppetto cried fearfully.

"He…will be safe…where he is….as will we….if the Queen casts her curse."

"Blue please, tell us," Jiminy pleaded.

"If the Strogoff and Ozopov heirs cannot break their curses and restore the balance between darkness and light before the final eclipse in Oz….the realms will fall."

"F…Fall…you mean…"

"This world, our world…will be destroyed!" she sobbed. "Those left behind will perish…and those who escaped will see it happen, will feel their pain as our price for survival…and we will be trapped in the Land Without Magic forever."

"What we do now could prevent it?"

"We can only hope Jiminy." She waved her wand and vanished.

"I'm so sorry," Jiminy said again flying onto Geppetto's shoulders.
"We're using the token," he said firmly.

"We don't know if it will work!"

"I have to see my boy. You heard the Blue Fairy. The wardrobe will only take one. If we go we have a chance of finding the Savior and helping my boy get her ready for what she needs to do! It's what her parents would want! You know this Jiminy."

He only wished it were so.

Later that evening Jiminy dictated a brief message to his friend using the gramophone that he always used in the council meetings to translate his cricket language to English and took flight, his destination the court of Prince Phillip and Princess Aurora. Once he arrived, the news his brother had to give him was less than encouraging.

"You've seen the Dark One, haven't you Jasper."

"I have. Things are much worse than we've feared. Maleficent has taken Phillip and placed Aurora under the sleeping curse. But worse still, the Dark One has informed me that Maleficent has cursed Rose as well and her female descendants. I have made my decision. I will take Rose to the Land Without Magic before this dreaded Dark Curse is cast and return her to her parents once it is broken." The cricket sighed. "My conversation with the Dark One was odd to say the least."

"Why?"

"He mentioned you."

"What did he say? Leave nothing out Jasper."

"He said that neither of us can escape our destiny Jiminy. I thought perhaps he'd been drinking too much ale and was talking in riddles as he's known to do and the day the curse strikes we will be be taken down the paths that will lead us to them."

"What does that mean?"

"I wish I knew. He said you will do your own battle against the darkness and I will see what horrors darkness leaves behind. As I said...it must've been the ale."

"Then we are to be separated again. The Dark One sees no other remedy?"

"Not from what I understood."

"Then spend what time you have left with me. You and Rose."

"We will," Jasper vowed.

Two days later the cricket and his young charge departed from King Hubert's kingdom unaware that the Queen of Hearts had returned to the Enchanted Forest and was making her own preparations to protect herself from the curse. In doing so she would preserve a small portion of the realm from the most devastating of its effects.
This story's missing a wishing well
No mirror to show and tell
No kiss that can break the spell
I'm falling asleep
Every prince is a fantasy
The witch is inside of me
Her poison will wash away the memories
We kill the lights
And put on a show
It's all a lie but you'd never know
Your star will shine
And then it will fall
And you will forget it all...

The Birthday Massacre - Kill The Lights
The Enchanted Forest
Start of the Dark Curse
"I'm waiting!" Rumple called out days later when he sensed Regina back in his cell and heard warning bells ringing in the tower above.
Regina appeared in a cloud of smoke.
"What took you so long?" he asked her.
"You know what took so long."
"Oh, yes. The curse. You did it."
"That's right. I did it. And I wanted you to know it before you, like all the other pathetic denizens of this wretched land, forgets everything."
"How did it feel?"
"Watching the curse cloud form? Felt like victory."
"How did you feel to kill the thing you love most? Ripping the heart out of your father? How did
that feel?” Rumple giggled.

"It was the price of the curse. How it felt doesn't matter. He would have understood. I took my life back. I had to. I won."

"And yet, here you are. Feeling the need to gloat. Something's missing, isn't it, dearie?"

"Not at all. I have everything I want. Nothing can stop me now."

"Not quite,” Rumple giggled.

"What does that mean?"

"The savior, the child of Snow White and Prince Charming. She can stop you. She can break the curse."

Regina scoffed.

"Well, looks like getting rid of a baby made my to-do list."

"Of course it did. But even if you succeed with that, you have an even bigger problem. Now there's a hole in your heart and someday you will come to me to fill it."

"You underestimate your powers of foresight." Regina started to walk away.

"And you underestimate the price of what you've done! You shall see! You will come to me! There is more you need!” Rumple sang.

"Your taunts will get you nowhere! I know you too well. You want to make another deal. Well, I won't,” Regina raged.

"A deal? You already promised me a good life in this new land. What more than I want from you?” Rumple laughed.

"Oh, to be let out of this cage. To be let out of our last deal. To escape the curse."

"But why would I desire that, dearie? I'm exactly where I want to be."

"What are you up to?” Regina asked coldly.

"Why, nothing! I'm looking forward to life in this new land."

"So am I,” Regina gloated and vanished.

Rumple closed his eyes and smiled as he watched the purple and green smoke approach his cell. Twenty-eight years, Bae...and then I'll find you. And this time I'm not letting you go again.

In her cell in the Dark Palace Belle was gazing at the door at the purple and green smoke from the curse coming towards her cot against the wall. Rumple, she can't keep us apart forever. I'll find you in this new land...and I'll fight for you with all the love I have...and I will break your curse!

Deep in the forest an anxious Jiminy and Jasper watched the curse cloud approaching, Geppetto fingering the token in his pocket. The cloud would soon be upon them and there wasn't a moment to spare.

"I don't wanna go!” Princess Rose sobbed. "Sir Jasper, I wanna go back to Mama!”
"We can't," he said sadly. They attempted to return to the place the day before only to find it warded against intruders by magic, Maleficent's magic Jasper supposed.

"Toss the coin Geppetto! Now!" Jiminy cried. "We haven't a moment to lose!"

"Stay close Rose," Jasper pleaded. Geppetto tossed the coin onto the ground and seconds later a large funnel cloud formed, circling toward them. Geppetto took Princess Rose's hand and held it tightly.

"I'm scared..." the princess wept.

"I'll be all right Rose. We'll be with you," Jasper soothed and leaped onto her shoulder while Jiminy leaped onto Geppetto's.

"We will find Pinocchio my friend. Believe," Jiminy said as they approached the funnel cloud. The winds began to pick up and Jiminy and Jasper were pulled off Rose and Geppetto's shoulders.

"Jasper!" Rose sobbed and reached out to grab him.

"Jiminy!"

"No! Geppetto...Rose...Jasper!" Jiminy cried as he felt himself being pulled into the funnel cloud while his companions were thrown into the path of oncoming curse cloud. He was hurled to and fro through the cloud, his cricket form changing back into that of a human. The cloud distintegrated and he crashed to the ground naked and unconscious.

Oz (The Outer Zone)

The Temple of Lurline

Twenty-eight years before the breaking of the Dark Curse

Twenty-eight years prior to the Double Eclipse

Alana Kantrine, the High Priestess of the Sons and Daughters of Light awoke from her slumber and glanced out her window to see a large funnel cloud appear on the brick road just outside the front gates of the Temple of Lurline. She rose and walked down the hallway to the quarters where her most loyal guards, Callux and Medira Benu were in residence with their son Ambrose and young daughter Xenia.

"Callux, Medira, the Heart of the North has arrived. Bring him to me," she commanded softly.

"Yes Mistress," they said in unison. "Ambrose! Fetch our horses!"

The young man jumped out of his chair and raced out to the stables, bringing three black stallions to the front doors of the temple. They rode out to the front gate and a few feet away a man lay on the grass without a stitch of clothing on his tall frame and several distinct markings on his skin.

"Callux, Medira, the Heart of the North has arrived. Bring him to me," she commanded softly.

"Yes Mistress," they said in unison. "Ambrose! Fetch our horses!"

The young man jumped out of his chair and raced out to the stables, bringing three black stallions to the front doors of the temple. They rode out to the front gate and a few feet away a man lay on the grass without a stitch of clothing on his tall frame and several distinct markings on his skin.

"Is it really him Papa?" Ambrose asked. "Is that Princess Azkadellia's bondmate?"

"It is son." Callux replied. "He will begin training to become a Guardian." Callux pointed to his lower back. "And here....the cricket. That is his personal symbol. A cricket represents the element Earth. The princess will be marked with this symbol once their bond is completed. Come, let's get him back to the temple. Our mistress will need to tend to him."

They lifted the unconscious man onto a litter and carried him back to the temple. The priestesses
dressed their guest and tended to his wounds while Alana kept vigil at his bedside. Moments later a puff of green smoke appeared in the room revealing two men, a short, silver haired sorcerer in his late fifties named Jeb Mysticos Strogoff and a tall blond haired man in his early twenties named Wyatt Cain. Wyatt was a Tin Man, the name given to the officers of the law in the OZ and had been recently appointed to serve on Mystico's protection detail.

"Who is that?" the Tin Man demanded gruffly.

"This, my boy, is Jiminy, the bondmate of our princess," Jeb explained.

"He doesn't look like one...kinda lanky." Wyatt observed.

"He will become the second most powerful mage in the OZ," Mysticos declared. They heard the man on the bed groan and his eyes fluttered open.

"W...Where...where am I?" he asked groggily.

"You are safe in the OZ."

"O...Oz? No! No, that's not possible! I was supposed to go to the Land Without Magic, not Oz!"

"No my boy. Your destiny is here in the OZ."

"Send me back! I have to go back. My friends...my brother...they need me!" Jiminy attempted to get out of bed but found he was too weak to stand.

"You have a concussion and must rest," Alana said firmly. "I'm afraid we cannot send you to the Other Side now but you will go there in time. It is the will of the goddess."

"I don't care what the will of the goddess is! I must go to the Land Without Magic! Now let me go!" he snarled.

The glass of water that had been placed beside his bed flew off the stand and shattered against the wall.

"Jiminy, you must calm yourself my boy. Your magic is reacting to your emotions," Mysticos advised gently.

"Magic! Are you mad? I have no magic!"

"Your magic was bound at birth and set to unlock upon your arrival here."

Jiminy glared at all of them, his blue eyes taking on a menacing green tinge. "Are you saying that I was deceived, that the travel storm token I was given was meant only for me?"

"Yes," Alana replied. "It was..."

"ENOUGH ABOUT THE WILL OF THE GODDESS!" he roared. "What of my will? Do I have any of my own or is my life planned out for me?"

"You are the Heart of the North Guardian," Alana declared.

"I...I am a Guardian like Rumplestiltskin? That's not possible!" Jiminy exclaimed.

"How do you know the Dark One's true identity?" Alana inquired.
"I was told. By Ozmalita Diosa." Jiminy scowled. "I'm assuming SHE is the one who sent me here."

"You are the chosen Guardian of Princess Azkadellia Ozopov. She stands at the North Gate and is the Keeper of the Emerald of Earth," Mysticos explained. "You were chosen because yours is one of the purest hearts in all the realms."

"Why wasn't my brother chosen?"

"It was not his destiny. It was yours. However, he possesses skills that you have inherited through your restored fraternal bond. I will train you how to master those skills as well as your magic. I'm afraid the mental link you shared will be severed as long as he is under the Dark Curse."

"Where is he and my friends?"

"Your friend Geppetto is in a place on the other side called Storybrooke. Your brother is in a place called San Francisco. The girl...was sent to a place called Bellefonte."

"So it seperated them," Jiminy said sadly. "The children...they'll be alone! Please! I must go to them."

"You cannot. The future of the realms depends on you staying where you are for now."

"Or the realms fall? Is that what you mean?" Everyone in the room cringed. "Ah, so it is." He sighed. "Then I will do my best...as the goddess wills."

"We will leave for Central City once you are well," Mysticos informed him.

Jiminy lay back against the pillows wondering how the others were faring in the new land, cursed and torn apart by a vengeful queen. Once he was asleep the others closed the door to the chamber and returned to Alana's quarters.

"Has the construct been put into place?" Alana inquired of Mysticos. He waved his hand over the mirror in her bedroom and the image of a small town appeared in the glass.

"He has...and the queen will be none the wiser nor will anyone else. It will be lifelike in every way and Jiminy will have access to its memories until the time comes when he arrives to take its place. It will appear as if he's been in the town the entire time."

Storybrooke, Maine

Fall 1983

"I did it. I won!" Regina declared gleefully when she awoke that morning in the new land that she had chosen to call Storybrooke. She dressed in the new clothing that now hung in her closet and went outside, taking in the sights of her new kingdom. There were no palaces but it mattered little. She'd taken away all their happy endings and now it was time for her to savor her own.

"Morning Madam Mayor!" she heard a voice greet softly.

"Good morning, Crick—Dr. Hopper," she corrected herself, recalling that she'd given the former cricket the name Archibald Hopper and the memories of being a psychiatrist in the town but he like everyone else in the town would be at her command when she needed him.

"Beautiful day, isn't it?"
"Yes. Yes it is," Regina said with a smile and walked on. Victory had never tasted so sweet.

Every day was pretty much the same for Storybrooke's local pawnshop and antiquities dealer Mr. Gold. He arose at seven AM, showered, dressed and drove his black Cadillac down to his pawnshop to open it for business. He was the wealthiest man in the town and had acquired it by renting out nearly all of the buildings, houses and apartments. He had been an attorney years ago but abandoned his legal practice when it hadn't proven to be as successful as his shop or being a landlord. Once in a while someone would come to him seeking legal advice and he was more than happy to give it...for the right price.

The one person he saw the most, although he wasn't too happy about it was the mayor herself, Regina Mills. It seemed that she was in need of his services for one reason or another but he didn't mind it since the debts she owed him piled up and if he needed a favor from her, it wasn't like she could refuse him. He was after all the richest man in town...hell, he practically owned the town. He'd come a long way from his humble beginnings in Glasgow. Still, there were two things missing from his life...his fiancee Belle and his son...Bailey or Bae as he called him. Belle had been killed in a car accident and he and his son were estranged since his divorce from the boy's mother.

He knew he hadn't been the idea father to his boy, spending more time at work than at home and his busy schedule had also taken him away from Belle as well. Now it was too late for him to take it back. All he had now was his work...and his memories. It wasn't enough for him but it would have to do. He did try searching for his son but it was as if Bailey Gold hadn't even existed.

The bell over his door tinkled as the mayor walked into the shop. She always seemed to be in a snit about something when she stopped by to see him and sometimes what she said made no sense to him at all. Today was no different.

"I'm not happy!"

"I believe Dr. Hopper's office is right down the street," Gold said.

"No I don't want to talk to him. I want to talk to you."

"Very well Madame Mayor. What is it you want to talk about?" he asked, picking up a gold teapot he'd just finished polishing and putting it back in the display case and started polishing its matching sugar bowl while she talked...or rather ranted. It was easier just to let her get on with it.

"This town. This isn't the deal we made."

"I'm sorry. I don't know what you're talking about." They made a few deals over the years but he couldn't recall making one about the town, except if it was a property deal.

"You don't, do you? I was supposed to be happy here." Regina complained.

"Forgive me, but, um, you're the Mayor. You're the most powerful woman in the town. What is there to be unhappy about?"

"Everyone in this town does exactly what I want them to!"

"And that's a problem?" Gold asked with a laugh. He certainly wouldn't be complaining about that. He thought about suggesting she see Dr. Hopper again only he didn't want the headache that would come with her tirade. He limped out from behind the counter.

"Well, they do it because they have to, not because they want to. It's not real."
"I'm sorry, what exactly is it you want?" he asked, still confused. Had she been having one too many down at the Rabbit Hole? He didn't smell any alcohol on her and he couldn't recall seeing her anywhere near that vile joint. He didn't even like going there to collect the rent.

"Nothing you can give me," she answered and left as quickly as she walked in leaving him still confused.

"Strange woman," he muttered and went back to his polishing.

After that, things went back to normal, if you could call doing the same thing every day normal, except when rent day came around. Even it had its own routine. Some of his tenants handed their money or checks over without question while others tried, without success to get some kind of grace period. Gold didn't grant grace periods. You either had the money or you didn't. If you didn't you were out on your ass in thirty days and he usually had your replacement tenant lined up to move in. People hated him for this but he didn't care. It was business. It was the same at the pawnshop. You either paid back your loans before the close of business on the day they were due or what you offered as collateral was forfeit.

Once Gold returned home for the day and settled in his chair, his iron facade collapsed and the lonely man he was came to the surface. His missed his son and he missed his Belle. She was the town's librarian, the library had been closed by Regina's orders after her death because, she claimed, the town didn't have the funds to keep it open. He hadn't resisted...there was no one else he felt belonged behind that circulation desk other than his Belle. He always read for an hour or two before he went up to bed but sleep was always difficult. Every night his dreams taunted him of the life he could've had if he hadn't spent more time building his fortune than being with his family.

For Alemedia, his misery was her nourishment during the days when she began to believe she would be trapped in this broken, magicless body forever. Her servant seemed to be having much better luck. Lavinia had been deposed, Bastinda had the throne and it was just a matter of time until she could get her hands on the key to unlocking the gates of Ephesis. Only one person knew where it was and like her servant, she did not believe the child was dead, buried in the ground. The loss of a major portion of the queen's life force was proof of it. She could only have given it to a blood relative and there was one she favored more than any other. All they had to do was wait for her to reveal herself and she would...with a little help from vision she planted in Rumple's head and a silly little thief turned cricket who provided the means for her to be tracked in the form of the blood of dragon mates. Still there was one other threat remaining...the missing East Guardian and like Dorothia, he would be lured into her trap by someone he trusted.

It all depends on the so-called Savior, she thought bitterly. But she will fail. They ALL will fail!
From The North She Is The Emerald of the Land and The Voice of Logic and Reason

Chapter by cjmoliere

This is me for forever
One of the lost ones
The one without a name
Without an honest heart as compass…

Nightwish – Nemo

Oz (The Outer Zone)

From the moment she was born, Azkadellia Andromeda Ozopov showed that she was a child who possessed wisdom far beyond her years. Born to Queen Lavinia, the current living descendant of the great Dorothy Gale and King Nicolai Ozopov, himself a descendant of Lurline, she also showed promise of being one of the most powerful mages in all the realms. Her only flaw according to the Ozian people was that her father was not an Ozian but a slipper named Tyler Bennett and he was a hot air baloonist and aspiring artist from Kansas who was at the Nebraska State fair when his balloon crossed the barrier that divided the worlds and crashed in front of the lake at the summer palace in Finaqua and the then princess Lavinia was smitten. The Queen was not pleased and made several unsuccessful attempts to remove the stranger from Oz but finally relented when Lavinia refused every other suitor the Queen placed before her.

Azkadellia received the education worthy of a future queen of Oz and even some skills no other heir before her ever learned. Her tutors were Miles Toto, a shapeshifter who taught her magic, politics, and history while the queen's advisor Ambrose Benu taught her the sciences since his hobby was inventing things. Both men knew from the moment she was born she would be more than the Queen of Oz. She was one of the four Guardians of the Balance, standing at one of the two most powerful gates: the North Gate. The only guardian whose powers were greater than hers was Rumplestiltskin, who would take his rightful place at the West Gate once he was free of the Dark One curse.

Azkadellia was also an observant child and noticed that not everyone in the realm was pleased with her mother's government, particularly those in the Western part of the country. They were farmers and laborers who felt the palace only catered to the nobles and merchants leaving them to fend for themselves. Her mother never made progresses to that part of the realm, instead she chose representatives to travel to those villages to speak for her. Miles and Ambrose were well aware of the hostilities brewing in the Western realm and tried to convince the queen to be more attentive to them but she was convinced her representatives were capable of diffusing the situation while she devoted most of her time to her growing family.

Azkadellia was seven years old when her sister Dorothis was born. Dorothis had been named after Dorothy Gale herself but everyone called her "DG" for short and once she was born, the queen devoted most of her time and energy to her youngest child. Dorothis was her "angel". Az paid it no mind, she adored her sister as much as her parents did and loved spending time with her but was also adamant about keeping up with her lessons.

One day while she was walking through the woods with her personal guard Jiminy she stopped in
her tracks. He'd been with her since she was a baby and was her closest confidante.

"What is it Your Highness?" he asked softly.

"I wish to learn the path of the dragon. Will you teach me?"

"Not yet Your Highness. General Lannot feels that I am not ready to be a tutor yet," he said, shocked that she knew now what he was. The Talons of the Dragon were an ancient order charged with protecting the four Guardians of the Balance and on rare occasions a Talon was chosen to be a Guardian's bondmate. Their training was similar to that of a samurai warrior on the other side with their primary weapons being katana swords. Some Talons were also mages but preferred to engage in physical combat first since using too much magic drained them quickly. A Talon was identified by a specific set of markings and their locations on their bodies depended on which side of the bloodline they protected. An Ozopov Talon was marked with two crossed katana swords on the upper right arm and a sleeping dragon on the right shoulder blade. Jiminy also bore a third marking on his back, the image of a cricket. The Guardians themselves often asked to be trained as Talons, one of them being the legendary Dorothy Gale. Jiminy was also a magician but he only used it when necessary.

"But you're ready. I've seen you spar with General Lannot and you have been teaching me the art of mindspeak and some simple fighting skills. You are ready," she declared.

He led them over to where a large tree had fallen and they sat down. "Only my master can decide if I'm ready Dellia, but I appreciate your confidence. I have no doubt that one day you will be as great a Queen as Ozma and Dorothy, even greater."

Jiminy was the only person Az allowed to call her "Dellia" and he'd been calling her that for as long as she could remember.

"I will not spend my days just sitting on my throne hearing news of the realms second handed. No, I will do as Dorothy and Ozma did and visit them. I will hear their opinions with an open mind and act in their best interests. And I would like for you to serve as my advisor during my reign."

Jiminy chuckled. "You have a long wait before you take the throne, Princess."

"I know but you know as I do, there are problems in this realm that Mother pays little mind to. The situation in the West…"

He sighed. Were he the queen's advisor he would suggest that she visit the realm and speak to the people directly. He feared Lavinia's lack of interest in the unrest brewing in the west would led to secession, mimicking a situation that arose many times on the other side...costly, bloody civil wars.

"Dellia, all we can do now is hope that your mother decides to act in the best interests of Oz and its people. Come on. I should be getting you back to the palace or you'll miss your magic lesson and Toto will turn into a dog and bite my ankles."

The princess giggled knowing it was something her bodyguard never enjoyed having done to him. "You haven't answered my question. Will you teach me the path of the dragon?"

Jiminy found it impossible to say no to her when she looked at him with those wide brown eyes. "I'll teach you the basics. The sword fighting you can't learn until you're thirteen. That's the law."

She threw her arms around him. "I will be thirteen in two months! You don't know how much this means to me!"
"Oh, I think I do." He took her hand in his and escorted her back to the palace. Lavinia was sitting out on the gazebo swing holding DG on her lap as she sang to her.

"Two little princesses dancing in a room
Spinning fast and free on their little toes
Where the light will take you there's only one way to know
Two little princesses dancing in a room…"

"Ah, you're back. Perfect. Azkadellia, you may relax a bit. I'm going to conduct DG's lessons first,“ Toto said to her.

"Go along my angel…" Lavinia murmured.

Az sat on a bench in the garden to read a book while Toto and DG were standing beside the lake. Toto held a doll of DG's in his hand. "Concentrate DG. You must let the light flow through you effortlessly. Remember…light as air."

"Toto…"

"It's Tutor. Now focus."

"I am but this thing won't float," the six year old whined. Az jumped off the bench and approached her, placing one hand on DG's shoulder and using her free one to take DG's.

"It will. It wants to. Just concentrate Deege," she coached softly, sending her sister some of her magical energy as she'd been taught to do years ago. The girls' hands glowed with a golden light and they closed their eyes as they concentrated on the task at hand. Slowly the doll rose in the air and begin spinning wildly like a ballerina on a stage.

"Yes! Yes!" Toto exclaimed. The North and South gates, bound by love and blood. Together they will stand and defeat any enemy, divided they will fall.

The girls opened their eyes, identical smiles on their faces as they observed the rewards of their teamwork.

"Well done, my angels," Lavinia applauded. "Well done."

"Thanks Az," DG said and hugged her sister.

"It's going to take you some time to get used to using your magic and you'll have a bit of trouble at first but I'll be right here when you need me," Az vowed.

Jiminy stepped out of his hiding place and approached the queen, amazed by the power radiating from the two girls. Toto was an excellent teacher but Azkadellia had far more patience with the headstrong and adventurous DG. "Your Majesty, the council is requesting your presence."

"I will only be gone for an hour or two. Do not go too far my angels and remember that you are not supposed to venture into the woods alone. Jiminy, come with me."

"Your Majesty...I must remain with the Princess..." he protested.

"There are some matters that require your presence," she informed him.

"Yes, Mother," Az said softly. "Go with Mother, Jiminy."

"Yes Your Highness."
Once the others were out of sight DG turned to her sister, giving her the puppy dog look. "I'm hungry. Can't we gather some apples?"

"You heard what Mother said…"

"We won't be gone long. Pleeeaaassee!" DG begged.

Az was feeling a bit famished herself and performing complex spells required her to eat to recover her strength. "All right but we're just going to pick some apples, not go wandering too far into the woods."

Az knew from her own walks in the woods with Jiminy that that some of the apple trees were a cantankerous lot and tended to become hostile when people wanted to pick the fruit from their branches. As Az reached up to pick a juicy red apple from the first tree they encountered, one of its limbs struck her and knocked her to the ground.

"Begone! Pillage one of the other trees!" it yelled.

"We mean you no harm," said the land's guardian. "We're only hungry and would like to eat some of your delicious apples, if you would be so kind…"

"No. Go away and bother some other tree."

"But yours has the ripest fruit…"

As DG stood there witnessing the exchange between her sister and the tree she could see in her mind the legendary Dorothy Gale and Scarecrow talking to the very same tree, the Scarecrow taunting it and making faces so that it would throw fruit at them. She smirked.

"Come on Az. That fruit looks ripe but it probably has ugly old worms in it just like that old tree." She blew as raspberry at the tree.

"Why you little brat! See if these have any worms in them!" the tree yelled and chucked apples at the fleeing girls. They kneeled down and gathered up as many of them as they could, using their aprons as baskets. "And stay away!" the tree called after them.

"It was clever of you to trick that old tree into throwing fruit at us," Az praised when they were out of earshot.

"I heard tell of it once…in a story from the past," DG explained.

"We should get back before Mother realizes we're gone or we'll be history too. We are not supposed to be out here alone. She says there's wild animals in the forest."

"Did she say what kind of…wild animals….?" DG inquired shakily, spotting a bear nearby.

"Lions and tigers and…"

"Oh my!" DG cried out. The girls dropped their apples when the bear started stalking towards them. DG grabbed her elder sister's hand and pulled her back. "Az!"

"Just hold my hand Deege. Nothing can hurt us if we stay together!" Az begged, keeping a firm hold on DG's hand and casting a protection spell around them as the bear stood on its haunches and let loose a loud roar. Both girls were terrified, Azkadellia knowing that her spell would not hold if DG released her grip. Seeing her older sister being so brave was making DG feel brave and she
held on tighter.

The bear gazed at them for several minutes, contemplating its next move until it realized it was in the presence of two of the Guardians and realized any attack on them would lead to its own demise. It lowered its head in submission and retreated back into the woods from where it came. Az released DG's hand, both of them sighing with relief.

"We really do need to get back," Az reminded her and the two of them raced out of the woods, frightened when they found their mother waiting for them with a frown on her face.

"What did I tell you about going into the woods alone?" she demanded angrily. "Azkadellia, I expected better from you!"

"It was my fault Mother. I wanted some apples so I tricked that mean old tree to throw them at us and Az wanted to come back but we saw a bear. She was so brave….she made me feel brave and we made the bear go away with our magic!" DG rambled.

"I'm sorry, Mother," Az said sadly, her head bowed in shame.

"I am very disappointed in both of you and as punishment you are confined to the palace for a week. Come along."

Azkadellia kept herself occupied during her confinement by reading and practicing her magic. In three weeks she would turn thirteen and hoped that Jiminy would keep his promise to her and begin training her to fight with a sword.

"I haven't forgotten my promise, Dellia. Your sword is being constructed as we speak."

"It is?"

He removed his own from its scabbard and held it out to her. "Do you see the image of a cricket here? That is my symbol and this sword cannot be used by anyone else but me. Yours will be the emerald itself."

"Why?"

"It's who you are. You are the North Gate, keeper of the stone of the land."

"I…I'm a Guardian…one of THE Guardians?"

"You and DG. She is the South, the keeper of the chalice of water. The West Gate is Rumplestiltskin and the East will be one of his kin."

Az shivered. "He…he's the Dark One!"

"His curse will be broken and you will be instrumental in breaking it…along with his bonded, Lady Belle Lavalliere and the East Guardian."

"He's on the other side now, isn't he…without his power…because of a curse cast by Queen Regina?"

"He is but recall the prophecy: The darkest of curses by Strogoff taken and through his sacrifice in the names of those he loves, the curse by a Strogoff shall be broken," Jiminy recited.

"The death of a Guardian will disrupt the balance," Az reminded him. "Unless a new one has been chosen."
"One has but I think Ozmalita has been too hasty. The person she has chosen has no magic in his blood at all while Rumplestiltskin is a pureblood as all Strogoffs are. He will break his curse. I'm certain of it….once he learns his bonded still lives."

"She is believed to be dead."

"But she's not, not according to our spies. It would disrupt the balance more than it already is as long as the four of you are unbound."

"Who is my bondmate?" she asked, wishing with all her heart he would answer that he was. For so many years she thought of him as a friend but in recent months her feelings started to change. She knew he was much older but she didn't care. There was no one else she wanted to be her consort though her mother presented her to the boys from every noble house in the realms as a possible candidate for her hand.

"I don't know, Dellia. That answer is locked in your heart's memories and it will only be revealed to you when the time's right. Come on. Your father wants to take you and DG to his art studio today."

"Perhaps it's you," she declared boldly. He blinked several times and gaped at her.

"Me? But...but....that is impossible! I am much older than you...a century at least because of my enchantment."

"But it's not forbidden," she reminded him. "Dorothy was to be bound to her Guardian, the Tin Man."

"And we both know that did not go well," Jiminy reminded her. "She didn't return his love and he died in agony, his remains melted down into the sword that has been locked away for centuries."

"I would love you if you were my bondmate."

"Dellia, please...let's not have this discussion. It's inappropriate."

"I am to be a woman soon. I must know these things."

"Then I suggest you discuss women's issues with your mother!" he cried.

She looked away. "I have. But there are many other things I only feel comfortable discussing with you."

"You know can confide in me Dellia, except for women's issues. Those you should discuss with your mother. Come. You shouldn't keep your father waiting."

Az smiled. It was the first chance she'd get to spend time with her father in weeks. He and Lavinia had finally been forced to travel to the Western realm to put down a small rebellion and little as she liked it, the council recommended the ringleaders be hanged in Central City square.

Ahamo set up an easel in front of the studio and made a sketch of the forest for his daughters to paint, making sure that the objects were large enough that DG could paint them easily. Both of his girls were artistic but DG seemed to be better at sketching. Once the painting was finished they handed it to their mother to be framed and hung in the gallery of the Finaqua palace. In the winter they would travel to the Northern Island palace.
"I think I'll go for a walk," Lavinia said softly.

"Hold on, I'll come with you." Ahamo offered.

"Can we come too, Daddy?" DG asked.

He smiled. "I'll tell you what. Why don't you two wait here and make me something…something that I can keep forever?" he suggested.

"We can do that," Az declared happily.

They found some clay in one of his trunks and spent most of the afternoon sculpting them into human shapes and painted them, DG's was a little girl in a red dress and yellow boots while Azkadellia's was a preteen in a green dress and black boots, the same outfits they were wearing that day. The girls took the dolls into the studio and Az placed them on the table.

"Leave them here. He'll find them when he comes back with Mother."

"Do you think Father will know they're from us?"

"Well he told us to make him something he could keep forever and he did teach us how to sculpt clay."

"What if they're touched with our magic?"

"Good idea." The girls held their hands over the dolls and they began to glow with white magic, near where their hands were nearly joined together. "Now he'll definitely know. C'mon."

Ahamo and Lavinia were delighted when they found the little gifts their daughters made for their father. Ahamo couldn't have been more proud. On the other side his daughters would have been famous for their talents. One day Az did want to journey to the other side to see what she could learn from it that could help her in her most ambitious project when she took the throne in her own right; modernizing Oz.

"Daddy, do you want to skip stones across the lake with us?" Az asked him. His face fell.

"I'd love to honey but I have a meeting with the council. There's been another rebellion in Central City."

Az worried for Jiminy's safety; he'd been called to the front lines along with most of the queen's guards.

Az picked up a flat rock and skipped it across the water. "Flat rocks glide."

DG picked up a round stone and tossed it but it sank into the water. "Round rocks die."

"We need to find the perfect stone. Come on!" Az said excitedly and the two of them began searching the grounds. As DG was searching she discovered a flat stone that was almost the shape of a heart.

"It's perfect," she cried, holding it up. "Let's save it."

"We'll hide it…for the perfect day," Az declared. The girls buried the stone under a pile of rocks and sang softly.

"Two little princesses dancing in room
Where the light will take them no one ever knows
Two little princesses dancing in a room..."

DG glanced up at her sister. "What's the matter Az? You look worried."

"I'm worried for Jiminy. We haven't heard anything from the royal army."

"You like him don't you?" the younger girl inquired with a smirk.

"Of course. He's been my guard since I was a baby."

"No...I mean like...like a suitor."

"Deege!"

"You do! You're blushing! Does Mother know?"

"No, and you're not gonna tell her either!"

"Do you think he likes you?"

"Not that way. He thinks he's too old for me. I'm only thirteen. Oh I wish I were older!" Az sighed longingly. "Mother would say my feelings were just a girl's passing fancy but I don't think so. I've always felt a connection to Jiminy but lately....I've felt so much more when I'm around him."

"Like what?"

"My heart....it beats faster when he's close to me. Oh, he keeps himself at a distance as he's trained to do but even at a distance there's so many things happening with me that...I've read so many of those books from the Other Side that....that I think I'm in love, Deege and it's a wonderful feeling but frightening at the same time."

"Why would love be scary, Az?"

"Because I worry that Jiminy will not love me in return once I'm old enough."

"If love is so scary, I'd rather not be in it," DG muttered.

"You say that now Deege but wait til you're older."

Storybrooke, Maine

Alemedia was enjoying her new surroundings. For centuries she longed to have an opportunity to cross over to the other side and her vessel and his former apprentice provided her with the perfect opportunities to do so. Her magic was inactive in this land and it would be until Snow White and Prince Charming's daughter broke the curse that had been cast on this town called Storybrooke. Still, the people in the town feared her and Rumplestiltskin who was known as Robert Gold in this land. That fear was what sustained her through the years of boredom and to her disappointment she still could not find a trace of Rumplestiltskin's bondmate, Azkadellia's bondmate or the East Guardian. They were on this side. She was certain of it. She would take care of them and Bastinda would destroy the others in Oz. The seal to the gates of Ephesis was weakening as it came closer to the time of the final eclipse. Soon her apprentice would call out and the weakest of the Guardians in Oz would answer.

Oz (The Outer Zone)
In the distance DG could hear a voice screaming out in terror.

"Did you hear that?" DG asked her.

"Hear what?" Az hadn't heard anything.

The voice screamed out again.

"We should go see what it is." DG insisted.

"No, we should get back. Mom said to stay close." Az advised.

"If we did everything Mom said we'd never have any fun. Come on, it's like an adventure!" the little girl said excitedly and ran into the woods.

"Your adventures have a way of getting me into trouble!" Az warned, hurrying after her.

DG followed the voice deep into the woods and down a hill to a cave. Az noticed some markings above the entrance, recognizing them as being part of the picture language of the ancients, chronicling the battle of the first eclipse where the great Dorothy Gale, Glinda the Good, Nicolai Ozopov and Alexander Strogoff defeated the dark witch Bastinda and imprisoned her for all eternity.

"Do you hear that?" DG asked again. It sounded like a child crying for help.

"We should go get our mom and dad," Az said. DG started to go into the cave, almost as if she were being drawn to into it. "Your adventures have a way of getting me into trouble!" she reminded her sister again, hoping she would come back but DG was determined to have her adventure. Frustrated, she followed her sister into the cave.

She found a lantern on the ground and lit it with her magic, finding her sister staring at another series of drawings on the wall of the cave.

"Look at this."

"It's the picture language of the ancients."

"Can you tell what it means?" DG asked her.

"Some. At the dawn of time, good battled evil and the light conquered over the darkness…and something about an evil witch."

They went further into the cave and suddenly Azkadellia stopped, tired of exploring. "Well, that was fun." She spun on her and started to exit the cave. DG stood still.

"Wait."

Az held the lantern up, her eyes wide with horror as she saw a large face made out of rocks staring back at them.

"Whoa!" DG cried.

"What is this place?" Az asked fearfully.

"It looks ancient." DG observed.
And terrifying, Az thought. All the more reason to leave!

"Maybe it's a tomb," her sister went on.

"I'm not sure but that face creeps me out. Let's go!" Az said firmly.

"Don't you hear it? There's someone trapped in there."

She reached her hand inside the mouth and something on the other side grasped it.

"DG!" Az yelled, reaching for her sister's hand to pull her back. A large piece of the mouth shattered.

"What have we done?" Az asked, horrified.

The cave had been unexplored for so many centuries that Bastinda had begun to lose hope that she would ever escape the prison she been placed in by that silly girl Dorothy Gale and the prince Ozarian. Then suddenly she felt it...the presence of two powerful young sorceresses, a prepubescent girl named Azkadellia and a child nicknamed DG but her true name was Dorothia. She had been named in the honor of the witch's nemesis. She watched with pleasure as the younger girl's arm reached through the keyhole of her prison, unleashing a powerful burst of magic once it was combined with the elder's. Then she felt it, the presence of two of the Guardians of Balance. Keeping a firm grip on the younger girl's hand, Bastinda reached into her heart memories to learn the identity of her bonded. In the girl's memories she saw an image of a tall adult male with short blond hair and blue eyes wearing a grey fedora hat, brown leather vest and grey duster with a tin star badge on his chest. His name was Wyatt Cain. She smiled with satisfaction. Lurline's angel Ozmalita had released Nick Chopper's heart and soul and merged them with Cain's. That meant the girl's heart and soul had been merged with Dorothy Gale's. She probed deeper and was given another vision. The young girl, her elder sister, Rumplestiltskin and another whose face she couldn't see would combine their powers and lock her in Ephesis forever. Now was the time to act. Both girls were unbound and without a bond, consummated or not, their souls were ripe for the taking.

She was in the form of a little girl, standing against the wall sobbing softly.

"Hey, are you okay?" DG asked her. She was about to approach her when Azkadellia took her arm and pulled her back, sensing the girl was not what she appeared to be.

"No. Wait. How did you get here?" she demanded.

"Help me," the girl sobbed.

"Our parents aren't far, we'll go and bring back help."

"NO!" the witch snarled and turned around. "Please, don't leave me alone. I've been waiting...calling...I thought this day would never come!"

The seal now weakened awakened the mobat demons from their slumber in Ephesis. They appeared on the ceiling of the cave, ready to merge with their new vessel.

The two girls stood side by side, hands joined, combining the power flowing through them combined with a deep affection for each other.

"The magic is strong in you. Let go." She said maliciously, keeping her cold eyes focused on the young Dorothia who was terribly frightened.
"No. Don't let go!" Azkadellia warned her younger sister.

"But I'm scared," the little girl whimpered.

"We have to stay together." Azkadellia insisted.

"You can let go little girl," the witch said sweetly to the wide eyed, frightened DG.

"No!" Azkedallia ordered.

"Let go!" the witch hissed.

The little girl screamed in terror and released her sister's hand, fleeing to the entrance of the cave as the witch forced Azkadellia to her knees, merging her essence with the girl's.

Release me, Azkadellia demanded.

Never. As long as you are in my power you will do my bidding.

DG raced through the woods with tears streaming down her cheeks. She found her mother just as they left her, on the swing. Lavinia picked her daughter up and held her tightly.

"DG, my darling you're shaking like a leaf. What's wrong?"

"Az…..she fell…and I let go," the girl sobbed.

"What are you talking about. There's Az right there."

Bastinda returned to the gazebo of the Finaqua palace in Azkadellia's body. It felt wonderful to be young, beautiful and free once again even if she was now limited to the meager powers the young girl possessed.

"Azkadellia?" Queen Lavinia asked. "Are you all right?"

The witch smiled. "Of course Mother. I've never felt better."

Through the elder child she would succeed where she failed centuries earlier, kill all the guardians and at last the dark goddess would rule as queen of the mortal realm and she, Bastinda would be the queen's most loyal servant.

Two days later a badly injured Jiminy returned from the front.

"Jiminy!" Az screamed when she emerged from her chambers to see him being carried on a litter to the Healer's Ward. The commotion brought DG out of her own room.

Lavinia reached for her younger daughter and pulled her back. "Go inside my angel. Az..."

Az spun around and glared at her mother. "This is YOUR FAULT" she raged. "YOU DID THIS TO HIM!"

"Az, darling...I..."

"Shut up!" the elder princess snarled. "I don't want to hear any of your excuses. If he dies I will NEVER forgive you!" She raced down the hall to the Healer's Ward while the physicians were tending to Jiminy.
"What is his condition?" she demanded.

"He is suffering from severe magical drain Your Highness but the wounds...." The physician gestured to the cuts on his chest and legs.

"Jiminy..." she sobbed and took his hand in hers, pressing it against her chest, near her heart. His eyes fluttered open and he gazed up at her.

"Dellia...don't cry..." he pleaded weakly.

"I can't lose you. I won't!" she vowed, a bright light emitting from her chest. The physicians stared in amazement as the light flowed out of her into his body, healing the wounds that had been inflicted on him, restoring his strength.

"Dellia, what have you done?" he whispered.

"Healed you," she murmured. Because I love you...and I'll have no other for my bondmate but you, she thought. She only hoped that some day in the future he would learn to love her as she loved him.

Lavinia had sensed a disturbing change in her eldest daughter's demeanor since her accident yet the girl continued to insist that she was well. She sought out Ambrose, the royal advisor and trusted friend and explained the situation to him.

"The princess's sudden mood changes are normal, Your Majesty. You experienced them yourself when you grew to womanhood, did you not?"

"Yes, but it was not like this Ambrose. She is distant with DG and that has never happened before. No matter what was troubling her, she never allowed it to interfere in their closeness. And she blamed me for Jiminy being injured on the front..."

"Perhaps a change of scenery will do some good," he suggested. "Being here at Finaqua brings back reminders of the accident. The Northern Island?"

"We could go there after my visit to Central City. Jeb Mysticos has been asking me to visit for some time now and I have missed him."

"I'll make all the preparations, Your Majesty." He said and left the room, leaving the queen still lost in her dark thoughts. She longed to talk to her husband but Ahamo was at his cabin working on another art piece and never wanted to be disturbed or he lost his concentration. They'd spoken often of Azkadellia's accident and he didn't share his wife's concerns that there was a growing dark presence around her. She and Toto reached into the deepest part of her magic to trace the source only to find a powerful wall blocking her. Azkadellia's magic alone was not strong enough to produce so powerful a barrier. It was good that she would be making the progress to Central City. She had so much more to discuss with the Mystic Man than just his well-being.
It took the royal party two days to travel to the city, still glimmering brightly from the precious emerald that had created it. The emerald, one of the most powerful energy sources of the OZ was safely stored in the crypt of her first ancestor, Dorothy Gale. While the girls stayed with their father, Lavinia and Ambrose sought out the Mystic Man. When they reached his headquarters they were quickly stopped by a tall blond man wearing a Tin Man's badge.

"The Mystic Man isn't ready for guests today," he said firmly.

"He'll see us. Now if you wouldn't mind stepping aside," Ambrose said and was about to reach for the door when the other man grabbed him and shoved him against the wall. As Ambrose stared at the other man's face he recognized him immediately.

"I don't think you heard me. I said the Mystic Man is not receiving visitors today," the man said icily.

Wyatt Cain? Is that you? he heard the advisor ask in his head.

How do you know my name and how can you speak to me in my head?

You already know the answer to that. It's me...Ambrose Benu.

Son of a bitch, you look different.

Yeah.

Royal advisor, huh? Better not be neglecting your Talon training or Jeb's gonna have a fit.

I'm not but Lannot is an ass. He won't give me the trial.

Why not? You're ready for it, more than I am.

Must be afraid I'll hack him to bits in his sleep.

That bad?

You have no idea.

"You'll take your hands off my advisor this instant Officer." the queen ordered.

"Really? Who do you think you are to give me orders, lady?"

"I am Lavinia, Queen of OZ!"

"Sure you are. If you're the queen why aren't you dressed like it?"

"Because we have been riding for two days and we avoid attack by dressing like regular travelers. Now release my advisor at once."

"Wyatt, what in the name of Lurline are you doing attacking the queen's advisor?" the Mystic Man cried out from his window on the second floor. The man released his hold on Ambrose and bowed.
"Your Majesty! I'm sorry. I didn't know!" he stammered. "It's been a while since I've seen you."

"You are forgiven Officer," the queen said with a smile. "And it has."

He heard Ambrose snicker and glared at him.

"If you'll uhhhh follow me," he said nervously as he led them into the Mystic Man's home.

"How is your wife, Mr. Cain?"

"Adora? She's good. We have a son now."

"Congratulations."

"Thank you."

Jeb Mysticos was standing in the hallway and embraced the queen.

"It's been a long time Vinny," he said, using the nickname he'd given her when they were younger. Jeb Mysticos, also known as the Mystic Man had once been a serious contender for Consort until Ahamo arrived in the OZ but their friendship hadn't ended after they broke their engagement. "This stubborn mule here is Wyatt Cain, head of my protection force."

"You do your job well Mr. Cain," the queen said softly.

"Thank you, Your Majesty."

"He even named his boy after me," The Mystic Man said proudly. "Wyatt, why don't you take the rest of the day off and go spend some time with Adora and my godson," the Mystic Man suggested to his protector.

"Are you sure, sir?" Wyatt Cain asked hesitantly.

"Ambrose'll be able to help if I have any problems."

"You promise you'll send for me if you need me?"

"I will, now go!"

"Sorry about roughing you up," he said to Ambrose.

"No harm done. Goodbye Mr. Cain."

"Your Majesty," Wyatt bowed once more to the queen before he left the manor. Although he was technically off duty, his Tin Man's senses were always on high alert. There was so much crime in Central City these days that the Tin force was beginning to feel overwhelmed. Wyatt had been relieved when he was assigned to The Mystic Man's protection detail. The older man gave him less headaches than chasing Antoine Demilo and his constant supply of whores out of the city did. Making matters worse, he was certain a few Tin Men were regular customers of Demillo's in exchange for letting him keep his business going. It hadn't come as a surprise to him when he caught Tin Man Gregory Zero with one of Demillo's girls. He wondered how Zero would feel if he saw the picture Wyatt had of Demillo and his first wife in bed together. Zero had suspected his wife was cheating on him but not who with. Wyatt hadn't felt the need to use his secret weapon yet. There was no need now. Zero would just have to find out on his own.

He was halfway to the apartment he and he wife had in the city when he collided with a sobbing
"Whoa…what's the matter sweetheart?" he asked gently.

"I…I can't find my daddy and sister," she moaned.

Wyatt kneeled down so that he was at eye level with her. "Do you remember where you last saw them?"

"I…I'm trying."

"Try a little harder," he suggested, taking her hand in his. Once her small fingers laced with his large ones they began to glow. "What the hell…?"

His mind was being invaded by strange images, a cold, dark cave, an old menacing woman, the little girl curious about something she'd seen in the city and wandering off while her father and sister weren't looking. He quickly pulled his hand away. This was no ordinary child, she was a young sorceress and only three people he knew possessed that kind of magic; the queen and her daughters. This one looked too young to be Azkadellia so she had to be Drotchia or DG as he heard they liked to call her. The last time he'd seen her she was just baby.

"Come on Your Highness. I know where your mother is so I'll take you to her."

The child's blue eyes lightened. "You do?"

"I just left her."

After the strange incident that occurred simply by touching hands, he tried to avoid having any further physical contact with the child but when a truck started coming toward them at a speed faster than was permitted by law in Central City, he picked her up and held her protectively. As her palm pressed against his chest it began to glow again and once again he started seeing visions in his head only this time they were accompanied by a female voice.

Have courage for the task at hand will be hard
This half of our heart you must now guard
The other half lives inside of you
And to both you must always be true
Divided we will fall
As one we form an impenetrable wall
Bound by light and love will we be
One heart forever to protect the OZ.

He stared down at the little girl. "What did you do to me?" he demanded.

"What?"

"You didn't hear that?" he asked her.

"Hear what?"

"That voice."

"No."

He shook his head. This little princess was strange, there was no doubt about that and although she
denied it, he suspected she put some kind of spell on him and the safest thing he could do was get her the hell away from him.

"I wish I had an answer for you Vinny but unfortunately I don't. Maybe if I knew more details about this 'accident' I'd have more of an idea what could be wrong with your daughter," The Mystic Man admitted.

"Neither Az nor DG will discuss it," Lavinia said.

They heard the front door close and went into the hallway to see Wyatt Cain with DG at his side. Lavinia kneeled down and embraced her daughter.

"I found her wandering around so I figured I'd better bring her back here," Wyatt explained.

"Thank you again Mr. Cain," the queen said softly.

"You're welcome. Now I'll be getting back...owww...what the hell?!" he cried. His palm was on fire as if someone had taken a match to it. He turned it over to see a strange symbol carved into his flesh and glared down at the little girl. It looked like a series of circles with an eye in the center.

"What kind of spell did you put on me you little witch?" he hissed. DG screamed and hid behind her mother's skirt.

"Mommy, I swear I didn't do anything..." she sobbed.

"What do you call this? It wasn't on my hand until now," Wyatt growled, holding up his palm so that the others could see the mark. It was now glowing brightly. Lavinia and The Mystic Man gasped in shock.

"It can't be...." Lavinia gasped and seized her own daughter's hand. Turning it over, she saw the same mark on her child's palm glowing as brightly as the one now on Wyatt Cain's. She led her over to the Tin Man and placed the child's marked hand in his and once their hands were joined a protective shield formed over them just as it had every time DG and Az's hands were joined. Wyatt snatched his hand away.

"Keep that girl away from me!" he growled.

"Wyatt, please calm down. You're scaring her," The Mystic Man said gently.

"I'm scaring her? She puts a spell on me and you're worried about me scaring her. She's scary enough. Power like that does not belong in the hands of a child. What do you think she'll do when she gets older?"

"I didn't mean to do anything bad!" DG sobbed.

"Ambrose, would you keep an eye on Mr. Cain and DG while Jeb and I talk," the queen asked softly.

"Of course Your Majesty. Come here DG," he said softly to the little girl and lifted her into his arms. "Mr. Cain, you stay put."

"Fine but I mean it...keep that kid away from me!" Wyatt grumbled as he sat down on one of the chairs while Ambrose sat on the sofa holding DG while she cried.

Nice going Wyatt.
Well, let me know how pissed off you get when she puts a spell on you?

Ambrose leaned back on the sofa and smiled. He had a feeling that these two were going to be a handful.

"...There's no mistaking it Vinny. DG has performed a bonding spell on my Tin Man." Jeb Mysticos informed her once they were alone in his office.

"She shouldn't have that ability at her age," Lavina reminded. "And why your Tin Man? There is a great age difference between them. Also he is married with a son not much younger than she is."

"Yet when their hands were joined we saw the protective shield form over them."

"Wyatt Cain does not possess magical ability, does he?"

"He didn't before but he does now through the bonding spell. They now have equal powers."

"Can we break the spell?"

"I'm not sure. We'll have to see how powerful it is."

"How can we do that?"

"We need to get them to join their marked hands again and place ours over the shield it forms. That will allow us to look at it."

"Mr. Cain will never agree to it and now DG is frightened of him."

"We must do this Vinny. If they refuse to do it willingly, we'll have to make them do it unwillingly." He walked over to his desk drawer and took out a small bottle. "This is a mild sleeping potion I keep handy for Wyatt. When he has to spend more than two nights here he has difficulty sleeping. I've been slipping it into his drinks without him knowing for years. If they refuse to cooperate, we'll give this to them. It should give us the time we need to look at the spell."

Lavinia sighed. "I don't want anything to harm my angel and I need to find a way to break this bonding spell if it will harm her."

When they returned to the sitting room, DG was asleep on Ambrose's lap while Wyatt Cain dozed comfortably in a nearby chair. Using her magic, Lavinia opened a mental connection with Ambrose and Jeb.

Jeb and I know what kind of spell has been cast Ambrose but we need to see how powerful it is and it seems the only way we can do this without a fight is while they're asleep. Try to take DG over to Mr. Cain's side without waking either of them.

This isn't going to be easy, Vinny. Wyatt has the senses of a bloodhound. He can smell trouble a mile away. We may have to use the potion on them.

I'd like to avoid that if I can.

Let me try this first Your Majesty.

Thank you Ambrose.

Ambrose slowly rose to his feet and walked over to the sofa where Wyatt Cain was sleeping, DG still asleep in his arms. She stirred for a fraction of a second and then fell back to sleep again.
Now what do I do?

Place her marked hand in his and try to keep them joined as long as you can.

I'll try but he'll shoot me if he wakes up and catches DG anywhere near him. I don't know what she did but it scared him.

That's what we're trying to find out.

Ambrose took a deep breath and raised DG's marked palm and pressed it against Wyatt's, hanging limp at his side as he slept. Immediately the hands started to glow and the shield formed over them, trapping Ambrose outside of it. Lavinia and Jeb stepped up to the glowing dome and placed their own hands on it. They began to see visions of an older DG and Wyatt together with Rumplestiltskin, Azkadellia, another man, a young boy and a girl, standing in a circle.

Lavinia and Jeb pulled their hands away from the shield, gazing at each other. DG's hand slipped out of Wyatt's, making the shield vanish.

Majesty, what is it?

It's all right Ambrose. Take her back to the sofa before Mr. Cain wakes up. We'll be back in a minute.

Lavinia closed the mental connection with Ambrose and she and Jeb retreated to his study, both of them frightened yet amazed at what they'd both witnessed.

"Your daughters are two of the four Guardians and Wyatt is DG's bonded," Jeb whispered. "We can't break this bond Vinny nor can we allow anyone else to. There is a price..."

Lavinia sank into a chair, her face pale. "My poor angel. Mr. Cain will never love her. He's married and she's only a child."

"That's the way it is now but you saw the same vision I did. DG will be able to complete the bond once she's a woman. And we have to do everything we can to make sure that happens."

"But what about his wife and son?"

"Their fate is the will of the OZ."

"No. I will not have my angel being held responsible for taking away everything Mr. Cain loves. I am breaking this bond."

"Lavinia, please, think about this."

"I have. I would sacrifice everything, including the OZ for my daughter's happiness. If you won't help me I'll find some other way."

Jeb sighed sadly. He knew she hadn't given the matter as careful consideration as she should have and feared that by severing one of the most powerful forces in the OZ, she was damning them all.

"All right. I'll see how we can break it. Give me some time to look through the old texts. There should be an answer in there."

"I'm going to be taking the children to the Northern Island. Once you find out how to do it, let me know."
"I will," he said. He was known as the man who had all the answers or knew how to find them but this was one answer he hoped he would never find.

When they returned to the sitting room DG and Wyatt were awake but they weren't speaking to each other. Wyatt was carving something while Ambrose entertained DG with a story. When the little girl saw her mother, she jumped off the sofa and ran over to her, throwing her arms around her.

"My angel," she crooned.

"Humph…that kid is anything but an angel," Wyatt muttered from where he was sitting. Lavinia glared at him, once again convinced that breaking the bonding spell between this cold man and her daughter was the best course of action she could take.

DG detached herself from her mother's embrace and stomped over to where was sitting, her blue eyes ice cold as she met his.

"You're a mean man Mr. Cain," she said through gritted teeth. "I don't think I cast a spell on you but I hope that if I did, you turn into a frog or something."

To her surprise he simply laughed. "You're brave kiddo, I'll give you that."

"What are you making?" she asked when she noticed his carving.

"Oh, just a toy horse for my boy. He's not old enough for it yet but I wanted him to have it done before that."

"Can I see it?"

"Uhhh…sure."

DG took the small statue in her hands and closed her eyes, calling on her magic. It would be a beautiful horse but it needed some color to it. She pictured her favorite horse at Finaqua and painted the toy with the same colors. Now painted, she handed the finished horse back to him. It was brown with white patches and she'd even added a small star like the one on his badge on its back. He gazed at it in wonder. She'd done in less than a minute what it would have taken him hours, even days to do.

"Thanks kid."

"I hope he likes it."

"I'm sure he will."

Jeb glanced over at Lavinia and opened up a mind connection to her.

You see. This can work. Give it and them a chance.

She's still too young to understand the commitment she's made to him. We cannot be certain that this bond will hold once DG is a woman.

The risks are too great to break it.

DG's happiness is my only concern.

"We must be going, my angel. Your father and Az are probably worried sick about you."
"I don't know where they are."

"I'll find them. Thank you for looking after my daughter for me Mr. Cain. I am sorry about what happened."

"It's all right Your Majesty." He looked down at DG. "Try to stay out of trouble kiddo."

"I'm sorry I called you mean Mr. Cain. You seem really nice."

"Thanks kid." He held out his unmarked hand to her and she took it her own, shaking it timidly. "See you around."

After the royals left the house Wyatt turned to his employer with his arms crossed over his chest. "Now, do you wanna tell me what the hell just happened? She did put some kind of spell on me, didn't she?"

"Yes," Jeb admitted.

"Well, what was it?"

"A protection spell," he lied, hoping Wyatt's magic was not yet strong enough to see through the lie. He used a mental spell to block the younger man from accessing his memories. "But by doing it she passed some of her magic on to you."

"Huh? Are you telling me she made me a sorcerer?"

"One whose powers are not fully developed like hers."

"What did she do it for?"

"I don't know. Maybe because you were kind to her."

"Well break it or something."

"I can't!"

"Can I?"

"No!" Jeb cried.

"Why?"

"Just listen to me when I tell you that you are not to try to break this spell unless you absolutely have no other choice." Jeb said fiercely. "Promise me Wyatt! It carries too high of a price."

"All right, all right, I won't but that doesn't mean I have to like it."

Jeb breathed a sigh of relief and reminded the younger man he still wanted him to take the day off while he retreated to his office to study the old Ozian texts. As he suspected, only two forces had the strength to break the bonding spell. One was the dark essence that, thankfully was imprisoned, and the other was Wyatt, the stronger of the two hearts as long as their bond had not been consummated, which wouldn't happen for years to come. He was not a man who enjoyed lying but he would lie as long as he could if it meant protecting the OZ and the ones he loved. In the meantime, now that his Tin Man possessed magical ability, he would need to learn how to use it.

"You're home early," Adora Cain said softly as she kissed her husband. "Uh oh...I don't like that
look. What happened?"

"I had an interesting encounter with the royal family," he said as he sat down in his favorite chair. He held up his marked palm. "The youngest princess put some sort of protection spell on me and now I'm a sorcerer! You know how I feel about magic!"

Adora felt her heart break. Her grandmother had been a powerful Ozian priestess and schooled her well on the ancient legends. The moment the small child's hand touched his heart, the will of the OZ was undeniable. DG and Wyatt were two of the Guardians of Light and it had been Adora's duty to prepare him for the day when the Princess would come to claim him as her own.

When she was a child, Adora hadn't believed her grandmother when she used to tell her that she was a guardian angel. She assumed her grandmother was only telling her this to make her feel better about herself when she was lonely or depressed. Now she remembered the full truth, she was Ozmalita herself, bound in human form until her final task was complete.

"Nana, does that mean I'll live forever?"

"No, darling. Guardian angels come in many forms and some of them are here in the OZ. You are one of them. We all have limited time here and you have to use yours wisely. Find your purpose and dedicate yourself to fulfilling it."

She began to believe she never would until the day she walked out into the schoolyard and saw a group of boys fighting. Three of them were attacking a smaller, blond haired boy named Wyatt Cain. He sat a few rows away from her in the classroom and everyone teased him because he had the lowest grades and lived on the poorest farm in the village.

"Leave him alone!" she yelled. Two of the boys glanced over at her in surprise.

"It's pretty bad when you gotta get a girl to stand up for ya, Wyatt," one of the boys said and laughed.

"Shut up!" Wyatt yelled back and kicked him in the shins. His face was bloody and his nose was probably broken again but he didn't care. The last thing he wanted was to be branded a sissy who needed to hide behind a woman's skirts. He never hid behind his mother's when his stepfather came after him with the belt, a board or whatever else he could get his hands on and he was going to be damned if he hid behind the skirts of Adora Kantrine, the daughter of the wealthiest merchant in the village.

"I don't need you stickin' up for me Adora! I can take care of myself," Wyatt growled as he punched one of the boys in his face and knocked him down. He continued beating at him until the other boy began to cry and begged him to stop. The others backed away, now terrified. He was like a wild animal that had been freed from its cage.

"Wyatt...he's had enough...you've got to stop." she said gently and touched his shoulder. He snatched her hand away with such force it nearly knocked her down.

"I'm sick of 'em kicking me down!"

"I know you are but if you keep doing this, you'll be no better than they are."

He paused and looked up at her. "Why the hell do you care?"

"Because you're a good person and deserve better than this."
He stood up and brushed the dirt off his pants. "Quit pretendin' you give two shits about me Adora Kantrine. I know you laugh at me just like the rest of these sons of bitches do. I'm nothin' more than dirt under your boots." Although he was only ten years old, hard times had aged him quickly and it reflected in the way he looked and spoke.

"You can be more than that if you would just stop being so stubborn!" she cried.

"Yeah, well I don't need no rich girl tellin' me what I need to do with my life so leave me the hell alone!" He stormed off, thinking she would take the hint but she followed him. "Don't listen well, do ya?"

"Why should I listen to you when you won't listen to me?" she retorted.

"Anyone ever tell you what a pain in the ass you are?"

"No. Just you and I am going to be the biggest pain in your ass until you straighten out."

"I'm not gonna be your charity case, Adora Kantrine." he grumbled as he kicked a patch of grass.

"You're not and would you please just call me Adora!"

"Okay." He sat down on a rock in front of the lake and took a handkerchief out of his pocket. He dipped it into the water, using it to wipe the blood off his face.

"Are you in any pain?" she asked him.

"I've had worse."

"From your stepfather?"

He stiffened. "How'd you know?"

"I've seen you trying to hide the bruises. Why does he hit you?"

"I'm not talkin' about this."

Adora sighed. He wasn't making this easy for her but she wasn't going to give up. She knew that under the dirty, ragged clothes, the crude language and the bruises was a brave, honest heart that needed a gentle hand to guide it out of the darkness.

Now, years later, Adora glanced down at the gold band around her finger and twisted it. It had been a long, hard battle but in the end Wyatt was willing to lower his guard and let her into his heart and the son she bore him completed that bond. One day she would be forced to give Wyatt up and she wasn't certain she had the strength to. The first time she'd done it Dorothy failed to claim him and he died in agony. She couldn't allow it to happen again.

"Do you think your grandmother might know more about this?" Wyatt asked her.

"You hate asking Nana anything having to do with magic." she reminded him with a smile.

"I'll make an exception in this case." He sighed. "Why is it that every time I have to learn something new I end up with a mark on me like a cow being branded?"

Before they moved to Central City and Wyatt became part of the Mystic Man's protection detail, the only mark Adora had ever seen on him was the small birthmark on his hip in the shape of an axe's blade, Nick Chopper's symbol. Now his right side bore three more distinct markings: a dragon
tattoo on his right shoulder blade, a pair of crossed swords on his upper arm and the House of Gale symbol on his palm.

"Being chosen to succeed the Mystic Man as the last surviving knight of the Talons of the Dragon Order was a great honor," Adora reminded him. "They were the original guardians of the OZ until the Gales assumed power."

"All I had to learn for that was the swordfighting and martial arts. I'll take that over the magic."

"Speaking of that, you still haven't told him you are training me, have you?"

He shook his head. "I will eventually. Then when our son is old enough, I'll teach him. If your grandmother knew she'd put a curse on me!"

"Oh, she would not!" Adora protested.

"Daddy's home!" they heard their son cry out from the doorway. Wyatt kneeled down and scooped up his son.

"There's my boy!" he said proudly and kissed him the forehead.

"How long are you gonna be home, Daddy?" little Jeb asked.

"All day so you and Mommy need to come up with some good ideas for stuff for us to do."

"We can do that," Adora assured him. "Why don't we go on a picnic?" she suggested.

"Can we, can we?"

"I think that settles it," Wyatt chuckled. "Can you help Mommy with lunch while I go change?"

"Uh huh."

"Okay." Wyatt set the child down and went into their bedroom. As he was opening a dresser drawer, he became disoriented and his head was throbbing with pain. "What the...?"

I hit my head.

Princess? Is that you?

Mr. Cain? Why am I hearing you in my head?

That protection spell you put on me. Kind of hard to protect you when I'm here and you must've taken a good knock to your head because I feel it.

I ahhh ran into the door.

Ouch! How did you do that?

I wasn't paying attention.

Try to be more careful, please.

I will. And Mr. Cain?

Yes?
I'll try not to bother you. I'm really sorry.

It's okay kid. It's just something we'll have to learn how to deal with, that's all.

"Wyatt, honey, are you okay?" Adora asked when she poked her head in and found him leaning against the dresser.

"This has to be more than a protection spell Adora. I can hear the kid's thoughts and feel any pain she has like it's my own."

"Something just happened?"

"She ran into a door. Hard. I was dizzy for a minute and now I have a headache and feel that someone isn't being straight with me."

"Ask the Mystic Man about it when you go back."

"I intend to. Everything ready for the picnic."

"I think our son packed everything edible in the house, not that it won't get eaten."

"Are you suggesting I eat like a hog," Wyatt teased, nuzzling her neck.

"You do."

"We'll just have to work it off later, won't we?"

"I'm going to hold you to that promise." Adora whispered.

Of all the men in the OZ to pick as the princess's mate, why does it always have to be the man I love?

That moment Adora Cain made a promise to herself. She and her son had at the most fifteen years left of their lives with Wyatt and she was going to make damned sure every minute of them counted.

"As you know the OZ is divided into four realms: North, South, East, and West and their points on the compass are like this," Jeb Mysticos explained, drawing the directions on a chalkboard. "Each direction is represented by a symbol, one of the four elements and can be either male or female."

"Which one am I?" Wyatt asked.

"You are from the western realm, therefore you now represent the west. Your symbol is the sword, your element is fire. Your female counterpart, the princess DG, is the south. Her symbol is the chalice or the cup and her element is water."

"Who are the north and east?"

"The north is the princess Azkadellia. Her symbol is surprisingly the Emerald of the Eclipse, her element earth. I cannot see who the east is but he would be a male with the staff as his symbol and his element is air."

"Wait a minute...you're saying I can control fire?"

"You will with the proper training, along with the rest of your magic."
"Couldn't the kid have chosen someone else to do this?" Wyatt asked.

"The OZ has chosen you. The original guardian was meant to be Rumplestiltskin but he is now under the control of the dark goddess Alemedia."

"But why me? I'm not a sorcerer. I'm just a farm boy from the western guild."

"You were chosen because you are the strongest male born in the western guild just as the princess DG was chosen because she is the strongest female born in the southern guild."

Wyatt sighed. "I'd give anything to go back to being a regular Tin Man."

"You can't. Now stop grumbling and pay attention!" Mysticos snapped and went back to his lessons.

If Wyatt thought swordfighting and martial arts training left him exhausted, magic training drained him more. He had headaches more often now but the insomnia he had when he was away from Jeb and Adora for long periods of time had quickly been cured and he wasn't sure he liked it.

He'd always been an early riser, a habit formed by living on a farm. He went downstairs before anyone else was awake and started practicing his sword and martial art techniques on his own until he was satisfied he was doing everything right. He sheathed his sword and put it aside.

Mysticos had just started to teach him how to control his signature element, fire. When he first tried to create fire it was not a complete success. He'd nearly burned his tutor's favorite lounging robe.

He opened his hand with the House of Gale marking on it and closed his eyes, forming the image of a ball of fire. When he opened them he could see a small ball of flame floating above his palm. He glanced over at a candle holder in the corner of the room and used his magic to guide the ball of flame over to it to light it only to his horror, it set fire to the silk drapes.

"Shit!" he cried, grabbing an ice bucket. He ran over to the drapes and tossed the bucket's contents onto them, dousing the flames yet large black holes appeared in the centers of them. "He is going to kill me," he muttered.

"What smells in here? Dammit Wyatt! What did you do to my drapes?" Mysticos demanded as he entered his parlor to find his emerald velvet drapes destroyed.

"I was ahhh trying to light the candle and I missed," he answered nervously.

"I'll say you missed. You could've burned the whole house down. Moderation boy, moderation! Fix this mess."

"How am I supposed to do that?"

"You need to figure it out."

"You're not gonna help me?"

"No."

He heard a female giggle in his head. He hadn't opened a mental connection to his new charge but it appeared that she had.

Do you find this amusing, Princess?
I did something like this too. It made Tutor so mad.

I didn't call for you so how are you talking to me right now?

I felt you were upset so I wanted to try to cheer you up. I'm sorry I laughed.

So you can feel my emotions and I can feel yours? My tutor seems to have forgotten to mention that.

My tutor won't talk about this at all and neither will my parents. They get mad when I even mention your name and I heard them tell Tutor not to teach me anything that involves you.

"Is she talking to you?" The Mystic Man asked softly.

"Yeah. You want to tell me why you left out the part that my emotions are like a beacon to her and hers are like a beacon to me?"

"I was going to. It's part of the spell. If one of you senses the other is in danger and you are not together, your minds connect so that you can draw strength and knowledge from each other."

Did you hear any of that, kiddo?

The only things I can hear are your thoughts.

Then I need you to pay attention to this: if you ever get in a bind, you have to make your emotions strong enough that you can call out to me no matter where I'm at.

How can you help me if you're far away?

You should be able to draw strength from me.

Like when I hold hands with Az?

I think so.

"You explained it to her?" the Mystic Man asked.

"Yeah."

"It's good training for the day you make her your apprentice."

"As in Talons of the Dragon apprentice? I thought the royals couldn't be in the order."

"Since you and the princess are now connected, she can become your apprentice."

"She already has a magic teacher."

"Whose knowledge is limited. You will be a master by the time she reaches training age and have far more knowledge of our practices than her tutor will. But you are never going to be a master if you keep destroying things in my house."

Wyatt focused his light on the burned drapes. The holes were replaced with new fabric. The Mystic Man studied them.

"Much better. Now, try to light the candle again, only this time...make the flame a bit smaller."

Wyatt formed a smaller ball of flame in his hand. Using his magic he guided it over to the candle
and held it above the wick.

Don't burn the drapes this time, please.

He lowered it slowly, breathing a sigh of relief when the wick started to glow.

"Good. Remember Wyatt, fire is one of the most powerful of the four elements. You must never allow it to get beyond your control."

"What happens if I do that?"

"You may not be able to rein it back in and run the risk of causing destruction."

"And that is the reason why I do not like having anything to do with magic. People who have it tend to abuse it."

"That is not something I have to worry about with you. However, unless you conquer your fear of your magic, you do run the risk of letting it control you and making you act irrationally. We'll practice with fire later. For now, let's work on some basic defensive spells and I'll show you how you can incorporate your Talon training into them."

Sleep proved to be difficult that night. As he often did when he was a child, Wyatt went outside and sat on the patio looking up at the stars.

Hi, Mr. Cain.

Princess, shouldn't you be in bed?

I can't sleep.

That makes two of us.

What are you doing?

I'm sitting out on the patio looking up at the stars. I used to do that a lot when I was your age and still do it when I can't sleep at night. Why can't you sleep? Don't tell me, my being upset at not being able to see my wife and boy is making you restless too. Now it's my turn to be sorry. You're too young to be having insomnia.

That's part of it but there's something else.

What?

I'm worried about my sister. She's mad at me.

Why?

I got scared by something I saw in a cave and let go of her hand when she told me not to. Then she fell.

Did you apologize to her?

Yes.

You may just have to give her time. She'll come around eventually.
I hope so. I don't want her to be mad at me.

Just remember Princess, she is your older sister and deserves respect. Also, if she is trying to talk you out of doing something wrong, you should listen. Okay?

Sometimes I just like to have fun.

There's nothing wrong with wanting to have fun but you have to remember that there's a difference between having fun and getting involved in something that might get you hurt.

You sound like my parents.

I am a parent DG. I'll be telling my son the same things I'm telling you now and I'm hoping he'll follow my advice, not go against it.

Do you know something?
What?

Besides Az, you're really the only other person I really feel comfortable talking to.

You may not always like my advice Princess but I'll give it all the same.

As he sat there, he felt himself starting to doze off, only allowing himself to fall asleep when he could no longer hear the princess talking. He was still asleep there when the Mystic Man came looking for him the next morning. The older man smiled. Yes, the OZ had chosen well. One half of the heart was ruled by youth and innocence, the other by age and experience. It was an equal balance that would grow in power as time passed.

Lavinia sent a message to him two days earlier demanding progress on his attempts to break the bond but he'd refused to answer it, instead committing to memory the text of the warning of what would come from breaking the bond.

The punishment is severe for those who defy the will of the OZ
A heart bond of our choosing is one that is meant for eternity
Should this bond be broken by human device
Everything it holds most dear it will be made to sacrifice
The rivers of its memory will flow with the image of spilled blood
Until the dams burst and they become a raging flood
If one day the lost half of its heart returns to reclaim
The one who has forgotten it, through love shall it be relieved from its pain.

You suffered enough when you were a child and I'll be damned if I'll allow anyone to break your bond and make you suffer a fate far worse.

Lavinia was now more distraught than before when her party arrived at the Northern Island Palace. Azkadellia's demeanor remained unchanged and now her youngest daughter was bound to a older, married man with a child. Late one evening after the girls were in bed, Lavinia summoned her husband, Ambrose and the girls' magic tutor to her study where she was reading through several books on the Ozian legends.

"There is a legend in the ancient texts that tells of a final battle between the darkness and the light of the OZ. I have ignored the signs but now that I have consulted the texts, I fear that time has come."
"What signs have you seen, Your Majesty?" Tutor inquired.

"While you have been giving DG her magic lessons, you have seen as I have, that she draws great strength when her hand is joined with Azkadellia's."

"It's amazing, strength from the deep affection they share." Tutor said proudly.

"It is a connection much stronger than that, my friend. My daughters are two of the Guardians."

"Indeed they are. I suspected it from the day each was born."

"Why didn't you tell me?" Lurline demanded.

"You would have attempted to break the bond with their mates…and if one has been broken it will carry a price," Toto predicted.

Only Wyatt and DG will be the ones to pay it, Ambrose thought sadly.

"That is absurd!" Ahamo exclaimed. "The man is nearly twice her age, married and has a child."

"The OZ has made its choices."

"These events explain the changes in Azkadellia's demeanor then. Now that DG shares a bond with someone else, Az may feel jealous," Ambrose said.

"I'm afraid they leave me with more questions than answers when I think of how much our child has changed, my love," Lavinia said sadly to her husband. "Theoretically this knowledge should have brought them closer together yet it seems to be creating a distance between them. Her own bondmate...I suspect it is Jiminy based on what occurred when he returned from the front. She healed him with her light."

"He's MORE than twice her age!"

"I know my love and he has maintained a respectable distance but I can sense the bond growing between them."

"Have you been able to find any answers in the texts, Your Majesty?" Tutor asked.

"None that lessen my fears."

The three men gazed at her, chilled to the bone by the pained look in the queen's lavender eyes.

"There is a cave in Finaqua that is the doorway to Ephesis. It was sealed by the first Dorothy Gale and Prince Nicolai along with our Strogoff kin and it can be unlocked by one born from their bloodline because at the time when the prison was locked, Dorothy's union also remained unconsummated."

"You aren't suggesting one of them unlocked it, are you?" Tutor cried.

"I hope not."

"What will happen if the prison is unlocked?"

"Bastinda will attempt to take control of one of the sources of the Oz's light and use it to destroy the other since Alemedia holds Rumplestiltskin," Lavinia explained solemnly. "Then they will destroy the OZ."
"How do we stop them?" Ahamo demanded.

"We cannot," the queen answered sadly. "Only the Guardians have the power to create a seal on the prison that can never be broken and send both of them back to Ephesis."

Ahamo rose from his seat, raking his hand through his hair. Lavinia knew what he was thinking. He felt helpless. This was a battle to be fought with magic, beyond his capabilities. Over the years she'd tried to help him understand that magic came in many forms and love held the most powerful magic of all. Now she no longer believed her own words.

"So what you're saying is that DG and that Tin Man she's bound to are two of the only people who can stop all of this."

"Not in their current state, no. They're both still learning how to use the powers they've been given."

Hope was renewed in her when Azkadellia's demeanor changed yet again and she was no longer distant with her sister. Lavinia assured herself that she had been worrying over nothing. The dark essence remained in its prison and DG would never have to bond with a man too old to love her.

One evening Lavinia lay on DG's bed, singing softly to the little girl as she lay beside her.

"Two little princesses dancing in a room
Spinning fast and free on their little toes
Where the light will take you, there's only one way to know
Two little princesses dancing in a room."

Lavinia lowered her head and gently kissed the child. "Sleep well my angel...my light," she whispered and left the room.

Bastinda strode into the room, the dark essence swirling around her. She glared down at the sleeping child.

"The majestic queen of the OZ
Had two lovely daughters she
One to darkness she be drawn
One to light she be show
Double eclipse it is forseen
Light meets dark in the stillness between
But only one and one alone
Shall hold the emerald and take the throne
Only one and one alone..."

She stretched out her hands and two long hands of dark magic reached out and locked the child's throat in a firm, icy grip. DG gasped and opened her eyes to see Azkadellia standing over her with an expression of pure malice on her face. The child tried to scream but was unable to speak.

Somebody help me!

Mother! Daddy?

There's no one here to help you now, you little brat! I've closed them all off.

Somebody help me! Mother! Daddy!
Wyatt’s eyes snapped open and he sat up in bed. His throat felt tight and found himself gasping for air. It was as if something or someone were strangling him yet when he looked around he saw nothing.

Please help me...I can't breathe.

He tensed when he heard the voice of the young princess in his mind and now understood. She needed him. From the moment they were first bound he hoped she would never have to call on him until he had enough control over his magic to help her defeat whatever it was.

Princess? What's happening?

She's...she's hurting me.

Who is hurting you?

My sister...Az.

Wyatt closed his eyes and called on the magic she'd given him to merge his essence with hers to see through her eyes.

She lay on her bed, her sister Azkadellia standing over her, her hands outstretched, another pair of hands formed from dark magic reaching around the younger princess's throat and squeezing tightly. It reminded him of the times his stepfather had tried to choke him and fueled his anger.

Hands off bitch! Wyatt threw a powerful blocking spell, pushing Azkadellia back wishing he'd been able to defend himself this way when he was a child not much older than the princess.

Fool. My powers far exceed yours, he heard a menacing voice say to him as it threw the spell back at him and moved toward the child again. Wyatt suddenly realized he was dealing with a much powerful force than a prepubescent girl.

DG...I can't hold her alone! Focus on our light and help me push her back.

He felt the child calling on her own magic but it was still too weak for her to focus correctly. She'd created a wall of solid ice. The witch quickly melted it with a hot ball of flame.

No DG, not ice...something stronger. Now focus!

She tried again, this time creating a wall of stone. The witch sent an energy burst at the wall, shattering it into pieces.

Wyatt called on his magic again, willing himself to appear in the room in shadow form. The witch stretched out her hands again and a mist in the shape of icy chains flew at him, wrapping themselves around his neck while she sent another mist of chains over to the bed where DG lay.

In the next bed at the Mystic Man's mansion, Tin Man and Talon apprentice Elmer Gulch awoke to the sound of his colleague gasping for air.

"Cain...you okay buddy?"

"C..Can't breathe.."

"I'll summon a healer."

"No! Mystic Man...get him...only one who can help me.."
Elmer ran down the hall and began pounding on Jeb's door but the man wouldn't answer. Knowing he was risking his boss's wrath by doing it, he threw his weight against the door and broke it open.

"Boss, you better come quick. Something's wrong with Cain!" Jeb heard one of his other protectors calling out as the man shook him from his slumber.

"What do you mean? Is he sick?" Jeb said as he jumped out of bed.

"I don't know. He says he can't breathe...if I didn't know better I'd think something invisible has a hold of him and is choking the life out of him and there's something weird going on with one of his hands."

Dear Ozma...the bond. It's not Wyatt that's being attacked, it's the princess and he can feel it as if it's happening to him.

What do you want me to do? he heard Elmer ask in his mind.

Stay here for now.

Jeb and Carson, his other guardian, ran down the hall to the bedroom where Wyatt was thrashing wildly on his bed, clawing at his throat as if he were trying to remove an invisible garrote. The palm that bore the House of Gale symbol was glowing with a red light and blood seeped out of its center.

"Out!" Jeb ordered the other man.

"But...shouldn't we summon a healer."

"That won't help him. Now go!"

The other Tin Man reluctantly left the room. Jeb opened a mental connection to Wyatt. It was weak but the younger man still had enough strength to hear him.

What's happening, Wyatt?

The kid...she's killing her!

Who is killing who?

The kid's sister is killing her.

Her sister? That's impossible.

She's using dark magic on the girl to strangle her and I can feel it! There's another presence in the room with us, one stronger than any of us. I can't fight it off. I'm trying but whatever it is, its blocking me.

Concentrate on DG Wyatt and try. If one of you dies so does the other. Give her the will to fight!

I'm trying!

Try harder dammit!

Wyatt reached for his boss's hand. "S...She's dying. Can't help her. Dark magic is too strong."

Jeb glanced down at his fierce protector, growing weaker by the second as the strength he'd drawn
from the bond left his body. He couldn't let him die. It was too late for the princess but Wyatt had a son and wife who needed him and in the years Wyatt had worked his protection detail, Jeb loved the boy like he was his own son.

"Wyatt, listen to me. No, I want you to open your eyes and listen to me!" Jeb cried when he saw the younger man's eyes close and heard his shallow breathing. You have your wife and your son, my godson. They need you."

"Don't know what to do."

"Wyatt, it's a bonding spell! You'll follow the princess to her grave unless you break it now."

"You...told me not to."

"I know I did son and you tried to use it to save her but it wasn't strong enough. Let her go. For the sake of Adora and your son, let her go."

"I don't know how."

"Look in your heart. The answers are always in your heart."

Wyatt closed his eyes again and his breath stilled. A chill pierced the Mystic Man's heart, fearing it was now too late to save either of them. How would he tell Adora that she was a widow and it was partially his fault? The bond should have been broken sooner. The odds that it would ever be completed were too great.

Suddenly Wyatt's eyes opened once more and he began to speak, his voice sounding older and wiser, yet broken.

"It is with regret that I now undo
This bond to make one heart from two
The future now is impossible to see
For with a severed heart comes a severed memory.
Myself I can never forgive
For the sacrifice I have made for us to live
Soon a storm will take you away
And through a storm we will be reunited one day
Then at last we can redo
This bond to make one heart from two
And only then will we be
One heart forever to protect the OZ."

Jeb watched as the younger man turned his palm up and the House of Gale symbol vanished along with the magic the princess had given him. His breathing returned to normal and in a few minutes he was asleep. In the morning he would awaken with no memory of the bond he'd shared with the princess or even having met her.

Lavinia, always a concerned mother walked down the hall toward her youngest daughter's room again in time to see Azkedellia leave. She entered slowly and saw her daughter on the bed, her eyes open, her body still. The queen cried out in anguish and rushed to her side.

"I'm so sorry I didn't protect you. I never thought!" the queen sobbed as she held her daughter and kissed her forehead. She called on all of her magic and opened her mouth, letting it flow from her body to her daughter's, her once chestnut brown locks now grey. DG exhaled heavily as life flowed
back into her body. Lavinia collapsed beside her.

"Oh my angel. Fear not my child. There is one thing that can stop her. The emerald of the eclipse,"
She leaned in closer and began to whisper its location to DG's memory, sealing it tight with the last
of her magic so that not even the darkness could touch it. "The secret to finding it now lives inside
of you. When the time is right you will return."

She raced down the hall to the bedroom she shared with her husband and woke him. Once he saw
the grey in her hair and what it meant, his heart sank into his chest. He reached for her hands.

"I can't leave you," he said sadly.

"It is the only way," the queen sobbed. "The only place our angel will be safe is in your world. The
other side. You must take her there."

"Azkadellia?"

"That thing is not our daughter," the queen said bitterly.

They rose just before dawn. Ahamo took one last look at his youngest child while she slept,
fighting back his tears. Lavinia promised him they would see each other and their daughter again
one day but the past few hours had taught him that it was only a fool who believed in hope.

Three days later a funeral was held for the princess. The story that had been given out was that the
child had died in her sleep and representatives from all four guilds came to pay their respects. Four
Tin Men had been asked to serve as pall bearers, Wyatt Cain was appointed to be one of them.

He gazed down at the sarcophagus, a sorrow he couldn't explain raging in his heart. He'd never met
the girl but he heard that she had been a happy child, so full of life. How was it possible that she'd
been struck down so soon?

"Wyatt, what are you doing here?" Jeb Mysticos asked him.

"It doesn't make any sense. How could a child die in her sleep?"

"It is what it is, Wyatt. Let it go."

"I can't. I don't know why but I keep having this feeling that something isn't right."

Is it possible that some trace of the bond still remains? Jeb thought. He tried to open a mental
connection to Wyatt but found only silence. Nor could he feel any trace of magic and the House of
Gale marking vanished the night the princess died.

"Don't you dare try to question the queen," Jeb warned.

"But...sir..."

"Wyatt! Let it be!" Jeb roared.

Not wanting to risk his employer's wrath, Wyatt wisely stepped away from the marble coffin yet
the suspicion that there was more to the story of the princess's death than had been reported never
left his mind. The funeral about to start, Wyatt moved into his position at the front right side of the
sarcophagus. He would stay with her until she reached her final resting place.

He glanced over at the surviving members of the royal family...what was left of them anyway. The
Prince Consort was nowhere to be found, a fact that didn't sit well with Wyatt. Being a father
himself, he couldn't understand why Ahamo wouldn't want to be at his own daughter's funeral. Other people were suspicious but they certainly didn't miss him. The general consensus was that the queen married beneath her when she chose him and his being gone was nothing short of a miracle. The queen's power seemed to diminish the moment she married the Othersider.

Then his gaze focused on the queen's eldest daughter. By rights she should have been the heir to the throne yet rumors were spreading across the four realms that Lavinia had been planning to alter the line of succession and pass the crown to the younger princess before she died. Was it possible the twelve year old Azkadellia had learned of the plot to revoke her claim and decided to take matters into her own hands? It wouldn't be the first time one Gale turned on the other but the girl wasn't acting like someone who removed a threat to her. She was a sister in mourning.

After the graveside service was over, Wyatt was startled when he felt a slight touch on his arm. He turned to face Azkadellia. He took off his hat and bowed to her.

"I'm very sorry for your loss, Your Highness."

"I don't understand what happened," she sobbed. "She was fine when I was with her last..." She glanced over at the queen and advisor. "They think it's my fault. They hate me..."

"Oh no, Your Highness. Your mother loves you very much."

"No she doesn't," the girl said bitterly. "And my father didn't either or he would've stayed with us. I shouldn't have said that. I'm so sorry."

"It's all right Your..."

"Azkadellia!" they heard the queen yell angrily.

He felt the young girl grasp his wrist tightly and she began to speak in a different voice.

"Your memory of your purpose you will one day recover
Until that day, take heed or you will be made to suffer
Think of these events as a bad dream
And mark that things are not always what they seem.
If the darkness succeeds with it has planned
It will be you who must lead her to the final stand!"

"Your Highness, what does that mean?" he asked.

"What does what mean?" the young girl demanded in a now cold voice. "I didn't say anything. I'll be going now."

She spun on her heel and walked away leaving Wyatt to wonder if he'd been wrong all along and he'd been carrying on a conversation with a murderess.

The witch savored the small victories she had achieved and contemplated her failures. She had successfully taken possession of the North Guardian. The elder princess still had some strength left in her to keep fighting back the witch's complete control. The power the young DG's portion of the heart possessed had been within her grasp when she felt fierce resistance from it's other half. By undoing the light bond between them, Wyatt Cain had prevented the witch from claiming the power she desperately craved and placed a powerful cloak on the memories their hearts held. A last descendant of Lurline, the witch had assumed the child was the strongest portion of the heart but it was not. The child's portion of the heart was ruled by innocence while the man's was ruled by knowledge. A heart ruled by knowledge held far more power than innocence and it would serve as
the other's guardian. If the child was alive, the broken bond between them would not allow the witch to track her.

A clear mist rose from the center of the room, taking the shape of vines with icy thorns. It paused in its growth before its mistress, awaiting her instructions.

"I give birth to a curse of pain
On the hearts of Dorothia Gale and Wyatt Cain
I call upon all the darkness to heed my will
Cast upon their hearts a bitter chill
Destined mates you will no longer be
For you will not have that memory
When in love you try to fall
Wrap around your hearts an icy wall
Hateful words you will speak until your last breaths
For shattered hearts shall be your deaths
Here I will at last claim my final victory
And permanent darkness will come to the OZ!"

The mist floated out of the castle and wrapped itself around it encasing the once beautiful building and everything surrounding it behind a wall of solid ice and snow, concealing it and the secrets it contained from all eyes except for those whom had fought there and would return again for the final battle but only the most powerful force would leave alive.
Heroes Fall, Heroes Rise

Chapter by cjmoliere

Finaqua Palace

Oz (The Outer Zone)

It was decided that little Dorothia would have no contact with her parents prior to the double eclipse. As difficult as it was for them, they knew they had no other choice. Dorothia would never be safe as long as Bastinda held Azkadellia's soul and her bondmate was unable to anchor her to her humanity. They retained the services of two cyborgs named Emily and Hank to raise DG as their own daughter, instructed to return three days before the eclipse with a travel storm token they'd given to Elmer Gulch, the tin man that would travel with them. Elmer would act as DG's guardian on the other side.

Lavinia stood on the gazebo beside the lake, the heart shaped stone her daughters had hidden for the perfect day clutched tightly in her hand. She waved her hand over it and began to speak.

"DG. If you are seeing this message then you have overcome much on your journey to find the Emerald. The emerald of the Eclipse contains the power to bring either light or darkness to the OZ. As you now know, the evil witch of the dark now lives inside your sister. That is why she knows not of my plan and why I could only entrust the emerald's power to you, my angel. Make haste now…South to the Realm of the Unwanted! There you must find a man called Ahamo. He will help you on the final leg of your journey. To save the Oz. To the Grey Gale. To the emerald!"

Her message complete, she returned the rock to its hiding place where DG would find it. Her heart's memories would begin to unlock as the day of the eclipse grew closer.

The cyborg Emily cradled her sleeping daughter in her arms, a small portion of the child's arm swollen from the spot where Jeb Mysticos injected her with the blood from the female dragon but she would be able to take dragon form until she reached maturity at twenty annuals. She wouldn't even need to. She could call on the dragon's strength and its rage when facing an enemy. Wyatt Cain born a similar mark, the blood of the dragon's mate flowing through his veins. Lavinia and Tyler gave their child one last kiss goodbye before Emily, Hank and Elmer stepped through the funnel cloud that would take them to a small farmhouse in Kansas.

"...WHY WASN'T I TOLD?"

Jiminy rose from his bed in the Healer's Ward, his eyes glowing green as he stalked toward the queen and her advisor, objects flying about and striking the walls while he unleashed his rage at the news he'd been given that morning when he finally awoke from his slumber.

"You were too ill...there was nothing you could've done..." Lavinia protested.

"I should've been here!" he raged. "You know my duty is to protect Azkadellia and yet recently all you've had me doing is cleaning up your damned messes. I WARNED you that your indifference toward your subjects would lead to disorder as would your foolish plans to alter the succession. Azkadellia is the rightful heir!" He gestured and a rolled parchment appeared in his hand. "Just as your sister Ekaterina would've been the rightful heir had your mother not altered the succession in YOUR favor!"

Lavinia whitened. "How...how did you...?"
"You forget what I was before I became the advisor to Snow White. I know where to find someone's valuables or in your case, secrets. Now you're gonna help me find a way to get that bitch out of Azkadellia!"

"We can't. Only DG can..."

"So you're not even going to try?" Jiminy asked bitterly.

"My light is not strong enough to conquer the darkness within her. She must remain at the Northern Island until her sister returns."

"You...you left her there alone?!" Jiminy sputtered. "You left a thirteen year old girl in the coldest part of the realm alone? Well, if you are not going to do anything then I will!" He vanished in a puff of smoke.

Lavinia leaned against the wall and pressed her hand to her heart.

"Are you all right, Your Majesty."

"Pray that he succeeds Ambrose," she murmured.

"We should've told him the full truth Your Majesty...that he is her bondmate."

"He would not have accepted it now. She is too young. Only time can strengthen their bond."

"So that's why you sent her there alone!"

"It was not an easy decision to make Ambrose but I am unable to reach her and Jiminy is right. I only have myself to blame. I favored DG and Bastinda took full advantage of it. He may be the only one who can reach her now."

"And Cain's bond with DG is broken."

Lavinia's eyes filled with tears. "Just as it was in their first lives."

"First lives! What do you mean?"

"My daughter is Dorothy Gale...reborn as Wyatt is Nick Chopper, the first Tin Man. I wasn't aware of it until I went back into the Book of the Ancients and saw a new entry on my family tree. Their bonds must be reforged before the third double eclipse or..."

Neither could bear to say any more.

Northern Island

Oz (The Outer Zone)

"They left you for dead but I will never leave you," Bastinda said to her vessel from the other side of the mirror in Az's suite. "There's no need to fight me child. Work with me and we can make your dreams of a new OZ a reality."

"I...think...not!" she heard a familiar voice snarl and the mirror shattered. Az spun around to see Jiminy standing there, his hands clenched into fists.

"Jiminy..." she began, her lips trembling. "I didn't kill DG...I didn't..."
"I know, Dellia, how did this happen? How did you find Bastinda's prison. Tell me the truth. Did you go looking for it?" His eyes met hers.

"Not intentionally. DG...she heard a voice and wanted to find out what it was...I begged her not to...but we kept going until we found the cave."

"Her adventures have a way of getting you into trouble," he mumbled.

"That...that's exactly what I said..."

"She heard the voice and you didn't?"

"Yes."

He frowned. "When did you start hearing it?"

"Once we were in the cave. We found this terrifying face and DG put her hand in it. I tried to help her pull it out..."

"Oh gods...your combined magic unlocked the prison!" Jiminy groaned. "Where in the name of Lurline was your mother during all this?"

"At a council meeting with Daddy."

Or in the royal advisor's bed, he thought angrily. He'd discovered their illicit affair a few months earlier and had given Ambrose a sound scolding over it yet it did little to discourage him from continuing his secret rendezvous with the queen under the consort's nose.

He sat down on the edge of the bed and raked his hand through his hair. "I should've been there, dammit!" he moaned. "I'm sorry Dellia. I'm so sorry."

"You're here now," she said softly. "Promise me you won't leave me Jiminy. You...you're all I have now..."

"I gave you my word the day I became your Guardian that I would protect you with my last breath and my word is my bond. I'm gonna find a way to get that bitch out of you Dellia."

I love you Jiminy. I only wish I could tell you, she thought sadly and took his hand. She felt stronger knowing that she was no longer fighting alone.

"My sister...she's safe?"

He nodded. "They didn't tell me where and it's better that I don't know. There has to be a way we can break this possession ourselves."

"I don't know how!" she sobbed. "I'm frightened Jiminy. You heard what she did. She...she killed DG...she made Mother surrender most her life force. She's going to try to take the OZ...and it's all my fault!"

"No, no it isn't Princess," he soothed.

If anyone is to blame it's that woman who gave birth to you for being more interested in her own pleasure than her daughters' safety!

He could see his young charge shivering and grabbed the comforter to wrap around her. "I am not leaving you here alone in case she tries to break through again."
Az placed her hand over her chest. "She's always in here, taunting me, telling me things I don't want to believe. I can't make her stop...but once you came...I couldn't hear her anymore."

"The only voice you need to hear is mine, Dellia and as long as I'm here, she's going to say in there and shut up until we find a way to get her out!"

"Jiminy, could we access your construct's memories?"

"Why would you want to do that?"

"Because I want to see what life is like on the other side. I won't be queen here now."

"I'm not giving up hope that you will be and don't you either." He waved his hand over the mirror in the parlor and they sat and watched a day in the life of his construct. It seemed that the construct, that had been given the name Archie Hopper had very little to do when he wasn't seeing patients. He loved music and the moving pictures, romantic and science fiction ones his favorites. He also shared Jiminy's love of reading.

Accessing his construct's memories was one of the ways they passed the long days in the deserted castle. Once in a while they would go outside and fight a snow battle or two and once a week they would travel to Central City for supplies, Az glamoured as an older woman, not knowing the tall, attractive brunette with brown eyes would be the woman she would blossom into at nineteen. Many of the people who encountered them mistook Az for Jiminy's mistress, something that didn't suit well with him since his charge was not yet a woman and even if she was he wouldn't feel right thinking of her in that way. In the back of his mind he could still hear her telling him that she wished he were her bondmate but he simply passed it off as a young girl's fancy.

The years passed slowly and the many efforts the pair put into finding a solution to Az's possession were useless. She could still sense Bastinda's presence, the witch only being able to take control of her during the times she was depressed, those times coming only when she thought of the family that had abandoned her. For his part, Jiminy did try to convince Lavinia to try to visit her daughter at least once but when the Queen arrived at the Northern Island the fall of Az's nineteenth annual it was to ask for Jiminy's assistance in quelling yet another rebellion. Jeb Mysticos would visit from time to time to bring them supplies or books but he never stayed long.

"If it were DG you'd be climbing mountains to get to her," Jiminy accused, unaware that Az was listening from the staircase above.

"I..."

"You would!" he shouted. "Five years. FIVE years she's been here with no one but me for company. She needs her family too but you and your husband seem to have forgotten that. And I still want to know where the HELL you were when she and DG were at Finaqua alone. Don't tell me it was a council meeting because it's a damned lie."

"How dare you...?"

"I dare because I know the truth, Your Majesty! You were in your advisor's bed while your daughters were trying to stop that bitch from being unleashed."

"How did you know...?" Lavinia whispered.

"I found you out months before it happened. I've told you before: any threat to Dellia's well-being has always been my concern and her mother being an adulterous tart threatened her well-being. And before you ask, no I haven't told her. She's been hurt enough."
"You've lost both of your daughters. Soon you'll lose your crown!" Bastinda laughed, now in control as Az despaired over her mother's deception. Then she turned to Jiminy. "And you, Commander, will have a choice to make. Serve me or serve her."

"I'll never serve you, bitch! My loyalty is to Dellia, and ONLY to Dellia."

"You can't keep me away all the time."

"What have you done?" Jiminy demanded.

"Begun my revenge against this wretched family! Enjoy your crown Lavinia. You won't have it long."

"That monster is not my daughter!" Lavinia growled and summoned a travel storm as a distraught Az regained control.

"Mother...MOTHER! Come back!" she screamed. "Come back!"

"She's gone. Dellia, I'm so sorry..." Jiminy said.

"Jiminy...we have to free me or she'll destroy the OZ," Az sobbed.

"We'll find a way. There has to be something we haven't tried." he said and hugged her. She buried her face in his shoulder, the only place she felt safe.

The next morning they doubled their efforts to search for a solution. Jeb Mysticos had graciously allowed them to access his vast library of books but nothing in his library or the great library at the Emerald Palace in Central City offered any clues.

"The Book of the Ancients," Az murmured, slamming one of her mother's books shut and tossing it aside. "I thought Mother had it but it's not there. There are only two of them in existence. Mother has one and the other...my cousin had it. Jiminy, do you think it might still be there?"

He looked up from his own book. "You want to try to go back to the Enchanted Forest? Dellia, it was probably destroyed when Regina cast her curse."

"We have to try," she insisted. "And I think I know how." She ran upstairs and into her mother's old bedroom and began searching through drawers until she found what she was looking for. She went back downstairs to find Jiminy still reading and tossed an object onto the table.

"A travel storm token. Where did you find that?"

"Mother's room. She's always kept one hidden in case of emergencies."

He closed the book and summoned his satchel and umbrella. "All right Dellia but I doubt there's anything left of that castle and if there is, I think Alemedia would have made certain his copy of the book traveled with him to Storybrooke and we can't go there or we'll be cursed like the others."

"His curse is inactive there, isn't it?"

"Not quite. Alemedia has no magic but she's still in him and still takes control every chance she gets so get any thoughts of going there out of your mind."

They went outside and tossed the travel storm token, Az clinging tightly to Jiminy's arm when the funnel cloud pulled them in. Jiminy wrapped his arms around Az protectively while the storm spun through the void and broke a few feet away from the entrance to the castle, now ravaged from the
effects of the curse.
"Told you it was still here!" Az taunted.

"Yes but not the way I remember it," Jiminy muttered. "Stay behind me. This place might still be warded."

"I'm not afraid of a fewwards."

Jiminy reached for the doorknob and turned it. To his surprise, the door simply opened.

"Maybe the curse deactivated the wards," Az mused.

"We're not taking any chances." He pulled a lantern out of his satchel and lit it with his magic. As they walked down the hall they caught the scent of rotting food. Az leaned down and picked up a bowl filled with bones and rotten apple cores.

"Jiminy, there's someone here. These were eaten recently."

"Cloaking spell," he advised. They waved their hands and made themselves invisible to everyone but each other. As they continued down the hall and into Rumple's dining room they saw a group of men sleeping in various spots on the floor. "Oh Rumple would have a fit if he found out there were squatters in his castle...and I think I recognize one of them." Jiminy kneeled where a bearded man wearing a green tunic and tan breeches slept, a young boy curled up beside him.

"Who is that?"

"Robin of Locksley. He was a knight in Regina's army...and her lover for a time until he married her lady-in-waiting, Marian. After she died he started robbing the carriages of the nobles under the name Robin Hood. Come on...not sure if they can hear us or not but don't wanna take the chance. Let's find the library. He has to have one."

They found the library in the west wing of the castle, the thousands of books within it covered with dust from years of neglect. They started pulling books from the shelves, discovering many of the other side's classic novels that the Ozopov library held but few on magic.

Jiminy closed one of the books with a frustrated sigh. "Nothing! He must've taken the rest of them with him during the curse. I'm sorry Dellia."

She reached across the table and took his hand. "We'll find another way. I won't give up if you don't."

"I'll never give up," he vowed.

It had been so easy for him to see her only as the young girl he'd taken an oath to defend until his last breath in the early years of their exile but his conscience was at war with itself and had been from the day she turned eighteen and he'd begun to notice that child he once knew transformed into the beautiful, intelligent young woman she often glamoured herself to be during their supply excursions to Central City. Now the thought of her bondmate being someone other than him disturbed him greatly.

He loved her, the will of the OZ be damned.

As they sat in the grand library of the Dark Castle, their hands joined and their eyes meeting in the candlelit room Az made her decision.
She loved him and always would, the will of the OZ be damned.

Storybrooke, Maine

It was a minor setback, the girl being able to resist Bastinda's control but Alemedia and her daughter were patient. Few knew Bastinda had been her child. She'd impregnated a simple peasant girl through magic and the girl and her husband passed the twins she bore off as their own. The youngest, Nessarose, had been the weaker of the two of them, killed when that meddling Dorothy arrived via a travel storm and crushed her beneath her house but she'd managed to curse Dorothy's intended bondmate Nick Chopper before she met her own untimely end by making him chop off all the human parts of his body and replace them with tin. Lurline had walked right into her carefully baited trap when she chose their despised second sister's mortal lover to become Dorothy's bondmate. Nick Chopper's heart belonged to Ozmalita and it always would no matter what name she called herself. Now all she needed to do was darken the heart of the North Guardian and both would be under her control.

Queen Regina's curse brought nothing but boredom for the goddess in these early years though she did enjoy learning about this new land's wonders through him. Television, the cinema, the books, the music! Ah, if she could only walk the realms in her true form.

"I'll find a loophole through your punishment Father," she hissed.

"Good luck with that," Hades taunted from his prison in the Realm of the Forgotten.

"And when I do...I'll destroy you and that whore you lust after from the other version of Oz!"

"Harm Zelena and I'll shove the Olympian crystal through your heart, daughter of mine or no!"

Alemedia laughed. "It's nothing but a worthless piece of glass in your hand without your magic."

"I'll get my powers back. You'll see," the god sneered.

"You'll be too late. The Guardians will never be united in time for the final eclipse. I will see to it."

"Your arrogance will be your undoing. Just like that bitch you call a grandmother."

Alemedia heard the tinkling of the bell above the door in her vessel's shop. Another customer had arrived and it was time for him to do his work. Little did he or they know that every time they came to him for a favor, she would gain possession of another soul to add to her growing collection. Ephesis would have a little population explosion on the day of the final eclipse with more toys for her mobat demons.

Central City/The Northern Island

Oz (The Outer Zone)

Az still insisted on being glamoured when they entered the city for their monthly supply run, still fearful that the people believed she had been responsible for her sister's 'death'. Jiminy purchased some food and clothing that he stored in his enchanted satchel.

"I'm going to go look at some dresses," she said to him.

"Don't wander too far," he cautioned.

"I won't."
She stopped at one of the stalls, admiring a beautiful jade satin and lace nightrail. "How much for this, madam?" she inquired of the merchant.

"Twenty platinums dear," the lady informed her with a smile. Az opened her purse and handed her the coins and tucked the nightrail into her own satchel then started walking down the street.

"Ahh you're a pretty little piece aren't you. Give us a kiss, love!" she heard a man say before he spun her around and kissed her roughly, dragging her into the alley.

"Take your hands off me!" she growled, recognizing Captain Hook, her cousin's mortal enemy.

"Oh now don't be that way. Let's be friends."

"I'd never be friends with you, Captain Hook!" Az shoved him back.

"Yes you will," he said, seizing her arms and pulling her to him. "Gonna give you a nice poke with my sword, love."

"You disgusting pig!"

He backhanded her and pushed her to the ground, tearing at the front of her dress.

"JIMINY!" she screamed.

"Give us another kiss..."

"The only thing you'll be kissing is the blade of my sword unless you take your hands off her!" Jiminy snarled, appearing behind them.

"You don't want to cross swords with me mate. I'm Captain Hook," Hook said haughtily.

"I don't give a damn if you're Captain Obvious. Get off her!"

"I'll handle this!" Az yelled, her fingers glowing with dark magic.

"No, don't let her take control!" Jiminy warned.

"I won't let him hurt you."

"And I am not going to let him hurt YOU!"

"You want her mate, fight for her." The pirate laughed. The last time he'd challenged a man to a duel for a lady's honor the crippled spinner wept, pissed his drawers and went home. He hadn't counted on the bastard becoming the Dark One either but he'd still enjoyed putting the coward that he was back then in his place. He expected the same from this tall, lanky ginger.

"You have no idea who you're dealing with," Jiminy growled and attacked, sending the pirate stumbling backwards into the street. A crowd began to gather, the pirate's crew cheering him on while the people in the town cheered on the man they'd seen put down dozens of rebellions in the last five years, be injured to the brink of death and get back up again.

"Mount his hide on the city walls Commander!" yelled the baker.

"Run him through Cap'n!" hooted Smee.

Az was terrified yet thrilled at the same time watching the man she loved fight for her honor as
she'd read and seen countless heroes do in the books and movies they were able to watch through
his construct's memories.

Hook could feel himself tiring as he dodged the stranger's blows, the man's skill rivaling his own.
Seeing his opportunity, he threw a pile of dung at his opponent's face and ran down an alley.
Jiminy waved his hand over his face to clean it and chased the pirate through the streets until he
had him cornered in front of the main gates to the Emerald Palace.

"Commander, the Tin Men are coming!" one of the townspeople informed him. Jiminy yanked the
sword of the pirate's hand and threw him to the ground.

"You bastard!" he yelled and began punching him in the face. "You were going to assault a girl! A
nineteen year old girl. Well, do you know what I'd like to do with scum like you?" He flicked his
wrist and threw the pirate against the gates of the Emerald Palace.

He wanted blood, Pirate blood. The thought of Azkadellia being violated enraged him. He stalked
toward Hook, his hand clenched into a fist ready to rip the pirate's black heart and crush it in his
fingers. As he was about to do just that he felt someone seize his wrist and pull it back.

"No! He is NOT worth darkening your heart over!" Jeb Mysticos cautioned. "Giving in to your
dark side never accomplishes anything. You must remain in the light. SHE needs you to. Listen to
me Jiminy."

"Do you see what he was gonna do to her? Do you?"

"Yes, but he didn't."

"Get him out of my sight before I change my mind!" Jiminy hissed.

"All right you, let's go!" Wyatt Cain grabbed Hook's arms and shackled them. "Round the rest of
them up," he ordered his fellow Tin Man. Jiminy leaned against the gates panting heavily. "You
okay, Commander?"

"I...want...to...kill...him!"

"Yeah so would I and a lot of others but it's the Queen's decision what to do with him."

"I want to see him hanging from the end of a rope or his head on the block!"

"Jiminy, calm yourself." Jeb advised.

He glared at the pirate while Wyatt led him away. Jiminy staggered over to where Az was sitting.

"Are you all right?" he asked gently and waved his hand over her dress to fix it.

"I'm all right. Jiminy!" she cried and threw her arms around him, fighting the urge to kiss him.

"Come on. Let's go back to the Northern Island." Jiminy took her hand in his and teleported them
back to the cold, dark castle. Once they were inside he sent their supplies to their proper places and
picked Az up and started to carry her upstairs.

"Jiminy, what are you doing?"

"You've had a traumatic experience and you need to rest," he said, sounding very much like the
therapist his construct had been cursed to be.
"I'm fine."

"Don't argue with me."

"But..."

"Dellia!"

"All right Jiminy," she said resignedly. He laid her down on the bed and drew the blankets over her then lit the fire. She was asleep a few minutes later. He made himself comfortable in the chair beside her bed. Several hours later he was awakened by her terrified screams.

"Dellia...Dellia, it's all right, it's all right!" he soothed as he crawled into the bed beside her and held her protectively. "He can't hurt you now."

"He...he...he was going to rape me!" she gasped.

"But he didn't...and I'd kill any other man who tried!" He cupped her face in his hands and kissed her tenderly. "I love you Dellia, the will of the OZ be damned!"

She burst into tears. "And I love you, I always have...the will of the OZ be damned! Oh, Jiminy maybe this is the answer we've been searching for!" She stroked his cheek. "I've always believed you are my bondmate and I'll never stop believing it!"

"Oh, I'd take you to the Temple of Lurline for a proper wedding if we weren't exiled in this damned dark castle."

"I don't need to go through a ceremony. I've been your wife in my heart for a long time." She drew him closer. "Don't go back to your room tonight. Stay with me."

"Dellia, do you know what you're asking me?"

"Yes."

"Are you certain this is what you want?"

"Yes."

"You know...ahhh...it will be...uncomfortable at first...?"

"Yes, but I know you will be gentle with me."

"Always," he vowed and lay her down on the bed, hearing the words Aggie spoke to him long ago in his mind. You're going to be a fine lover to a lucky woman someday Jiminy. You know now what you need to do but the rest has gotta come from your heart.

Holding Azkadellia in his arms, he felt like he was the lucky one. Though they were decades apart in age, part of her soul was possessed by the spirit of a wicked witch, the love they felt for each other was strong enough to shatter the barriers and give off its own light, light as white as the snow that covered the mountains and lakes outside the walls of the cold, dark palace they'd called their home for the past five years. Jiminy had been true to his word, making their first joining as gentle as possible, this new bond they'd formed driving the witch further and further away until she was nothing more than an unpleasant memory.

"Dellia, maybe we should send for a doctor," Jiminy said worriedly one day when Az emerged from their suite after a vicious bout of nausea.
"There's no need. I won't need one yet."

"Are you mad? You've been nauseated every morning and exhausted for the last two months. And you ah...have quite the appetite. Something is wrong."

"No darling, something is right." She smiled.

"Dellia, how can you be so calm about this?"

She took his hand and pressed it against her belly. "I am with child, Jiminy. Our child."

"A child? Are...are you certain?"

"Are you angry?"

"Angry? Why would I be angry?" He scooped her up in his arms and kissed her "We're having a child, Dellia! The light of our child's love and ours for each other will send that bitch back to Ephesis where she belongs!" He kissed her again and carried her back into their bedroom. "Oh I've longed to be a father!"

"I know...and you will make a wonderful one."

He laid her back down and crawled into bed beside her and took her in his arms again. "But we can't stay here."

"Jiminy, I can't cross realms in my condition."

"Then we'll wait until our child is born but we are leaving this place."

"Where will we go? We can't go to Storybrooke. We'll be cursed and parted and I can't bear to be parted from you."

"We'll find somewhere safe to go."

"But the will of the OZ..."

"The will of the OZ be damned! I love you and you are going to be the mother of my child. Nothing else matters now. We could go to the other side and you could be a politician."

"No, I don't care much for politics anymore. I've seen enough corruption in our own government. Maybe I just want to stay at home," she said, moving his hand to her swollen belly. "I don't want our child to ever feel like her parents never have enough time for her."

"You inherited your father's artistic ability. Maybe you could do something with that...or even teach. You certainly have the patience for it."

"Not until our daughter is old enough to go to school."

"You know for certain it's a girl?"

She nodded. "Her aura is strong, stronger than mine is. I can feel her protecting me, protecting both of us."

They chose the name Ambrosia as their daughter's name because in Greek mythology legends Azkadellia read the goddess Hera used the nectar to purify her body from defilement. In their minds it was little Ambrosia that would banish Bastinda's taint from her body and soul.
They never spoke of the Oz's choice for her bondmate again. It no longer mattered as far as they were concerned. For Az, there was only enough room in her heart for one man and that was Jiminy Ozopov and the daughter they would soon have.

Jiminy was increasingly concerned as Az's due date approached. Every midwife he asked refused to attend to the exiled princess. When he was saddling his horse to ride back to Finaqua he was approached by Gregory Zero, whom he trusted as far as he could throw, which wasn't very far.

"I heard you were looking for a midwife for the princess. My mother would be more than happy to help out. We...don't buy the story the queen's giving out about her murdering little DG and if you want my honest opinion...off the record, Azkadellia should be on the throne," the tin man said smoothly.

Jiminy couldn't argue with that. He like many other members the high council were stunned when Lavinia changed the succession and named DG as her heir before the attack at the Northern Island, objecting strongly.

"Your Majesty, Azkadellia has been in training since infancy to take the throne when the time is right. Why this sudden change of heart?" he demanded.

"Azkadellia will serve as her sister's advisor. I feel...DG will best serve the needs of the people."

"Not when she barely pays any attention during her lessons!" Toto protested.

"Your Majesty, please reconsider..." Ambrose pleaded.

"The succession will stand as it is. My daughter Dorothis will take the throne with her sister serving as royal advisor."

"This will come to no good, I promise you!" barked General Bridgerton of the Western forces barked and stormed out of the room followed by two other generals. They had as little faith in the younger princess as their people.

"...There is no chance of that now, officer. If your mother is willing to offer her services, I will be eternally grateful. I know nothing about delivering a baby." Jiminy admitted.

"I'll go fetch her and ride out to the palace. Don't you worry about a thing. The baby will be taken care of."

Jiminy was not aware that Gregory Zero's family had been part of the Order of Shadows for three decades, his mother already aware that soon she would be approached to tend to Bastinda's vessel.

"That child must be eliminated before it takes its first cursed breath!" instructed the high priestess. "It has the power to banish Bastinda from the princess's soul and return her to Ephesis. The goddess's wrath will come down on us all if we fail!"

"I will not fail Mistress," Catherine Zero vowed.

"See that you don't!"

Az went into labor a week later. Though she wanted Jiminy by her side during the birth, Catherine ordered him out of the room. She couldn't take the chance of him interfering once they made their move. It was a difficult birth, lasting six hours and shortly before dawn, Ambrosia Ozopov was born.
"You're exhausted, Your Highness. Let me give you something to help you relax," the midwife said, taking a syringe out of her bag.

"My baby….where is my baby…?" Az demanded groggily.

"You'll be able to hold her in a bit Your Highness. You must rest first." Catherine plunged the needle into the princess's arm.

Az gasped in horror when she noticed a familiar blue glow spreading across her limbs that were now unable to move. "Squid ink! What are you doing!?" she cried. "Jiminy! Help me!"

"He can't help you now," Catherine hissed. "Gregory…quickly…!"

He lifted the child off the table with the umbilical cord still attached and wound it around the baby's neck, squeezing tightly until the child lay lifeless in his arms.

"NOOOOOO!" Az screamed, the last of her control shattering.

"Dellia! What's happening? DELLIA!" Jiminy howled. "What are you doing to her you bastards!?"

He conjured a fireball and was about to throw it at the door when it opened.

"The goddess will be pleased with both of you," Bastinda said to the pair.

Jiminy burst through the door and sank to his knees when he saw his daughter's lifeless body and her mother no longer in control of her own. He ran over to Amber and took her into his arms, kissing her cold cheek.

"I'm sorry baby….I'm so sorry," he moaned.

"You're too late Jiminy. They're both mine now."

"BITCH! I'll find a way to drive you out! I swear it!" he howled.

"Zero, dispose of that! Now you are mine too!" the witch said fiercely and tossed a bottle of squid on him.

"Nooooo! Dellia, Amber!" Jiminy sobbed as his daughter's body was yanked out of his arms and thrown into a sack like trash while two guards seized him and dragged him away.

"The Queen's reign ends today," Bastinda declared gleefully. It was just a matter of time before she would be saying those very words to the woman's face.

Later that night a meeting was held with the witch and the four generals of the royal forces. If the queen would not surrender the throne, they would take it by force.

"What of Commander Ozopov?" General Lannot inquired.

"My husband is ill at the moment," Bastinda replied. "And for the moment you must continue to show your loyalty to the Queen until we reach Central City."

"Yes, Your Highness."

"Sorceress," she corrected.

"Yes, Sorceress."
Bastinda teleported back to the Northern Island palace to find Jiminy lying on Azkadellia's bed in the fetal position clutching the blanket she made for their child. He raised his head and glared at her through tear filled eyes. "I would rip your black heart out and crush it if I didn't think it was hers I'd be destroying!"

"And I could crush yours easily...but I'm not going to." She reached out and brushed her fingers against his cheek.

"Bitch! You may have her body but you are NOT my Dellia and I would NEVER touch YOU!" He yanked her hand away.

"I have no use for a lover. But you, Jiminy Ozopov, ahh the potential for darkness you have within you, that is what I need."

"And what makes you think I would ever ally myself with the bitch that killed my daughter?"

"Such a change from the timid former thief you used to be!"

"Yeah well life in this hellhole has toughened me up!"

"Let's see how strong you are when I take the OZ."

Jiminy sat up an energy ball in his hand, wanting to throw it and incinerate her until he gazed up at her face, the beautiful face of the woman he loved.

"Dellia, please...don't let me fight her alone," he pleaded.

"Azkadellia is dead."

"No! She's still in there. I got her back once and damn you I'll do it again!" He seized her by the arms, forcing her to gaze into his eyes. "Dellia, help me push her back..."

The hands clenched into fists and he could see sparks of dark magic within them.

"You took my baby but you can't take away my love. It's stronger than you ever will be."

The facial features softened, the hands relaxed.

"Jiminy," he heard in Az's anguished voice.

He released her arms and waited. She leaned forward and buried her face in his shoulder.

"She'll never let me go," Az sobbed. "She'll never let me go...she killed our baby...our baby..."

"She will...and I'll go as far as it takes...even into darkness if I have to."

He wrapped his arms around her and buried his face in her hair, sobbing brokenly for the hope that had been lost when their daughter took her last breath.

Two days later they were stunned when one of the queen's messengers arrived at the palace.

"Her Majesty requests Commander Ozopov's assistance in Central City," he informed them when an exhausted Jiminy opened the door.

"What's happened?"
"A rebellion commander. General Bridgerton's army has defected and is marching toward the capital."

"Where is General Lannot?"

"On the march to intercept."

"The fourth brigade. My brigade?"

"Awaiting your orders, Commander."

"Excuse me for a moment." He closed the door. "Dellia."

"We must defend the OZ, Jiminy. She's fighting for control again. Go!"

"Remember who you are," he pleaded and kissed her. "You are Azkadellia Ozopov. You are the North Guardian...and you are my only love."

He summoned his sword and opened the door. "We go to Central City."

Ambrose raced through the queen's courtyard, wringing his hands both in terror and despair. Just when it had seemed victory was within their grasp it was quickly snatched away the moment the fourth brigade was defeated at the hands of General Lannot who marched his troops into the city not to assist Commander Ozopov but to destroy him. The soldiers had also been unprepared for the attacks by a flock of mobat demons. The Commander himself had been immobilized by squid ink and taken prisoner, his whereabouts unknown.

"Majesty I bring bad news. The Princess Azkadellia has seized Central City."

"Have our men pull back. Set up positions to the south."

Ambrose sighed.

"What?" The queen asked angrily.

"The fourth brigade has fallen. General Lannot has defected."

The queen gasped in shock. "He was our most loyal friend." she whispered. She turned her head away, not wanting her only friend to see her grief.

"I'm so sorry. There is no law other than Azkadellia's. She tried to steal the plans for the sun seeder but I was able to destroy the blueprints."

The queen gripped his arm, frightened. "She'll come after you Ambrose." They both understood what the princess intended to use the machine for and could not let it fall into her hands. Using moratanium, an element that could conduct magical energy, it would focus the power of Lurline's emerald to lock the moons Nero and Neru behind the sun and open the gates of Ephesis, allowing Almedia to no longer need a vessel to walk the mortal realm.

He nodded. "Is there nothing you can do? Majesty?"

"It is too late. The darkness is too deeply rooted in her," she confessed brokenly.

"But your light. You are the most powerful being in all the OZ!" he reminded her, making one last attempt to inspire hope in his former lover.
"Was old friend. I gave my power and my light to save someone very special...my angel." she whispered.

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Azkadellia approaching with a dozen soldiers. He rose to his feet. "Show some respect!" he demanded, placing himself before the queen.

"The queen's reign ends today," Bastinda proclaimed, a malicious smile on her lips.

Lavinia rose from her seat, placing a reassuring hand on Ambrose's arm and facing her daughter, now a stranger to her.

"Do you have any idea of what you are doing?" she demanded in a soft but firm voice.

"I do. You need a long rest, Mother. Take her away," she instructed her troops. "And take him to the alchemist. If you won't tell me what you know I guess I'll just have to reach in and take it myself." The troops surrounded him and the queen and escorted them to separate wagons. Her heart was breaking yet Lavinia would never dare give her enemies the opportunity to see her weak.

Bastinda was waiting for them when the troops and the truck carrying the queen arrived at her tower palace. Two guards seized the fallen queen's arms and escorted her through the halls to her daughter's conference room. Az, now in control focused her magic on her mother and the queen began to shrink. Once she was merely a few inches tall, Az picked her up in her hands and clapped them together. Despite all their differences, Az wanted to protect her mother the only way she knew how, Bastinda wanted her alive to see her suffer.

Lavinia found herself trapped on a strange island, with only dead trees, sand and little water. A few seconds later her daughter appeared.

"I hope you enjoy your new home Mother," the younger woman said with a smirk. The queen did not answer her. She kept telling herself that the woman standing before her was not her daughter yet she could not deny that she'd seen with her own eyes this daughter use dark magic to try to murder the sister she'd once loved so much. Bastinda, now in control again, clapped her hands and vanished, leaving Lavinia alone.

As she thought of her the husband she could no longer hold or touch, the daughter she'd been forced to send away for her own protection and the daughter who had destroyed them all, Lavinia sank to ground and wept the tears she'd held back for so long.

The witch closed the metal dome lid to the prison that now confined one of her mortal enemies. She controlled the first. The second was in her grave, the third under her mistress's control and the fourth would be eliminated. Then there was the tin man, chosen by Ozmalita to be Rumplestiltskin's replacement. He was still a threat that needed to be taken care of.

"Corporal Zero," she called to one of her strongest commanders. He appeared before her, saluting.

"Yes Sorceress?"

"You are to observe and report the activities of a Tin Man by the name of Wyatt Cain. You are familiar with him, yes?"

"We've been on the force together for years. He's just a dressed up cowboy from the western guild. Nothing to worry about," Zero said arrogantly.

Blithering idiot, the witch thought.
"Nevertheless, you will watch him. If he acts in any way that is in defiance of our authority, you are to arrest him."

"Why not just kill him?"

"No. I have something else in mind. Come."

She led him down the hallway and into a storage room housing hundreds of iron suits. She opened one of them. "This, Corporal Zero, will be our punishment for traitors." She began to explain how the suit worked. It would keep the victim nourished with fluids, filter out waste and maintain breathable air but only someone on the outside would be able to open the suit. Zero smiled. It was ingenious. Thinking about that fumbling cowboy Cain locked in one of those suits brought him immense pleasure.

"Cain locked in one of these things...I like it."

"No, Corporal. I have a special suit in mind for him that I know you'll be even more pleased with."

When she had first taken command of the royal army, Zero had his doubts that Azkadellia would be a much better leader than her mother but she was quickly proving him wrong. It was better for the leaders of a country to be feared then loved and with these nifty little devices, the people of the OZ would be pissing their drawers and bowing down to them like dogs to their masters. At first glance this new suit looked the same as the others but when she opened it, several spikes shot out, dripping water that quickly froze.

"You're going to freeze him in there?" Zero asked gleefully.

"That is one modification, yes but the other is that this suit cannot be opened by any other way than the touch of someone who possesses strong magic. And I am the only being in this realm with that ability."

"You never cease to amaze me, Sorceress."

"You will be richly awarded as long as you remain loyal to me Corporal Zero," the witch promised. "And as long as Wyatt Cain remembers his place and stays in it, we will have no need of this suit, will we?"

"No, but I'd disappointed because nothing would make me happier than to see that son of a bitch get what's coming to him."

"Have patience Corporal. You may have your wish after all," the witch said with a smile. "You are dismissed."

Bastinda gazed up at the suit. She had no doubts that Wyatt Cain would perform according to her expectations. A faint trace of the light still lingered in him and that light would pull him toward a course of action that would put him in her carefully baited trap. All she could do now was wait for her prize to come to her. And he would. It was his destiny.

She teleported into the dungeon of her old tower.

"Bitch!"

She smiled at the only occupant in its cells. "I believe I gave you a choice years ago Commander. Serve me or serve her."
"I serve her. I will always serve her," he sneered.

"But we're one and the same now."

He lowered his head.

"She wants this. All of it. After all, it was rightfully hers until her mother decided to take it all away and give it to her 'angel.' Where is her precious angel now? Cold in the ground and rotting away."

"Like our daughter."

The cell door opened and she entered the cell, kneeling beside him. "I was so afraid you'd been killed."

"Dellia," Jininy whispered.

"It's getting harder to break through. She's taken Ambrose and Mother. I've tried to protect Mother as much as I can but Ambrose...oh Jiminy...they removed his brain!"

"For what?"

"The sun seeder."

He exhaled sharply. "To lock Nero and Neru behind the moon. A permanent eclipse. She's going to enact Aramon's prophecy with Ambrose's invention and use the mortanium here to conduct the energy from half of Lurline's emerald to do it. Your half. That's why she went after you!"

"But I don't know where it is!"

"Your mother does and hopefully she's cloaked her memories enough that Bastinda can't get to them."

"She has."

Even know he could feel Az's control weakening once again. He rose to his feet, his eyes meeting those of his captor.

"Have you made your decision, Commander?"

"Go to Ephesis and rot, bitch!" he growled.

"I'll give you a little more time to think it over," she said and vanished.

He'd been many places throughout his adulthood but Wyatt Cain was not a man to forget his roots. Of the four guilds, he knew the strongest fighters came from the west because they loved the land and their families and those two things were worth fighting and dying for. The southern guild was made up of similar people but most of them were criminals and lunatics, not entirely dependable.

Although Queen Lavinia kept up the facade that there was peace throughout the realm, the westerners knew better. They watched in silent rage as merchants from the northern and eastern guilds marched into their villages like armed troops and built their factories and opened mines that destroyed lands that had been untouched for centuries to make goods in the fastest speeds possible and to maximize their profits. They shed bitter tears as loved ones were taken from their homes to work in the factories and mines for very little pay and long hours, many of them falling ill and dying.
But an animal will let itself be wounded so many times before its fury is unleashed and damned be those who have fueled its rage. The people of the western guild were angry, and willing to fight. All they needed was a brave heart with a strong hand to lead them. They never expected to find it in the boy who was raised in poverty in the west and lived in comfort as a man in the east.

Wyatt could feel the disgust as he rode through his village to his father’s cabin, the disgust that began when he was eighteen and married Adora Kantrine, a woman who represented everything the westerners hated about the east. She may have given the poor farm boy an education but she loved him enough that she never asked him to forget where he came from.

"What're you doin' back here Wyatt Cain?" Delbert Grimes demanded angrily from his rocking chair on his front porch. "Old Del" as people in the village called him, was their version of the town wise man. Nothing escaped his notice and he always had sound advice for those who needed it.

"I came to see my pa," Wyatt answered, surprised at how quickly his western accent was coming back. He dismounted his horse and approached the porch only to find the barrel of Old Del's shotgun pointed at his forehead.

"You don't belong here anymore, city boy. So you just saddle up and ride outta here before you find yourself sportin' another hole."

When he was still a boy a threat like that like would have made him shake in his boots and piss his drawers but after dealing with the worst criminals the southern guild and Central City offered, an old man with a rusted shotgun was just a minor annoyance.

"I'm not here to make trouble Del. I just wanna see my pa," Wyatt said gently, pressing his hand down on the barrel of the gun and pushing it away from him. It was then that Del's gaze was focused on the tin star Wyatt wore on his duster.

"You're an officer of the law now?" he asked.

"Yeah," he answered.

It was the code in the western guild that no man deserved more respect than an officer of the law. Del set the gun down.

"What's all the damn commotion over here, Del?" Wyatt heard Garret "Grumpy" Brimely demand of his best friend as he approached them.

"Wyatt Cain's back."

"So? He's a city boy now. Don't belong here."

"He's an officer of the law."

"That so?" Garret turned to the younger man and froze when he too noticed the tin badge. "Well...looks like you aren't so city after all, are you boy?"

"No, sir. We got convicts in Central City that need a good ass whipping just like they do here."

"Only we don't got ourselves someone brave enough here to whip 'em."

"What do you mean?" Wyatt asked worriedly. "Where's Jimmy Boggs? He was our sheriff when I left home, not much older than I am."
"Jimmy got hisself shot up in a bar fight with some eastern bigshots three annuals ago. Everybody else is too damned scared of the rich folks to take the job so they run the town and now that the Sorceress is in charge, well...she makes 'em push the workers hard here."

"Like hell," Wyatt grumbled. The two older men looked at each other with a gleam in their eyes. They remembered well what this boy now a grown man was like when he got angry and nothing spread fear through Elba than an angry Cain.

"We need a new sheriff around here Wyatt and although you may have been in the city all this time, you're still an officer of the law and a Cain to boot."

"One who's gonna get lynched the minute everyone knows I'm back in town. They practically chased me and Adora outta here."

"You're still married to the Kantrine girl?"

"Yeah... and we have a boy named Jeb."

"Where are they?"

"Back east. We had to leave Central City once the troops came. Since they were the law, they didn't want my kind of law there."

"Well we don't want the Sorceress's kind of law here. People may wanna lynch ya at first Wyatt Cain but you're a tough boy, always have been. We need you here. Can we count on you boy, or are you gonna be as yellow as everyone else around here has become?" Garret demanded.

Wyatt's blue eyes narrowed to slits. "Call me yellow like that again and the only yellow you're gonna see is yours when you piss it out your mouth," he threatened.

Garret howled with laughter. "Looks like we got ourselves a sheriff."

"One without a posse. Not gonna be much of a sheriff without one, am I?"

"Hell boy, we'll be your posse!" Old Del exclaimed.

"No offense but you're too old to be running around the guild chasin' convicts and keepin' the Longcoats out," Wyatt pointed out.

"We can still shoot the balls off any man Wyatt Cain so don't you be tellin' us we're too old. You won't want anyone to be tellin' you that when you get to be our age, do ya? Besides, you need our support to be the new sheriff or you will get lynched."

"No, I don't think I would. Where is my pa, Del? I really do need to see him."

Del and Garret looked at each other. "He's laid up, Wyatt." Del said.

"From what?"

"Them new eastern folks who took over the mines have been working the men to death. Sammy...well, he got tired of it and like you Cains have a habit of doin'...he picked a fight with the foreman and got shoved down one of the mineshafts. One leg and arm are broken."

Wyatt's face paled. "Take me to him."

"Sly Fox" Samuel Cain still lived in the run down cottage that had been Wyatt's home until he was
six years old. Then his mother woke him up in the middle of the night and the two of them went to live with the new man in her life, the drunken, abusive son of a bitch who made the next ten years of his life a living hell until the goddess finally showed mercy on him and made his stepfather kill himself by falling down a flight of stairs while he was drunk. His mother was the only person to mourn him even though she'd gotten her share of beatings from the bastard.

When they rode up to the house a woman came out the door holding a shotgun, lowering it when she spotted Del and Garret.

"Who's with ya, Del?"

"Sam's boy, Marielle."

"Wyatt? Oh thank the goddess!" she cried. "You probably don't remember me, do you, Wyatt?"

"Um, no ma'am."

"Well, don't just sit on that horse like a dead tree stump. Come here and greet your aunt properly!" she scolded.

He jumped off his horse and swept his aunt up in a fierce embrace. Marielle wept tears of joy as she held tightly to the man who was more of a son to her than a nephew.

"Little 'Wild Wyatt'," she said softly.

"No one's called me that in a long time," he chuckled.

"Nor will they when they see you sportin' that badge. An officer of the law. Your pa is gonna be so proud!"

"How bad is he, Aunt Mari?"

"It's bad honey. I hope you bein' here can lift his spirits a bit. You plannin' on stayin a while?"

"Yeah, I got business here."

"Mari, who the hell is out there!" he heard his father yell in slurred speech that made a chill race down his spine. It was the way his stepfather sounded after he'd had too many drinks and was looking for someone to take his wrath out on.

"Dammit, I thought I hid it all!" Marielle moaned.

"Let me deal with this," Wyatt said firmly, now back in his Tin Man mode. He'd hauled more than his fair share of drunks out of the bars in Central City but it wasn't going to be so easy to handle his own father.

"He doesn't get like..."

"Like Bart? Maybe not now but if he keeps drinkin' like this he will. Whose idea was it to give him the stuff in the first place?" He turned his icy gaze to his father's best friends. Del and Garret lowered their heads guiltily.

"He was only takin' nips to kill the pain." Del said. "The doc doesn't have the medicine he needs."

"He's takin' more than nips and you know it! I catch either one of you bringin' him anymore booze and you'll be the ones sportin' extra holes. Got it?"
He took a deep breath and walked into the house. As he feared, his father was trying to tear the place apart as much as he could with his working limbs looking for the bottles of whiskey Marielle had been trying to hide from him.

Samuel Cain looked up at his son with bloodshot eyes, his gaze focusing on the star on his duster.

"Jimmy? You ain't dead? I thought you got shot up three years ago."

"Pa," Wyatt said softly as he kneeled down beside his father. "It's Wyatt."

"Wyatt? Naw, you ain't Wyatt. He's a city boy now that he married that Kantrine tramp."

"Pa, I'm gonna try to remember that's the booze talkin' but you know it pisses me off when you call my girl a tramp."

"You turned your back on your roots boy!" Sam yelled.

"You and the rest of the folks in this town ran me and Adora outta here!" Wyatt yelled back. "I made something of myself Pa and what're you doin'? Drownin' yourself in booze and turnin' out to be a mean, miserable son of a bitch like Bart. You think I want to go through that again? You think Aunt Mari does?"

"You watch yourself boy or I'll skin your hide."

"How you gonna do that with a bum leg and arm, Pa?" Wyatt challenged. "Go on and do it if you think you can."

Sam braced himself on his good arm and leg and tried to stand but quickly collapsed on the floor howling with pain.

"I'm getting' you back to bed."

"You're getting' me nowhere. I'll get there myself."

"No you're not." Wyatt placed his father's broken arm over his shoulder. "We're gonna stand up slow on your good leg. Come on Pa, help me out here!" Wyatt cried when his father started to fall again. "You're too big for me to carry you."

"And you ain't gonna either," Sam grumbled. "I don't wanna be havin' to use my son as a damned cane for the rest of my life."

"Then you're gonna have to stop feelin sorry for yourself and do something about it," Wyatt ordered as he helped his father back to his bedroom. "You're not getting up until you sleep it off."

He walked over to the old chest his father kept some of his tools in and opened it, scowling when he pulled out several bottles without labels and opened one of them. "Should've figured Amos was still in business."

"Yeah well that rotgut you get in the city probably doesn't taste half as soon as Amos's homebrewed whiskey."

"Yeah well, you won't be having any more of it," Wyatt said as he opened the window and started dumping the bottle out.

"You idiot! You realize how much money you're dumping out!?" Sam snapped as Wyatt removed several more bottles from their hiding places and emptied all of them, ignoring his father's insults.
until Sam finally grew tired and fell asleep.

He found Marielle in the kitchen cooking his favorite soup. She ladled some of it into a bowl and handed it to him. "You don't know how glad I am to have you back home, Wyatt. Sam's been driving me out of my mind first with his accident then with the drinkin'."

"Well, he's taken his last nip Aunt Mari. We got bigger problems."

Adora,

I'm sorry it took me so long to write but there was so much going on here all at once that's kept me pretty busy.

I'm the sheriff now. Jimmy was killed in a barfight three years ago and no one else took the job so they offered it to me. You can imagine how angry some folks were about it at first but they're coming around.

Pa wasn't in good shape when I came home. He was pushed down a mineshaft after he got in a fight and had some limbs broken. Worse, he started drinking. Aunt Mari and I have him sobered up now and he should be getting up and around soon.

I don't know what the Sorceress and her troops are looking for but they've been tearing apart other villages and torturing people to find whatever it is. I want to be ready for them when they come here but there is only a small group of us willing to do anything about it.

I was hoping on bringing you and Jeb out here with me but right now it's not safe. I don't know how long it will be, but I'll come and get you soon. I love you both.

Wyatt

"Here they come, sheriff!" Garret cried from their post on the top of a hill on the outskirts of the village.

"How many?" Wyatt asked.

"Bout fifty or so?"

"Alright, listen up! We need to make every bullet count. When you shoot, you shoot to kill, got it?" Wyatt glanced up at his small army comprised of his aunt, Del, Garret and at least sixteen more men and women from the village, armed only with their shotguns and a limited supply of ammunition since trade within guilds had been cut off.

"Put em right between the whites of their eyes!" Marielle ordered.

"Get ready," Wyatt growled as the sound of over a dozen hoofprints carried on the breeze. He pulled his pistol out of its holster. The sounds grew louder. "Take your aim..."

Shotguns were raised, fingers poised over triggers.

Men in long leather coats rode into sight.

"Fire!" Wyatt shouted and aimed his pistol, firing a shot at the leader, hitting him in the chest. A volley of shots rang out. Six longcoats fell from their horses onto the ground. The others, recovering from their surprise, pulled out their guns and returned fire.

"Fire at will!" Wyatt commanded. The small army started down the hill, firing at the nearest
"Wyatt, there's a group that's broken off and is headin' toward the village!" Marielle cried.

"We have to cut em off! Billy, Morgan and Curt come with me!" Wyatt ordered. The small group mounted their horses and rode off in pursuit of the stray pack of troops while Marielle and the rest of their army killed the last of the troops that had surrounded them.

"Wyatt's gonna need some help. Saddle up!" she commanded. "I just hope to hell we can get there in time," she muttered.

The longcoats had already reached the village by the time Wyatt's party arrived and people who had been awakened by the commotion were fighting back with anything they could get their hands on. One woman had used the huge pot of soup she'd been making all day as a hot cauldron and doused several longcoats when they broke into her home. A group of boys formed a small firing squad armed only with slingshots and rocks. Two women used their their laundry lines to knock riders off their horses. The patrons of one of the bars locked a small band of longcoats inside and set it on fire. Necessity was the mother of invention and the citizens of the small western guild village of Elba were quickly proving to be a force to be reckoned with. When the last longcoat fell from a fatal shot from Wyatt's pistol the crowd cheered loudly only to gasp in shock as he collapsed on the ground from a bullet wound in his shoulder.

News that the sheriff and citizens of a small western guild village had managed to fend off a large army of longcoats with little ammunition and common household items spread throughout the OZ like a wildfire. Wyatt Cain was a name frequently mentioned. Armed with only a pistol and wounded, he killed at least ten longcoats and made sure all the longcoats dead before he passed out from pain and exhaustion.

Adora, sitting across from him in their kitchen knew she couldn't love him more than she did at that moment. He'd saved their village and inspired the people to stand up and fight for their freedom. As soon as she'd heard what happened at Elba she asked a friend to take her and Jeb out west to join him.

"We have to find a way to get a hold of more weapons, Pa," he was saying to his father as he, Sam, Marielle Del and Garett were studying a map. "There's a fort with a legion of longcoats stationed here," he said, pointing to an area on the map. "We can't hold em off forever with what we find around here."

"We need to start settin up some kinda line of defense in the woods," Sam suggested.

"Traps," Del spoke up. "We got plenty of animal traps we can use. Hell, everything we used in town worked, we just gotta think bigger this time."

Wyatt chuckled. "I don't think Annabelle will be happy about us askin her to cook more of her soup to waste."

"Are you kiddin? She calls it 'Longcoat Stew' now and just the other day she was saying she's itchin to try out a new one on em if they come back."

"She'll need a bigger pot," Marielle advised.

"Hell, we'll make her one and carve 'Boiling Belle' on it for her."

"Adora, can you go house to house and let everyone know there's gonna be a meeting?" Wyatt asked to his wife.
"Do they need to bring anything?"

"Just their heads. If they've got ideas, we need to hear 'em."

"I'll be back in a little while," she said and kissed her husband and son before she headed out.

"What do I do, Daddy?" young Jeb asked from his place on the floor. Wyatt glanced down at his son. "I wanna help fight those bad guys too."

Sam howled with laughter. "That boy's a Cain all right!"

"Jeb, you can't fight the bad guys yet." Wyatt said gently although in his heart he couldn't be more proud. His son was growing up to be more and more like him every day.

"Yes I can!" he pouted. "I can hit em with rocks like those other boys did! C'mon Daddy! I wanna help."

"He's not gonna let up until you give him something to do, Wyatt," Marielle reminded her nephew. "And whether we like it or now, our kids need to know how to defend themselves too."

"I don't know..."

"Please, Daddy!" Jeb begged.

"Me and Del can take him with us when we go set traps. He's gotta learn how to set 'em anyway if he wants to hunt," Sam suggested.

"His mother's not gonna like it," Wyatt muttered. "She'll skin me alive..."

"None of us like havin' to do this Wyatt but we got to," Del spoke up. "C'mon boy," he said to Jeb. "Time ya learned how to be a hunter."

"Quiet as a tomb in there, Wyatt," Garret said to him as they waited in the woods not far from where the fort stood.

"Okay...Billy, Curt...you two take out the guards on the ground. Pa, Marielle and Del, can you handle the ones in the tower?"

"We'll get em."

"Belle, how's the stew coming?"

"First batch is hot an' ready. Just need some help gettin it on the catapult. It'll make their eyes cry an' their noses burn."

"We'll get it on there for ya Belle," two men said.

"I'm almost done with the second batch, Belle." Adora said to her.

"You add my special sauce dearie?"

"I sure did."

"Okay boys, let's go check it out." Annabelle said as they went back to the firepit where a large pot full of stew was cooking. The men gasped and held their noses.
"Ozma's ghost, Belle!" Wyatt cried. "What'd you have her put in there...smells like cow shit!"

"That's the idea boy. I'm callin' this one 'The Sorceress's Outhouse!'"

"You didn't really have them put...that in there, did you?" Wyatt asked, horrified.

"Well it wouldn't be called 'The Sorceress's Outhouse' without it, now would it?" Annabelle asked with a wicked grin. "Was your woman's idea."

"Adora!" Wyatt glanced over at his wife. She was smirking.

"What? The Longcoats have been giving us shit for over a month now and I think they deserve to take a little of it courtesy of Elba's finest cattle."

"I love you, you know that," Wyatt said, laughing so hard there were tears in his eyes and kissed her. "Okay, let's get moving but for Ozma's sake while you're haulin that stuff, cover your noses and don't get any of it on ya! We don't want em to smell us coming!"

"They did what?" the witch screamed.

General Lannot backed away, having never seen the Sorceress so furious. "The resisters in a small village called Elba captured our fort there, captured or killed everyone there and emptied the armory. Now they're going to the other guilds to get others to join them."

"That fort was heavily guarded. Do you want to explain to me how they got in?"

"They...ahh used a catapult and threw several pots of what I'm guessing was soup at the guards inside and shot the guards on the tower."

"Who is leading this little army?" she demanded.

"An ex Tin Man named Wyatt Cain. Apparently they just made him their sheriff."

"Zero!" the witch yelled.

"Yes Sorceress?" he asked as he walked into the room.

She smiled. "It looks like you're going to get your wish after all. I want you to take a small group of men and go to the western guild village of Elba. Wyatt Cain has been leading an uprising there."

"Am I taking the suit?" he asked, unable to contain his excitement. He was beginning to worry that he would have a long wait before he saw Cain ruined.

"You are. Traitors must be made an example of. As for his family, it seems that they are all involved. Kill them."

It would take him at least a week to reach the village but this was one trip Zero was looking forward to making. His nemesis would be put in his place once and for all.

Gregory Zero's hatred of Wyatt Cain began when they graduated from the Tin Academy. He'd never understood why a cowboy from the western guild had graduated at the top of the class while he, born into one of the wealthiest families in the Northern guild was within a hair of failing out.

Making matters worse when the Mystic Man was searching for one more Tin Man to join his protection detail, he'd narrowed his choices down to Zero and Cain. According to their captain the Mystic Man was looking for a protector who possessed certain attributes but the captain hadn't
bothered to tell him what they were. When Zero had been told Cain was chosen he was furious and he spent too much time brooding about it that he hadn't realized his wife was getting ready to walk out on him. When she did he no longer cared. Now his second marriage was on the verge of collapse for the same reason...his hatred of Cain and destroying him dominated most of Zero's thoughts that there was nothing left for anyone else.

The witch watched him leaving with a smile on her lips. There was no other soul as dark as that of Gregory Zero. It was why she had chosen him to be her hunter. She would use him to seek out all traces of the light of the OZ and extinguish them. He naively assumed his target was Wyatt Cain but she had another in mind...Dorothia Gale. All evidence suggested the girl was dead but she wasn't certain. She never would be until she either saw a body or killed her herself while the goddess took care of the Strogoff line. All they had to do now was capture the one person who would bring Dorothia to them. Her mate.

Wyatt and Adora stood face to face, he in robes of black silk, a golden dragon emblem engraved on the back, the symbols of the dragon master, she in robes of white, the apprentice. Her Katana sword in her hands, she kneeled down, her head bowed as a show of respect to her teacher.

"Adora Kantrine Cain," he began. "Your quest for knowledge is at its end. You must now face the dragon's wrath to earn the right to call yourself a master. Do you accept the challenge?"

Adora looked up at her husband, her eyes warm with love. Yet she would have to set those feelings aside for the time being for now he was not her husband but her teacher. "I do," she said firmly.

"Rise and let us begin," he commanded, sword in hand, assuming his attack stance. Adora stood up, her own sword poised. The opposing blades crossed.

Wyatt's heart was filled with pride as he watched his wife meet his every attack with equal skill. He'd pushed her hard in the first few months of training, often reducing her to tears yet her courage never faltered. All her life she'd been desperate to prove that she could be so much more than a wife and mother and when she learned Wyatt had been made a Talon, she begged him to train her even though a Talon was not to take an apprentice until granted the rank of master.

For several days he'd been plagued by nightmares that something was coming for him and wanted Adora to be prepared for the worst. As the last of the Talons, it was now his duty to name his successor in the event of his death but first she had to earn it by defeating him in a test of strength and skill. It was the challenge he should have faced with the Mystic Man. He fought hard, pushing himself and her to their limits until she finally seized her opening and forced him to the ground, her sword poised over his throat.

"Claim your victory," he commanded proudly. She raised the sword up and thrust the blade into the ground barely inches away from the side of his neck and kneeled beside him.

"Victorious in my quest, I ask for the right to be called a master. Will you give me your blessing?"

Wyatt rose to his feet and swept his wife into his arms, tradition be damned. "How could you doubt it?" he asked as he kissed her passionately. "And you told me you didn't think you were ready."

"You had me worried a few times," she admitted. "Pushing me harder than you ever had before."

"I had to even though I hated every minute of it but I knew you could do it. I always have."

She cupped his face in her palms and kissed him. "I know this isn't appropriate behavior for a student..."
"Neither is this, but do you think I give a damn?" he said seductively as he carried her into the house to their bedroom.

"Wyatt Cain, what do you think you're doing?" she giggled as he dumped her on the bed. "The Mystic Man would be so upset with you that you're not following tradition."

"Tradition later," he said as he silenced her with another kiss. "Right now the only tradition I'm interested in is making love to my wife."

Adora looked up at him and held out her arms. "You won't hear an argument from me."

They rarely had moments like this while Wyatt had been part of the Mystic Man's protection detail because he had always been exhausted from his training and once the uprising started, even less time.

"Wyatt, sweetheart, is something wrong?" she asked him.

"No. It's nothing, nothing at all," he lied.

Adora's eyes glistened with tears. Hadn't he realized by now that she could always sense when he was lying to her? She wrapped her arms around him and pushed him back against the pillows, pressing her lips to his, willing all the love she had in her heart to push away his dark thoughts.

"Don't think about anything right now," she commanded softly. "It can't touch us here..."

"I love you, Adora," he whispered as he pulled her beneath him.

She came into his life like a light in the darkness when he was an angry, abused child of ten and made him into the man he now was. If this was going to be his last night with her, he wanted it to be the kind of night that would be engraved on his heart when he made his journey into the afterlife.
Wyatt awoke the next morning to the sound of hoofprints galloping up the path to their home. He jumped out of bed and dressed, pulling back the delicate lace curtain on the window to look out. Sure enough, there they were, a small army of longcoats. He heard Adora stir in the bed behind him.

"What's going on?" she asked as she dressed herself.

"I want you to lock yourself and Jeb in here and not come out." he said firmly.

"But I..."

"Promise me, Adora!" he growled.

"Wyatt..."

"Adora!"

"All right. I promise," she cried. He grabbed her and kissed her.
"I love you Adora. Never forget it."

"I won't," she croaked.

He walked out of the house. He knew he should have taken at least his gun or his Katana but the gun was stored in a box underneath the house and his Katana was in the bedroom. If they wanted to take him, they would have to fight him like men with fists instead of weapons. They would have to face the dragon's wrath to earn the right to be called masters but he would not allow them to claim their victory.

The executioner has come...

Adora thought, her body frozen with fear as she looked out the window and saw the horses approaching, Gregory Zero at the lead. Wyatt stood on the porch with his arms crossed over his chest.

"I shouldn't be surprised you joined up with the Sorceress," he grumbled. "You'd slit your own mother's throat to get ahead."

"And you are a treacherous bastard!" Zero shouted. "Wyatt Cain, you are guilty of high treason against Azkadellia, Queen of the OZ. The punishment is death."

"The only thing I'm guilty of is trying to help the people free themselves from a tyrant. How long do you think you think it's gonna be before you find yourself on the receiving end of her wrath, Zero? Can't kiss her ass forever but since that's what you do best you'll probably spend the rest of your life being her lapdog."

"Seize him!" Zero ordered two of his soldiers. As they approached the porch, the dragon in Wyatt awoke and he went into attack mode, driving them back with kicks and punches. Zero watched both astounded and angry. Where the hell had that stupid farm boy learned to fight like that?

Inside the house, Adora grabbed her son and ran into the bedroom, opening a trap door in the floor. She placed him inside. "Stay there until your father or I come for you," she whispered. The boy nodded.

Adora lifted the mattress of the bed and grabbed her Katana sword, removing the sheath and tossing it away. Her eyes blazing with anger, she ran outside and slashed at one of the Longcoats Wyatt was fighting. He fell to the ground with a fatal wound in his abdomen. She was no longer Adora Kantrine Cain. She was the Talon apprentice, sworn to protect her master; the dragon protecting her mate.

Angry before, Zero was now in a blind rage as he watched Adora and Wyatt Cain defeating his soldiers, she with sophisticated sword fighting techniques, he with physical attacks. Knowing taking out Cain wouldn't be easy, he'd requested that a second legion follow them to Elba but he couldn't see hide nor hair of them and it was pissing him off. Cain never made anything easy for him.

"Adora, for Ozma's sake get out!" Wyatt cried.

"Not without you," she said firmly. Seeing his opportunity, Zero grabbed her by the hair, the silk ribbon she'd tied around it earlier falling to the ground. She slashed at him with the sword. He raised his foot and kicked her hand, the Katana flying out of her hand into the bushes.

"Bitch," he hissed, pushing her toward two of his soldiers. One of them snaked his arm around her throat. Two more men seized Wyatt by the arms and pushed him down to his knees while a third
punched him hard in the face.

Zero picked up the silk ribbon and wrapped it around his hand. A malicious grin on his lips, he stood before Wyatt and delivered a hard punch to his face, staining the silk ribbon with his blood.

In his hiding place, young Jeb Cain could hear his parents' cries and felt their suffering, the sounds reaching into the deepest corners of his heart and awakening the dragonspawn's desire to attack the enemy and defend his kin. He burst out of his hiding place like an animal freed from his cage and as he was about to open the door, the dragonspawn heard his sire's call of unrestrained rage. The child attacked with all the strength that a boy of nine years had yet did not possess the necessary skills to fully channel the dragon's spirit and use it to defeat but the father could.

Zero raised his hand and backhanded the boy. Two Cains giving him trouble was enough. A third was a headache. They had to be destroyed. He was about to strike the boy again when the elder Cain attacked.

Calling to her own inner dragon, Adora broke free from the men restraining her and grabbed her son.

"Adora take Jeb and run!"

Wyatt cried.

"Wyatt, I..."

"Go! Your duty is to your apprentice now, Talon Master!" he ordered fiercely.

Choking back a sob, Adora took her son's hand and tried to pull him away but the boy broke free from his mother's grasp and ran back into the house.

"Jeb, no!" his mother screamed and started after him when she was pulled back by one of the Longcoats. Jeb emerged from the house with his father's Katana in his hands. Wyatt took the sword from his son's hands and raised it, the steel blade clashing with the one Zero now held in his hands. "Adora, take Jeb and run...NOW!" he commanded once she freed herself again. She looked up at him with tear filled eyes and nodded. She would not disobey again. Her duty now was to their son, her apprentice.

"After them!" Zero shouted to his troops. They raced into the woods. "What the hell are you?" Zero asked when he faced Wyatt again.

"I am the Dragon," Wyatt said in a cold voice as he felt the dragon's spirit flow through him. "Face my wrath but you will never earn the right to call yourself a master!"

"We'll see about that!" Zero hissed. "A dragon? Being on the Mystic Man's detail certainly has made you full of yourself." He swung his blade to make a cut on Wyatt's side only to have it blocked. "You'll be begging me to kill you."

"The OZ will freeze over before I beg the likes of you!" Wyatt hissed as he kicked Zero's feet out from underneath him. His opponent fell to the ground. Wyatt pressed the tip of his sword against the other man's throat.

"That may come sooner than you think," Wyatt heard a icy voice say from behind him and felt something strike him in the back. Suddenly he found he could not move his limbs at all. His sword slipped out of his hands and he crashed to the ground.
Zero rose to his feet. "I could've taken him."

The witch scowled. "You didn't appear to be doing a very good job of it."

"What did you hit him with?" Zero asked.

"A very special spell," the witch answered. "He can see and he can hear but his limbs will not move. It is what I call the conscious death. Leave us." Zero wasn't happy about it but he didn't dare disobey his mistress's order.

She kneeled down beside him and pressed her hand to his chest, the power radiating from him unlike any she'd ever encountered before because it was fueled by his love for his family, the land and the people and the spirit of the dragon...the strongest magic of all. She craved it like an addict craved the vapors that sent them into a permanent state of bliss. She weakened the spell enough to allow her mind to communicate with his.

I am giving you one opportunity to earn your freedom.

Oh and what's that bitch?

Where is she?

Where is who?

You cannot fool me. You may have severed your bond and removed your magic along with it so that I cannot track her but you know where the child is, or at least your heart does.

What child?

DG. Where is DG?

Princess DG is dead. You killed her. And what makes you think I have magic? Do you see me doing any magic tricks?

"Zero!" the witch shouted.

"Yes, Sorceress?"

"We're taking him back to the Tower for a reading," she said angrily.

Zero and several of his men tossed Wyatt into the back of a truck, surprised that the Sorceress sat in the back with him. She seemed to be treating him as if he were someone she admired and Zero hated him all the more for it. How could she admire Cain when he was one of her most faithful officers although his ascent in the ranks was not happening as fast as he wanted it to.

This is worse than being dead, Wyatt thought. No matter how hard he tried, he could not move at all yet he could still hear and see everything going on around him and having that sorceress bitch stare down at him made him wish his limbs worked because all he wanted to do was choke the life out of her. Suddenly he felt very tired and within minutes he was asleep.

Azkadellia was on borrowed time. The moment she learned that Wyatt was to be taken for a reading she knew she had to take back control of her body and her magic long enough to help him in any way she could. The paralysis spell the witch placed on him was too powerful for her to break but there was one spell she could use that the witch couldn't break. She pressed her hand against his heart.
"Any attempts to read you will be rejected
For within this wall your heart's memories will be protected
Until the day her kiss does restore
The bond of light between you forever more."
She felt the witch taking control again. It didn't matter. Her work was done.
The viewer screamed as he felt the shock of the electric prod.
"Heart empty...beating but dead!"
"If it's beating, it's not dead. Try again!" the witch hissed.
"Raw trying!"
"Not hard enough. Focus! Push harder," The witch growled
"Hurts too much!"
"Coward."
"Why don't we just rip it out like we did with Ambrose's brain?" Zero suggested. The witch glared at him.
"You fool! We can't read him if he's dead." She leaned closer to Raw. "Read him again and push harder."
The viewer pressed his hand against Wyatt's chest. He could feel the man's heart beating but there was nothing in it, almost as if it had been completely drained of all of its memories. He pushed harder and could feel a faint light and heard a female's voice speak only to him.
"His heart holds many secrets and this one only you will see
One day your paths will cross again and you must find the courage to lead him back to the one who holds the key
Through her love the lock on his heart will open
And forge a bond that can never be broken
Yet even a strong heart needs a friend
To discover hidden truths on you it will depend."
"Raw see nothing...only emptiness." he murmured.
"Worthless." the witch growled. "Take him back to his cell and bring me Lylo." she ordered her alchemist.
She tried for two weeks using at least eight viewers, killing two of them in the process but her efforts were in vain. The memories in Wyatt Cain's heart had been locked by powerful magic that even she couldn't break.
A tin suit led by a horse drawn wagon bearing the corpse of the resistance's chief commander was
led through the roads in all four guilds as a warning to those who dared to oppose the Sorceress's reign. She rode in front of her prize, seeing the people cower in fear acting as balm on the deep wound the Cain family had inflicted on her power when this uprising began. She would send her destroyer to the four realms and tear them apart until every last Cain was found and killed.

Adora awoke in the middle of the night, sharp pains in her abdomen. She threw the covers off and glanced down to see a pool of blood staining the sheets.

"No..." she moaned. "Oh noooooo!"

Her anguished cries brought Marielle and Belle into the her tent. Marielle looked into her eyes, her own eyes filling with tears.

"Oh honey...you were with child? How long?"

"Since the night before...before Zero came," Adora sobbed. "I wanted this baby so much, Mari...his last gift to me...and now its gone.

Gone!"

She looked up at the sky, her eyes red with rage and heartbreak.

"You've taken him away from me! Wasn't it enough? Did you have to take our child too? Will you come for Jeb too? I won't let you have him. Why did you send him to me if your will was to erase all traces of our love? Your will is cruel and I'll serve it no more!"

"Adora, stop!" her grandmother cried as she ran into the tent. "You don't know what you're doing!"

"I don't care anymore, Nana!" she screamed. "This is all her fault. Why couldn't she just leave him alone or at least waited until I'm dead before she bound him to her! I hate her!"

"Alana, she's going mad," Marielle said sadly.

"Adora, my angel, please don't do this to yourself. You still have Jeb and he needs you to be strong for him."

Adora shoved the older woman away from her. Alana seized her granddaughter by her shoulders. "This is going to hurt me more than it hurts you my precious but I cannot let you destroy yourself in grief." She raised her hand and delivered a stinging slap to the side of the younger woman's face.

"N...Nana," she croaked. "Y...You've never hit me before."

"Nor do I want to again," Alana sobbed. "I mourn the loss of your child as much as you do my precious but you cannot abandon Jeb and you dishonor Wyatt's memory by filling your heart with hate for an innocent."

"No, Nana. I can't. Nor can I just sit here and do nothing." She rose from the bed and reached for Wyatt's sword. She'd returned to the cottage the after the raid and found it in the place where it fell. "I have a son to train and a war to fight and I'll honor his memory until the day I die."

The death of Wyatt Cain and attempted defilement of his memory did not have the effect the witch planned. Branded a traitor by the Sorceress's regime, he was hailed as a hero by those who served under him and now those people were in search of a new leader.

Like the phoenix rising from the ashes, Adora Kantrine Cain rose from the ashes of her heartbreak.
The simple housewife and mother she'd been all those years was no more and in her place stood a warrior now ready to pick up her fallen husband's sword and continue the fight for the cause he believed in. If she were to die, the torch would be passed to their son, Jeb. Each generation of Cain would fight on until victory was in their grasp for now they were the last of the Talons of the Dragon.

She sat on her horse in the middle of the field staring out at the large Longcoat army marching toward them.

"Load the catapult!" she screamed. A group of men gathered around one of Belle's pots and carried it over to the catapult as Belle watched with pride. This recipe was her finest yet but she would not reveal the name until it was launched. Although the western army now had better weapons thanks to the daring raid Wyatt laid on the fort, they would never stop using Belle's lethal stews knowing how much Wyatt loved them.

"Get ready to launch," Belle said and took out her dinner bell as the first line of Longcoats marched toward them. She held the bell up high and rang it.

"Launch it!" Adora ordered.

"Taste 'Wyatt's Wrath' you sons of bitches!" Belle yelled as an archer fired a burning arrow at the liquid once it doused the troops, engulfing them in flames. "Can't let em go without second helpings. Give em the next course!"

Adora drew Wyatt's sword from its sheath. "Calvary, form up!" Lines of men and women on horseback formed a line behind her. On the other side of the field the longcoat calvary line began riding toward them.

"Charge!" Adora commanded, riding forward, sword in hand.

For centuries her purpose had been to obey the will of her goddess but the moment the man she'd been forbidden to love was taken away from her Adora Katrine Cain decided to choose her own path and it was now a long and painful one. She knew she faced her goddess's wrath once she returned to Paradise but she no loner cared nor would she ever allow the people who once fought by her husband's side to forget him and what they were all fighting for.

The lines Jiminy carved to mark the days of his confinement now covered the north wall of his cell. It had been weeks since he'd last seen his beloved Azkadellia. Every day the monster that possessed her soul and committed countless atrocities with her face and body would come to visit him and pose her question. And every day he gave the same answer.

"Go to Ephesis and rot, bitch!"

Two days later the dungeon population grew when two more prisoners were brought into cells adjacent to the one Jiminy occupied.

"Oh thank, Lurline!" Toto exclaimed. "We thought you were dead."

"Name's Glitch. Sometimes my synapses don't fire right," Ambrose said, attempting to shake Jiminy's hand through the bars of his own cell. Jiminy shook his head, horrified at the former advisor's new appearance. There was a large zipper that ran from the top of his head down to the top of his neck, his old uniform torn and dirty.

"I feel like I am dead," Jiminy said bitterly. "I lost my wife, my child, my country...I should've...kept my distance and allowed her to find her bondmate. He could've stopped all this..."
"Jiminy, you are her bondmate."

"Don't play games with me Toto. I'm in no mood!"

"You are!" Toto insisted. "We knew from the day you arrived in the OZ. Haven't you ever wondered why the travel storm that brought you here chose you instead of your brother?"

"I already know. I was chosen to be Dellia's Guardian...not her lover...but goddess forgive me I do love her and always will."

"You were chosen to be both as Wyatt Cain was chosen to be Dorothis's. You just needed time and a place for your love to grow. We couldn't reach Azkadellia but we had hopes you could."

"I tried," he said sadly. "Dellia and I spent years trying to find a way to break that bitch's hold on her but she wouldn't let her go. And when we lost our child..." He buried his face in his hands and burst into tears. "A part of us died with her."

"Azkadellia bore a child?"

"A daughter. We named her Ambrosia. And she was murdered before our eyes by that bastard Zero!" Jiminy's eyes narrowed to slits. "And mark my words, the day will come when it will by MY hands around HIS throat or I'll rip out his heart and make him watch while I crush it to dust!"

"Jiminy, you cannot give in to darkness."

"It's dark in here...always dark in here," Ambrose muttered."That's life these days in the Oz. Always dark."

Jiminy rose to his feet, feeling the last dose of the squid ink he'd been given wearing off, his hands glowing.

"To the darkness I must be be drawn...for to light she be shown..." he murmured and blasted the bars. He flicked his wrist and the doors to the other two cells opened. "This is the will of the OZ. The darkness will fall in the year of the double eclipse."

The tutor nodded for no one would dare question the word of a Guardian.

"Go west to Elba. Find Adora Cain and tell her the cricket is flying. She'll know what it means."

"What about him?" Toto nodded at Ambrose.

"His memories will come back to him when the time is right. Take him somewhere and hide him. They'll need him when she gets that machine to work."

"So we wait."

"We wait. That is the will of the OZ," Jiminy confessed sadly. "DG and Dellia are the only ones who can defeat Bastinda now and they must do it together on the day of the eclipse."

The trio vanished in a puff of smoke.

"Sorceress, Commander Ozopov has escaped and taken the tutor and the advisor." Zero announced when he entered the throne room. Bastinda rose from her chair and glowered at him. "The squid ink system has broken down. It..."

The soldier froze.
"Looking for me?" they heard a voice ask and the doors swung open. Jiminy walked into the room dressed in the uniform of the Sorceress's army. "I believe you have a question for me, Sorceress."

Bastinda smiled. "And I believe I have my answer."

Zero, now unfrozen, glared at him. "You...you.."

Jiminy gestured and the soldier was lifted off his feet. "YOU will address me as Commander Ozopov!" he snarled.

Bastinda watched the exchange with delight, the Commander's inner darkness far exceeding her expectations. She had no idea what made him come around but she would not question it. Her mistress would be pleased with this latest turn of events. They now had two of the four Guardians under their control as well as their bondmates.

"Y...Y...Yes Commander," Zero sputtered and crashed to the floor.

"Put him with Lannot's brigade. I don't want him in my sight again or I'll kill him. Or I'll just send him to the Fields of the Papay and let them do it for me. Why do you want to keep this piece of scum around? He'd cut your throat while you sleep."

"He can try. Very well. I'll send him to Lannot, He'll make use of him. Our Mistress requests a conference. Come."

She led him down the hall to her sitting room and waved her hand over the mirror. Jiminy could see Rumplestiltskin in his cursed persona of Robert Gold on the other side of the mirror sitting in an easy chair in the living room of the salmon Victorian mansion that was his home in Storybrooke.

"You've made the right choice Commander," Alemedia praised in Rumple's voice. "Now we must deal with Ozmalita. She is now the leader of the resistance army. She must be captured and executed and we must find Lurline's emerald."

"The queen has cloaked her memories."

"Then you must unlock them Bastinda. Or shall I reawaken Nessarose?"

"No! I will find the emerald mistress...even if I have to tear the OZ apart!"

"It must be in your hand the day of the double eclipse."

"It will be."

Rumple's image vanished.

"The double eclipse will not occur until the year 2001 according to the Other Side calendar Sorceress. There's still time," Jiminy said.

"And this rebellion needs put down. Immediately. I am placing you in charge of my forces Commander."

"Yes, Sorceress."

Later that evening two crickets flew out of a window on the fifth floor of the tower.

I've missed you so much Jiminy.
Not as much as I've missed you Dellia.

I've tried so hard to take back control but she is getting stronger.

How?

She's...she's feeding on the life force of others, taking their souls.

Lurline preserve us! The more souls she takes the more difficult it will be to defeat her.

I am so sorry I brought you to this Jiminy.

I brought myself here, Dellia. I will get her out of you...no matter what it takes. I'll fight from the inside out. Ah I've forgotten how much I loved flying at night!

The OZ looks so beautiful from up here...but it's not the OZ I remember anymore.

It hasn't been for a long time. I'm hoping that Adora can rally enough of the people that they can defeat Bastinda's human army.

She still has her magic...and her demons.

Az flew down to the ground near a lake and shifted back to her human form and moments later Jiminy appeared beside her and drew her into his arms. "Keep her away as long as you can," he pleaded. "Give me at least one night..."

"She can't come here," Az whispered and kissed him, pulling him down to the grass with her.

Later they lay in each other's arms by the lake gazing up at the sky as the first moon rose over the trees.

"Jiminy, please be careful. If she thinks you're deceiving her..."

"I know...but I have to do something Dellia. The Resistance needs to know what's going on inside that tower and I'm the only one that can do it."

"Then you're going to need some help." She sat up. "Pallux!" she called out.

Jiminy watched as one of the mobat demon markings above her breasts glowed and flew off her chest, the mobat demon bowing his head and tucking in his wings in submission.

"Mistress?"

"Protect my mate Pallux."

"I will, Mistress."

"You've turned one of her demons! This is excellent Dellia, excellent!" he cried.

"Pallux and his mate Perika are loyal to me but we cannot trust Zora. She's been with Bastinda too long. Pallux, you will take any messages Jiminy gives you to Adora Cain of the Resistance army when he cannot deliver them himself."

"Yes, Mistress."

Az pressed her hand against Jiminy's arm, the flesh beneath her hand glowing with the light of her
magic as she placed Pallux's marking on his skin. "Now you can summon him yourself when you need him."

"She's going to wonder where he is."

"No she won't. I'll make certain of that."

"You be careful too Dellia!"

"I will. We should get back...she always takes control before morning."

Their idle time had come to an end.

Bastinda would have no one threaten her position as the undisputed Queen of the OZ including a traveller that resembled the Strogoff descendant now under the control of the dark goddess Alemedia that wandered into the realm through one of her grandfather's portals. Were he freed from Alemedia's Dark One curse, Rumplestiltkin Strogoff had the power to unite his Ozopov and Strogoff kin and restore the balance, sending Bastinda and her mistress back to Ephesis, with no chance to escape and unleash their horror on other realms and worlds. She would not take the chance that this version of him possessed the same abilities and locked him away in the boughs of her tower dungeon.

I should've known there would be no escape, even in another world, Robert MacNamara thought bitterly from inside the iron suit that was a worse prison than any other he'd been in before. This Ozian sorceress was creative with her torture, he had to give her that. The suit was designed to keep him alive but it was sealed with magic meaning only she could open it. She only released him long enough to have him "viewed" by Seers that were half animal and half human with the ability to see the truths one's mind concealed by looking into their hearts. Rumor had it that the Viewer population was becoming extinct because many of them died attempting to read another one of prisoners, a man named Wyatt Cain. Robert didn't want anyone or anything dying for him.

It was after midnight when he heard the door to his cell unlock and a tall, bearded ginger haired man entered the room wearing the gold armor and black leather of the Sorceress's army. The man placed his hand on the front of the iron suit and it opened. Robert sighed. Another mage...and with powers second to those of his mistress. This man had to be the Commander Jiminy Ozopov one of his guards complained about, the sorceress's second in command and lover yet none of them dared cross him in fear that he would kill them without even breaking a sweat. His counterpart in his own world was Jiminy Cricket, a former thief transformed into a cricket by the Blue Fairy to make amends for turning a child's parent into puppets. The cricket would later serve as an advisor to Snow White and this version of him lived a similar life until a travel storm brought him to the OZ the day the Dark Curse was cast. Life in the OZ had hardened the former cricket and being trained in magic made him more terrifying.

"What do you want?" Robert demanded angrily. "Going to have me viewed again?"

"I don't need to. All the answers I need are right there," Jiminy said, pointing to Bobby's chest. "And I could take it out and look at them, if I'm inclined to."

"So do it!" he challenged. "I know all about you. The cricket who lost his conscience the moment he climbed into the sorceress's bed!"

"You know nothing about me!" Jiminy growled. He waved his hand and cast a silencing spell over the cell. "But I know everything about you. You don't belong here."
"That's obvious, dearie but your sorceress seems to like keeping me around. She's wasting her time. I don't have magic. I repel it. She should just let me go and find the version of my brother she wants."

"She already knows where he is."

Robert laughed. "So...you have no idea why she's keeping me here either. Afraid she's gonna replace you with me."

"That will never happen. You're not one of the Guardians of the Balance. I am, at least in this world. But, there is a chance you may be in your own and that is why I have to send you back."

"You're releasing me? This has to be a trick."

"It's no trick Bobby." Jiminy gestured and he tumbled out of the tin suit. "Sorry about that." He reached into his pocket and took out a gold coin. "Take my hand. We don't have much time."

He hesitated.

"Oh for Lurline's sake!" Jiminy grabbed his hand and teleported them into the forest. He pressed the coin into the other man's palm. "Over that hill is a village. Look for the blue smoke coming out the chimney and tell the woman inside Cricket sent you and to give you safe passage out of the OZ."

"You're playing both sides, aren't you?"

"I have to. It's the only chance I have of saving my wife."

"The princess Azkadellia is your wife, isn't she?"

Jiminy nodded sadly. "I can't free her from Bastinda alone. My magic isn't strong enough yet. Nor can I free our Rumplestiltskin from his curse. The Guardians have to be united for that to happen. And it will," he added determinedly.

"I wish you luck. You're gonna need it...Cricket. Maybe I'll see you again when all this is over."

"We can only hope." Jiminy smiled and vanished in a puff of green smoke.

Robert arrived at his destination an hour later, a small cottage at the bottom of the hill. He rapped several times before a woman with silvery blond hair opened the door, an angry teenage boy at her side holding a gun.

"I mean you no harm...."

"I know you don't, Robert McNamara," the woman said softly. "Come inside, quickly. Jeb, lock the door!"

"Who is he, Mother?"

"A lost soul," Adora murmured.

"I was told to tell you that Cricket sent me and to give you this for safe passage out of the OZ." He placed the coin in the woman's palm. "But...how do you know my name?"

"Come outside with me and we'll talk."
Bobby shook his head. This place and these people were stranger by the minute. He followed her outside hoping she would make sense of the strangeness he'd encountered from the moment he arrived in this world.

"Okay, we're outside now how do you know my name? I wasn't even in this realm long before I was captured by the sorceress."

"Because I am more than just a Resistance leader. My true name is Ozmalita."

He'd heard that name mentioned a few times during his confinement. Ozmalita Diosa was the servant angel to their goddess Lurline, punished to live as a mortal for marrying the Guardian Wyatt Cain and having his child though he was meant to marry to the deceased Princess Dorothea, Azkadellia's younger sister. She was now the leader of the Resistance movement against the Sorceress's reign, her many victories bringing many screams of rage within the walls of the tower. She always seemed to be one step ahead of the Sorceress but no one could figure out why. Her attempts to root out the spy within her inner circle proved fruitless.

"That clears up a few things. But how can you get me out of here without your powers?"

"This coin Jiminy gave you will summon a storm that can take you back to your own world." She tossed it into the ground, a large funnel cloud forming in front of them. "Once you're inside think of the place you want to be and you will go there. Quickly...before it fades!" she ordered over the howling winds.

"Commander! Our scouts are reporting travel storm activity near the fields of the Papay!" Jiminy looked up from the book he was reading and scowled. Zero was the last face he wanted to see that evening.

"That's impossible. We've confiscated the machines that create the tokens. You had too much ale at DeMilo's place again or have been overindulging in the Wonderland vapors! And haven't I told you I don't want you in my sight?"

"But…"

"Zero, will you stop wasting my time and GET BACK TO YOUR POST!"

"I know what I heard and I'm going to check it out."

"You'll do no such thing! I'll go and if I found out you've wasted my time you're going to be spending the next three weeks as a guest of the Papay when I put you on guard duty!"

Zero cringed. A Papay runner would tear a man apart in less than thirty seconds if it wanted him for his dinner. All of the guards stationed there wore special charms to protect them from the creatures but he knew Commander Ozopov would conveniently forget to give him one if he sent him there. It was no secret his superior despised him and the feeling was mutual.

"The Sorceress should…"

"I'll make a report to her when I return." Jiminy vanished.

Zero cursed silently when he found himself unable to move or speak.

Figures the bastard would freeze and mute me before he left.

He had no doubt he would have a memory lapse too. Ozopov was notorious for those, especially
when he saw anyone as a threat to his position with the Sorceress. He couldn't wait to see the day when the former cricket had his wings clipped and reduced to being a grunt like the rest of them.

The travel storm vanished as Jiminy teleported to Adora's safe house in the woods.

"You were right to send him to me, Jiminy. He needs to get back to his own world and be reunited with his brother but it won't be easy."

"Everyone needs a family." His fingers touched the tear shaped amber around his neck, the memorial to his precious daughter Ambrosia murdered as soon as she was born by the man now immobile in his study.

She patted his shoulder. "She will be returned to you when Azkadellia is freed from Bastinda's control."

"And when she is, the man who killed her will find himself at the end of a rope!" Jiminy growled. "You don't know how many times I've wanted to kill him myself!"

"You cannot darken your heart, Jiminy. Justice will be done...in time."

"Not soon enough for me. I need to be getting back."

"Be careful Jiminy."

"You too Lita."

The Sorceress was waiting for him when he returned.

"There's been an escape."

"An escape? We have no prisoners I'm aware of Sorceress. And I left Zero here....he reported travel storm activity but the storm was gone by the time I arrived."

"Some travel storm tokens were taken from one of our bases near Finaqua," she said angrily. "We must tighten the patrols. The Resistance is seeking allies from other realms."

"I'll order Lannot to get it done right away. But you haven't answered my question. Who was in the dungeon?"

"A Guardian."

"A Guardian? But that's impossible."

"Not one from this world. Jiminy. Another world, and this one is resistant to magic. He would have been the perfect weapon for us."

"Sorceress, we don't need outside assistance. We have the situation under control here."

"Still it never hurts to have an ace in the hole, does it?"

"No, it doesn't."

"No matter. We will find another way to put down this rebellion."

Try all you want bitch. You'll never succeed, he thought as the Sorceress's control weakened and the woman he loved stood in her place.
"Dellia," he murmured and took her into his arms.

"I'll try to keep her away...as long as I can." She laid her head on his chest. "I hope Bobby can find his way back home."

"So do I Della, so do I. Thank the goddess you were able to tell me about him and I could get him out of here before she followed through on turning him into a weapon against us."

"She would have used one of the other two Dark One daggers."

He nodded. "We have to continue our search and find them before she does."

"And neutralize them Jiminy," Az reminded him. "You know what price is required to do so."

He nodded. "To sacrifice themselves to protect those they love. But their hearts have to be divided before they can do that, the portions not tainted by darkness held in the custody of a fellow Guardian. You and I both know Alemedia wants to put those other two daggers in your sister's and Cain's hands. If they cannot overcome the pain from their pasts they'll destroy each other and release her. And we know the hell all the realms will be subjected to if she is freed."

"And ours will be destroyed…"

"If we don't restore the Balance before the final eclipse we'd better pray to Lurline Alemedia is still trapped in a vessel when this world is destroyed because that will be the only way we'll have to defeat her."

"I'm hoping Bobby's world has a much better fate than ours is destined to."

"We can't lose hope Dellia. All we can do is our best to protect everyone we love. And protect the other realms. If Bobby's world has anyone like Alemedia he must be prepared."

Bastinda was furious over the loss of her secret weapon but she still had others at her disposal...if she could find them.

"Sorceress?" Jiminy asked when he entered her chambers after she'd finished a conference with her dark mistress on the other side.

"There are two other items we must search for along with the Emerald of the Eclipse but this information will go no further than this room. Do I make myself clear Jiminy?"

"Yes Sorceress. May I ask which items you are referring to?"

A book appeared on the table before them. "This is one of only two copies of the Book of the Ancients in existence. The other is in the possession of the Goddess's current vessel. What we seek are these." She turned to a page showing three daggers identical to the one Rumplestiltskin was known to wield. "These daggers allow our mistress to walk the mortal realm in the body of a vessel. They must be destroyed before the final eclipse."

"Why?"

"Once we destroy Ephesis the Goddess will walk the mortal realm in her own right. If she is still trapped in a vessel's body when Ephesis is destroyed she will die."

"Sorceress, how will we be able to destroy Ephesis?"

"By destroying the emerald Lurline has tethered her life force to."
"The emerald is hidden and our searches have turned up nothing. You've had the strongest viewers in the realm attempt to read Queen Lavinia and none of them have been able to breach her cloaking spell. You've even had them read Cain and gained nothing but more bodies to bury."

Constructs to bury, Jiminy thought. Along with constructs of people in villages his forces raided, the real people tucked away safely in one of Adora's camps after he'd warned them himself or sent Pallux in his stead. The mobat demon had been true to his word that he would serve his new master faithfully as had his mate who would be the one to bring Jiminy information on plans the Sorceress did not share with him.

"The emerald must be recovered."

"And it needs to be in your possession while you still occupy the body of Princess Azkadellia or it will be useless," he reminded her.

"I am aware of that Jiminy."

"I meant no offense Sorceress."

"I know you didn't. You are the most loyal of my Longcoats which is why I trust you and only you with these plans."

"What would you have me do?"

"Take a company of men and begin your search in the Southern realm beginning with Finaqua."

"General Lannot searched it years ago."

"I believe he was not as thorough as you will be."

"Of course Sorceress. I will do my best."

"I know you will." She smiled. "You can begin in the morning."

"Thank you Sorceress. Good night."

"Jiminy….Jiminy…wake up!" he heard an urgent voice whisper and shake his shoulder later on that night.

"Dellia!" he cried, sitting up and throwing his arms around her.

"I don't have much time…." Az said sadly.

He sighed. "I know. She always breaks through too soon." He kissed her gently. "You know what she wants me to do."

"Jiminy, those daggers do have to be found and neutralized but if Aramon's prophecy comes true and Alemedia is not contained within a vessel before Ephesis is destroyed…"

"There'll be no stopping her," he finished gravely. "But Rumplestiltskin's blade will need to be neutralized as well."

"That will happen only when he is ready to banish her."

"Will he ever be?" Jiminy asked bitterly. "He's kept the curse for centuries."
"Because he needed to as I need to contain Bastinda. My sister…"

"I hope she's matured on the other side or this realm is damned!"

"Jiminy…"

"I am sorry Dellia. I know she was a child but she was far too rebellious and the prophecy of the final eclipse will come to pass."

"If you find the daggers…"

"I'll know what to do. Stay with me tonight."

"I want to…but what if I...what if she breaks through?"

"She won't," he said firmly and laid her down. "Not this time."

She wrapped her arms around him and drew him closer. "I love you Jiminy..."

"You know I love you Dellia, that bitch be damned!"

Az awoke just before dawn watching her husband sleep, wishing she could make time stop as it had on the other side and relive the previous night for the next ten years. They were not able to afford many nights like those as long as Bastinda held a tight grip on her soul. The loss of their child had weakened her resolve slightly but losing Jiminy would destroy it completely.

And send him away was what the OZ was asking her to do.

She leaned over and kissed his cheek. He groaned and opened one eye. It was always difficult for him in the mornings he awoke with her, fearing Bastinda would be in control again.

"Sorceress?" he inquired sleepily.

"It's me," Az whispered and crawled back into bed with him.

"Dellia..."

"Oh I wish we could make time stop like it is on the other side," she moaned.

"I wish we could too...it's hell when she takes over."

"Jiminy...it's time," she said gravely. He tensed.

"No...Dellia, not now...hold her back for a little longer..." he pleaded.

"I don't mean that...it's time for you to go...to the Other Side."

"No...don't do this to me. Not now."

She waved her hand and dressed them before she teleported them into the forest and tossed a travel storm token onto the grass.

"I AM NOT leaving you!" Jiminy shouted over the rising winds.

"You have to," she sobbed. "It's the only way. Rumplestiltskin's heir must be protected and prepared to help his grandfather break the curse and so does his bondmate. And DG has to be brought back. There's no one else that can do this but you."
"YOU need me too! I'm all you have left here! Dellia, please send someone else. My place is here with you! I AM NOT leaving you at her mercy!" he insisted.

"We have no choice. This is the will of the OZ."

"The will of the OZ be damned!"

"You cannot think like that. We've already lost too much for defying her will."

"I know," he croaked, his thoughts turning to their child.

"You will return and we will free me from her...together. And then we'll free the OZ," she vowed and stepped back, reaching into her chest and removing her heart.

"My true mate shall you reveal
Let him see as I see, feel as I feel
Two hearts as one
Not even in death will this bond be undone!" she chanted.

The organ began to glow and divided itself into two pieces, one resting in the palm of her hand, the other hovering above it glowing white. She cupped the floating piece in her other hand and kissed it tenderly. "Jiminy Ozopov," she murmured and released it. The piece floated to where he stood and floated into his chest.

"My true mate shall you reveal
Let her see as I see, feel as I feel
Two hearts as one
Not even in death will this bond be undone!" he chanted as he pulled his own heart out, leaving one piece in his hand, the other hovering above it glowing white. He cupped it in his hand and kissed it. "Azkadellia Ozopov," he said lovingly and released it. It floated over to where she stood and disappeared into her chest. Seconds later the pieces in their palms vanished.

He took her in his arms. "When I go there, I won't remember you or Amber. I'll be the man I was before I became a cricket and I'd rather die than go back to that!"

She shook her head. "But it will be the perfect cover for you to do what you need to do. Your strength will come back when you need it."

"Not soon enough."

"And you won't be alone. Pallux!" she called out. The mobat demon's marking began to glow and he flew off Jiminy's arm. "Take him with you."

"He's a mobat demon from the Ozian hell realm. He can't go to the land without magic looking like that!" Jiminy gestured and a Dalmatian now stood between them. "And you need a new name." He smiled at his bondmate. "I'll call him Pongo."

Az giggled. "How did I know you were going to do that?"

"Because you love that cartoon as much as I do. Someday all of the people in the OZ will
experience the wonders of that land as we do…in peace. I'm not giving up on that dream Dellia."

"Neither am I…You have to go….she's fighting to take control again and I can't let her see you're her enemy!"

He took her in his arms and kissed her passionately. "I love you Azkadellia Ozopov. Never forget that. And I WILL find my way back to you once I wake up from this curse."

"I'll be counting the days. I love you Jiminy. Always…"

Jiminy tightened his grip on Pongo's leash as the funnel cloud approached.

"I am Jiminy Ozopov, husband of Azkadellia, father of Ambrosia…I am the Heart of the North Guardian…I am..." he chanted and closed his eyes when the cloud began to pull him in, the construct in Storybrooke that was once Archie Hopper vanishing as if he'd never existed and returning to Oz, transforming into the man it had been created to imitate, asleep near the Fields of the Papay.

Storybrooke, Maine

2001

"You ahh...wanted to see me?" Archie asked when he walked into Regina's home office.

"I did."

"Well, if this is about Pongo's dog license, I believe it's still up to date."

"This has nothing to do with your dog."

"Madam Mayor, are you all right?"

"I'm okay.

"Excuse me for saying so, but you don't seem okay."

"I don't tolerate that sort of bluntness. I'm the Que...the mayor."

"I am a therapist. That's why you asked me here, isn't it? What is bothering you? What are you feeling?"

"Nothing. I'm feeling nothing."

"If I were to guess, I would say you're a driven woman and sometimes that can leave a hole."

"A what?"

"A hole. An emptiness. There's more to life than work. Maybe that's why you feel dissatisfied."

"I am not dissatisfied. I love my life."

"What's the point if you've got no one to share it with?"

"There's that bluntness again."

"Has there ever been a time in your life when you haven't felt this way?"
"When that little boy visited. Owen."

"A child. That can bring so much meaning."

Oz (The Outer Zone)

Ten years prior to the Double Eclipse

Ten years prior to the end of the Dark Curse

"...Sorceress...I regret to tell you that Commander Ozopov is dead." General Lannot informed her when he entered her study.

"What?" Bastinda asked angrily. "Are you certain?"

He motioned and Zero and another guard carried a litter into the study. Bastinda lifted the sheet and gazed down at the body, her eyes red with rage when she saw the bullet holes in his chest.

"Who did this? I'll have their hearts!"

"Resistance fighters Sorceress," Zero lied hoping that his mistress would be unable to tell that he'd done the deed himself and took great pride in it. He found his former superior asleep near the fields of the Papay and wondered how it was possible that luck was on his side this day of all days. Killing the Commander and taking his place at the head of the Sorceress's army had been his dream for years only he knew killing the bastard would not be a simple task. Except on this day it had been simple. One down, one to go and getting rid of Lannot would not be easy either.

"Prepare him for burial," she commanded through gritted teeth. "He is to be buried with all honors."

"Yes, Sorceress," Lannot said and motioned for the men to pick up the litter. As they carried the body out of the room Az's lips curved into a devious smile. Her husband was safe and the witch was none the wiser. Now he would prepare the East Guardian for his destiny.

Storybrooke, Maine

Ten years prior to the breaking of the Dark Curse

Rumple was standing at the counter looking over his ledger, tapping his fingers on the counter when the door to his shop opened and Regina walked in. He knew this wasn't a social call...it never was. She wanted something and he couldn't imagine what it was.

"I need a child Gold, and I need your help."

His eyes widened. Was she insane? He wouldn't touch her even if his life depended on it!

"Well, I'm flattered but uninterested."

"Not like that!" she exclaimed, much to his relief. "I spent all morning talking to adoption agencies. The wait lists are over two years long. But you, Gold, you know how to cut through red tape. And if anyone can work the system and find me a baby, it's you."

"You wish to adopt?"

"Well, don't look so surprised," she said angrily.
"Oh, I'm not. I'm sure you'll make a... well, a mother of some sort."

"Can you help me?"

"Of course I can. But a word of caution. Ask yourself if this is something you're ready for."

"It's something I need."

"Well, that may not be the same thing. I'll get you a child," he promised. "But whether or not that's helping you remains to be seen," he added when she walked toward the door. "When you become a parent, you must put your child first. No matter what."

I'm a good one to talk, he thought bitterly.

"Just find me a baby, Gold," she ordered.

After she left he retreated to his office in the backroom and flipped through the Rolodex on his desk until he found the number he was looking for of a colleague in Boston. They never met in person but Sam Anderson had gotten used to Gold's reclusive behavior and had contacts outside the town that came in handy when Gold needed them...specifically to cut through red tape as Regina had said. Regina had suggested the two of them speak years ago when an issue arose regarding one of Gold's rental properties.

"Hello Sam."

"Been a long time, Gold."

"Yes it has."

"So what crisis does your mayor want you to fix now?" he joked.

"She wants to adopt a baby."

"Are you serious?"

"I'm afraid so."

"From the way you describe her she doesn't sound like the mothering type."

"Perhaps having a child will change her."

Anderson laughed. "Let me know when you wake up from your delusions of grandeur."

"I do owe her a favor and I always repay my debts," Gold reminded him.

"All right...I'll see what I can find out for you. Has she spoken to any agencies?"

"She said the waiting lists are two years long."

"For some, yes but if she's serious we can move things along."

"Excellent."

Regina stopped in every day to check on his progress, furious when he had nothing new to report and it wore on his nerves. He still didn't understand how she could possibly find time to raise a child when she was so wrapped up in her work? He certainly hadn't and it cost him dearly. He was
dead as far as his son was concerned. Finally one of the agencies contacted him with the news that would finally get Regina off his back.

"Madam Mayor...it's Mr. Gold," he said when he called her office. "I'd like you to come over to my shop this afternoon."

"I'll be there!" she said excitedly.

"You have news?" she demanded when she entered the shop later on that day.

"Fate may be on your side. This morning, I, uh, spoke with an agency that had placed a baby boy from Phoenix with a family nearby in Boston."

"With a family? How's that fate?" she asked.

"Because at the last minute, the adoption fell through. It happens." Of course it had taken a bit of money to make it happen but as long as Regina got what she wanted and left him alone, it was worth it.

"So the baby still needs a home?"

"Indeed. As they say, fate appears to be on your side." He handed Regina the folder of information Anderson faxed over to him that morning. "The agency is in Boston," he informed her.

For a while it seemed that Regina was happy with her new baby that she named Henry but then she stormed into his shop on another day with the baby carrier in her hands and a furious expression on her face.

"You knew," she accused.

"Knew what, exactly?" he asked. Now what was she harping on about?

"The child that you located for me in Phoenix... his mother was found in the woods outside of Storybrooke eighteen years ago," she said angrily setting the carrier on the floor.

"What a starling coincidence." And it was.

"Eighteen years ago?!" Regina raged.

"I fear I'm missing the significance. You have to forgive me; my memory is not what it used to be," he said and that was true. There were times when he forgot what day of the week it was.

"Henry's mother was found as a baby on a very significant day. The day this town... this town..."

"This town what?" Nothing significant happened in the town that long ago that he could recall.

"She's important, isn't she? This mother."

"Is she important? I suppose that as much as she gave birth to your son," he pointed out wishing she would either get to the damned point or get the hell out. He wasn't in the mood for her hysterics today.

"You... you built this into this whole thing, didn't you? You made this happen because the mother... she's..."

"She's what, madam mayor? This mother you seem to fear so much."
"Oh, you really know nothing of what I'm talking about."

"Well, I know you're upset, that much is clear." And looking like she was about to have a nervous breakdown. Ah well, it happened to the best of them.

"You told me I'd come to you. That I'd have a hole in my heart. And... you want this to end. This town. What I built. You want to destroy it all by bringing the mother back! That's why you did all this!" she cried.

"Do you know you have dark circles under your eyes? A weary tremble in your voice. Poor thing. Look what motherhood has done to you," he said a bit tauntingly. If she wanted to play games, so be it. He was beginning to enjoy seeing her come ungled. It was about time.

"Play dumb all you want, you little imp. You should know who you're dealing with by now. I sacrificed everything to build this life! And nothing will tear me away from my revenge! Henry goes back to Boston! Tomorrow! " she yelled when she picked up the baby and walked out.

Gold shook his head. "And you need to check yourself into the hospital," he muttered.

Over in the hospital's basement the girl known as Lacey sat on a cot and looked up at the small window in her cell, asking herself the same question she did every day. Why was she there? She hadn't done anything wrong as far as she remembered and who was the woman who always came to see her. All she would do was open the small door and smile at her, a smile that sent shivers down the girl's spine. And the things she would say...

"He doesn't remember anything...not even you. How does it feel? I can tell you how it feels to me...wonderful!" the woman gloated.

"Who are you? Why do you keep coming here to torment me?" Lacey asked.

"Because I can...and neither of you can do a damned thing about it. You had so much hope that you could save him, that you could break his curse. Didn't quite work out, did it? He tossed you out of his life like trash. He was never going to change, not even for you...and he's more useful to me without you distracting him."

"What are you talking about?" Lacey cried. "Go away!"

The woman laughed. Lacey took off her shoe and threw it at the door.

"She's acting out again!" the woman called out.

"No...NO!" Lacey screamed as several orderies came into the room along with the nurse. She held a syringe in her hands.

"Lacey, how many times do we have to have this discussion?" the nurse asked her. "We don't throw things at visitors."

"Keep her away from me!" she begged.

"Restrain her," the nurse commanded.

The girl screamed as an image flashed before her eyes. She could see herself, although she was dressed in what looked like clothes from the Middle Ages being held down on a wooden table while men dressed in red robes surrounded her, screaming in terror.
"Lurline, our goddess, our mother and Aramon, our father, in your mercy, guide us so that we may cleanse this child of the Dark One's evil taint and show her back to the light."

She could see someone else watching and to her horror it looked like her father.

"Papa, don't let them do this to me...please!"

He ignored her. "It's for the best, my girl."

The last thing she saw before the sedative took effect was a man with gold and grey flecked skin and repillian eyes and herself leaning forward, pressing her lips to his.

Regina left the asylum, Belle's terrified screams music to her ears.

I'll never stop fighting for him!

"You won't be able to fight for someone you can't remember, now can you?" Regina asked no one in particular and laughed again as she drove away.

She took the baby back to the adoption agency the following morning as she'd promised but the agent, suspecting Regina was having second thoughts left her in the room with Henry for a moment.

"Oh, Henry. You deserve better than me. You truly are the only one in all the realms who believes in me."

"Would you like me to hold him so we can get the last written signature?" the agent said when he reentered the room.

"No, that won't be necessary. Henry is my son. The best thing for Henry is to stay with a mother who will never let go of him. Ever again." She grabbed her bags and left the office.

"I'm afraid there's been a hiccup. You'll have to go back on the waiting list. The mother changed her mind. I'm sorry," he said to the two men waiting outside his office. They were John and Michael Darling, two young men from a different place, a different time and pawns in a frightful game.

"We lost him?"

"Yes, but I can put you back on the list..."

"Pan will not be pleased." Michael Darling said to his brother.

"Which is why we don't give up. We will get that child." John Darling said angrily.

Before Regina arrived home she placed a call to Archie, asking him if he would mind stopping over at the house to meet the child.

"Regina, I'm just so pleased. I'll admit I was concerned. And I'm just so... glad the way things worked out." he said when he arrived.

"There's just one problem, Dr. Hopper. I'm afraid, no, I'm... dreading... that Henry's birth mother will wake up one day full of regret over leaving him and come here and take him back."

"Wasn't it a closed adoption? You're both perfectly anonymous to each other, right?"
"Yes, but, I'm worried about something bigger than the laws at play. Fate. Destiny."

"It seems to me you've made your own destiny."

"But there's still someone out there who can destroy it."

"Regina, if you keep worrying about the future, you'll never enjoy the present. This child has brought something to you—love—revel in that. Revel in being a mother. I would if I were a father."

"Perhaps you will be...someday," she said without a trace of malice. Though he was subject to her will like everyone else in the town there was no need to make him miserable...yet.

"Perhaps." the doctor agreed.

The Tower

Oz (The Outer Zone)

Az's fingers traced a pattern on the amber ring she wore on her finger that matched the pendant her husband wore around his neck but would not recall its significance for another ten years. "You did revel in being a father my darling...for the brief time our Ambrosia was with us. But protect Henry, love Henry as if he were your own son and teach him how to anchor his mother to her humanity. Pan will come for him and she may be one of the only people who can stop him."
Neverland

Many years ago…

Neverland was an anomaly in their world, the only realm not created by the Ozian goddess Lurline and done so with only the best intentions, a safe haven for the unloved and the unwanted; the seeds planted in dreams, hopes and desires the water and sunlight to make them grow and form the large island it now was. Only animals inhabited it now, the children would grow into adults and forget their childhood paradise but they left parts of their souls behind, all of them merging together to create a caretaker in the form of a shadow that possessed the wisdom of the ages. The shadow never expected one of the former child residents to return as an adult but when one did; neither Neverland nor its residents would ever be the same. Malcolm McDermott possessed one ability the others that visited did not, magic that was not of their world. Magic from other worlds was fiercely unpredictable and there was the chance that it would do more harm than good if used there.

The outlander took control of the island and began to transform it from a refuge to his own version of the hell realm Ephesis where he was absolute ruler but all magic came with a price and his was that his youth would only last as long as there were sands in the large hourglass inside Skull Rock. The second price was that Pan could not be away from Neverland long. The longer he was separated from his source of power, the weaker he would be but he'd gotten bored living on the island with only the shadow for company.

"There has to be a way I can stay young forever without all this," Pan said angrily.

"There is but obtaining it will be difficult," said the shadow.

"What is it?"

"The only way you can retain your youth and be able to cross realms without restriction is to take the heart of one who is descended from Lurline herself, a pureblood with a pure heart."

"A Strogoff? The last one was killed years ago and now my son has her dagger according to my spies."

"A Strogoff still lives and has continued the bloodline."

"Who is it?"

"Your son."

Pan scoffed. "My son? A Strogoff? Impossible! His mother was just some runaway I tumbled after having too many pints of ale."

"Your son's mother was Lilliana Strogoff and now Rumplestiltskin's son Baelfire is the last of his line but he is not a pureblood."

"So my son's heart is the one I need."

"His heart is tainted by darkness from being under Alemedia's control. No, one of his descendants
will have the pure heart required to complete the spell."

"Then I'll just have to find him."

Though Pan was not a patient person by nature, he knew he would have to be to ensure his own survival. He also blessed the line of Scots-Irish witches and warlocks he descended from that gave him the ability to look into the future, a gift he hadn't tried to use before for the words the shadow had spoken to him were true. His great-grandson would be the key to his immortality. All he needed to do now was set the events in motion that would bring the child to him. He also blessed the dark goddess who held his son under her heel; making him abandon his son, just as Pan had done to Rumple. A lonely, lost soul would be much easier to manipulate. Now Baelfire was back in his home world, living with a family named the Darlings. Their two boys Jonathan and Michael often came to Neverland in their dreams but for his scheme to succeed, he would have to make it appear as if he wanted them to become permanent residents, not their new 'brother'.

Now there were over a dozen boys living on the island, all brought there courtesy of a former royal naval officer turned pirate Killian Jones, now using the name Captain Hook. Hook had his own issues with the Dark One, the death of his wench or so he told the master of Neverland. That wench also happened to be Baelfire's mother. Pan couldn't help feeling just a tinge of pride at that revelation. It ensured that Hook would bring Baelfire to him the moment he showed up in Neverland. He also kept a supply of rum available to make the pirate a little more compliant when he had an attack of conscience, which wasn't often.

During one of Hook's excursions into the Enchanted Forest he brought back an exiled and powerless fairy named Tinkerbell. At first he thought he could use her to his advantage too but the fairy wanted to brood in private. He didn't care as long as she stayed out of his way…until he had a vision that she would be essential to his plans to obtain the heart of Lurline and Aramon's last descendant. He also made a few excursions to the Outer Zone, his last one almost ending in a death sentence if Cora hadn't brokered a deal with the Sorceress to release him.

He sent the Shadow to England to visit the Darlings and bring the girl Wendy to Neverland, to make her believe the island was a paradise only she could hear the anguished cries of some of the Lost Boys who longed to return to their families only this was no longer possible in a realm where time stood still and anyone who attempted to escape would be killed by the shadow, their spirits haunting the place known as Dark Hollow. Now the Shadow wanted one of her brothers to live there, forever.

"H…how did you escape?" Bae asked her.

"He let me go. Because he didn't want me. He wanted a boy. He's coming back tonight to take one of my brothers in my place. You said magic was bad, and you were right, Bae. It's going to destroy my family."

"No. I won't let anything bad happen to you or this family."

Pan chuckled as he gazed through his seeing globe. "It's time for a family reunion, Baelfire."

Captain Hook couldn't believe his luck. The boy he and his crewmates fished out of the sea was none other than Baelfire….Milah's boy…and the son of the Dark One. He was also the key to Hook's survival on Neverland. He hid the boy from Pan's little army at first, wanting to try to convince the boy to sail off with him as his mother had done but eventually his own desire for self-preservation had gotten the best of him and he put the word out that there was a boy on his ship, possibly the one Pan was looking for.
Bae glared at him as he was being taken away. "You hated my father so much, you never even realized you're just like him!" he snarled. The boys threw a sack over his head and rowed away in their small boat. Once they reached the shore, he was dragged off the boat and onto the beach where the sack was lifted off his head.

"Is this the boy?" the blond haired leader demanded of another who was looking at a piece of parchment.

"No it's not."

"Congratulations boy. It's your lucky day. You get to live. Put him with the rest!" The blond boy shoved Bae to two others. They dragged him down the beach to a small camp where a dozen other boys were living. He recognized a few of them from the group that went missing shortly after his father found them with Pan.

Baelfire didn't know how much time went by while he was living in Neverland and when he wasn't being forced to run errands for Pan, he passed the time by drawing on the walls of the cave he made his home and trying to devise a plan to escape and get back to the Darlings. They'd given him the home he missed so much…and a real family. There were so many times when he wished his father hadn't taken that dagger. It had changed him and not for the better. The only friend he had on the island was an exiled fairy named Tinkerbell. The two of them would sometimes spend hours talking about everything that was on their minds. Tinkerbell had been exiled trying to help--the Queen of the Enchanted Forest change her life for the better but the Blue Fairy was convinced Regina was beyond saving, stripping Tinkerbell of her wings and her powers for disobeying her orders. Tinkerbell was content to stay on Neverland but she knew Bae didn't belong there.

"There is a chance you can escape Bae, but it is dangerous," she cautioned.

"I don't care how dangerous it is. I don't want to be here anymore. I hate Pan and I hate what he makes us do…steal….make all the kids the Shadow takes from their homes believe this is such a great place when it's all a lie. I heard him talking to Felix. He's looking for a specific kid, one who has the Heart of the Truest Believer. He's gonna take that kid's heart and make himself immortal! I hope he never finds him."

"So do I Bae because that child is a descendant of the goddess herself and the powers of a deity in the hands of someone like Pan…" She cringed.

"The Shadow is the only thing that leaves Neverland…if I can capture it; I can use it to get me outta here."

"Please be careful Bae. You know what will happen if you fail. He tells those other boys it's their shadows he rips from their bodies but its more than that…it's their life force he's taking."

"How is he able to do that?"

"I wish I knew. It's a power only the four Guardians of the Balance should have."

"Is it possible he is…?"

"NO! Absolutely not! The Guardians can only be those of the Strogoff and Ozopov bloodlines. That is the proper order. It must be something here that is giving him these abilities." Tink paced the floor of the cave. "There is something else….the time stillness spell Pan cast will not hold once you cross back into that other world."

"What do you mean, Tink?"
"How many years have passed since you have been here?"

"I don't know."

"Once you cross over, you will become the age you should have been in this land. That is the price you will pay if you leave….and that is why many others have been too terrified to leave….too much time has passed."

"I don't care how old I get…anything is better than this!" he said determinedly.

"Then you must go to Dark Hollow," she said softly.

His plan was a simple one. He would trap the Shadow inside a coconut shell that he used to use to replicate starlight on the ceiling of his cave. He loved gazing up at the stars with his father when they were still the poor, crippled spinner and his adoring son. But the Dark One and dark magic had taken everything away from him. Part of him never wanted to see the stranger his father had become again and another wished there was some way he could go back to the good man Bae remembered.

Later that night he made the treacherous journey to Dark Hollow, unaware that Pan was observing his every move through his hourglass that sometimes functioned as a seeing device. It was a clever little trick he learned from a brief visit to Oz during the reign of the dark witch Bastinda. She was in power once again and in control of one of the four guardians. He didn't dare try to cross into Oz again, neither Bastinda nor her dark mistress were women to be trifled with. It was why he never forced his son into a battle. Alemedia could blast him into the void with a thought. But….if he managed to get hold of the heart of a descendant of a deity and become one himself….all the better.

He gave it little thought at that time, but Bae's quest to capture the Shadow was not as difficult as he believed it would be. He forced the being to mold itself into the fabric of his tunic and flew through the barrier that divided their world from the one Wendy called Earth and as Tink warned him, the moment he passed through his appearance began to change from a boy's to a man's and he was not in the place the Darlings lived. He looked up and saw a sign reading PORTLAND, 5 MILES.

I learned how to survive in this world once…I can do it again, he thought confidently and walked into his destiny for three months later he would meet the woman who would change his life forever, Emma Swan.

Oz (The Outer Zone)

Six months prior to the double eclipse

Two months prior to the breaking of the Dark Curse

What are you wearing?" the warden sniggered as he gazed at the long white satin gown his prisoner wore in place of the shirt and pants that had become her custom attire as leader of the resistance.

"My wedding dress, for today I fullfill my marriage vows...til death do us part." Adora answered calmly.

"Crazy bitch," he muttered. "You'll stain it with piss when you see the sword coming to take your head off."

"I'm not afraid to die."
"We'll see," he taunted.

Two guards flanked behind her and led her outside to where the scaffold stood. As she passed through the crowds, she could hear the people passing along messages of sympathy and mercy to her. Once she was standing on the scaffold, Zero stepped up to her, a satisfied grin on his face.

"Adora Kantrine Cain; you have been found guilty of high treason against her Majesty, Azakdellia, Queen of the Outer Zone. You are hereby sentenced to death. Do you have any last words before your sentence is carried out?"

"I do."

"What can you possibly have to say, bitch?" Zero hissed at her. Adora smiled and faced the crowd, feeling their support as the gazed up at her, many of them weeping.

"The executioner has come
And my time in this realm is done
Good Ozian people, never fear
For hope of freedom is near
There is a legend that has rarely been told
Of the saviors of the OZ, two young, two old
Two lost in a storm, two asleep behind a cold dark wall
Soon they will be reunited through love, the strongest magic of all!

Zero shook his head, wondering what Cain saw in that woman. She was obviously a lunatic. Most people when they had last words would go on and on about how sorry they were for what they did but not this one. Oh no. She stands up there and recites some idiotic poem yet the people hung on her every word.

"Idiot," Zero mumbled.

Adora kneeled down on the scaffold, her long skirts fanning out around her, holding her body straight. One of the guards brought the blindfold over to her. She motioned for him to take it away. She could hear Zero's footsteps behind her and the scrape of metal as he removed his sword from its sheath. She pictured her husband's face, still handsome in his magic induced slumber.

It won't be long now. Soon you'll awaken and take back what you've lost.

Then she thought of the son their love had given them and the child they lost. The resistance would never die as long as a Cain was there to lead them and it was her hope that father and son would be reunited and lead them to their final victory. She could feel the blade of the sword approaching. Keeping the faces of her son, her lost child and husband in her mind and remembering the precious time they had together brought a smile to her lips.

When the blade struck, the crowds did not remember Zero's demented laughter as he held up his prize, the head of the resistance leader, they remembered a brave woman kneeling on the scaffold in the same dress she took her wedding vows in, her head held high and a beautiful smile on her lips as she waited to meet the man she loved in the afterlife.
They also took to heart the words she spoke for she was the granddaughter of Alana Kantrine, the most powerful soothsayer in all of the OZ and if she said a savior was coming, they had to believe. Until that day they would fight on in her honor and in honor of those who had fallen before her.

"Sir?"

Jeb Cain glanced up at Artie Dagon. After his mother's death Jeb had taken command of the Western Guild resistance force and Dagon now served him as faithfully as he'd served Adora Cain.

"Yes?"

"We've had news from our spies at the tower."

"What news?"

"We've discovered that the power source for the machine the witch is building is a brain with the code name Ambrose and they are mining large quantities of mauritanium."

"Make sure they send word to us immediately with any updates." Jeb sighed and wished Commander Ozopov were still alive. He'd taken greater risks than any of the other spies the Resistance had in place in the Tower but his information was always legitimate and came to them much sooner.

"Yes sir. And sir...there are two escorts from the Temple of Lurline requesting an audience with you."

"Send them in."

Artie Dagon returned with a male and female dressed in white robes, both carrying swords. They bowed to Jeb, the blades of their swords thrust into the ground.

"Leave us." he ordered Dagon. The man left the tent. "Greetings and rise, Son and Daughter of Light," Jeb greeted two of his great grandmother's faithful protectors. "What are your names?"

"I am Medira Benu and this is my mate, Callux," the woman greeted. "Greetings Master Cain. We come bearing a message from Her Excellency, Alana Kantrine. She requests your presence at the temple at once."

"I'll come. Follow me," he said and the three of them left the tent in search of Dagon. He found him holding a meeting with the rest of the soldiers in the troop, discussing the latest news from their spies. "Artie, I'm going to be away for a few days. See what else our spies can find out about that machine. In the meantime, tighten the patrols."

"Yes sir."

Once he was on his horse, Medira and Callux Benu took their positions on either side of him. The Sons and Daughters of Light had been the protectors of the High Priestesses of the OZ from the beginning of time. Now their mission was to help protect their current priestess's only living descendant, her great-grandson, Jebediah Cain.

"We grieve the loss of your mother and father with you, young Son of Light," Medira said softly. "They were both very brave souls."

"Thank you, Medira," Jeb said sadly.
"Know that you are not alone in this world. We, the Sons and Daughters of Light pledge our loyalty to you as we do to your sainted parents and our own Priestess, Mistress Alana." Callux spoke up.

Jeb chuckled. "My father always thought you guys were crazy."

"That is because he did not understand his destiny," Medira explained.

"You still think he's alive, don't you?"

"He is the Dragon. A dragon does not back down from a fight. If he is wounded he will rest for a while but then his strength will return and he will fight again."

"I wish I could believe that everyone tells me he never would have survived the suit. No one ever has."

Medira and Callux looked at each other and shook their heads. The dragonspawn's heart had turned cold from years of battle and devastating loss. Neither he nor his sire had chosen to accept the Oz's will and if they never learned to, both would suffer. The father was already suffering.

The years of the darkness's reign had been terrifying for all the inhabitants of the OZ but for those who served Lurline herself it was even more so. Although they knew the resistance fighters were their allies in their struggle, Medira and Callux still exercised caution as they escorted young Jeb Cain to their underground fortress in the Northern guild.

Alana Kantrine wept as she set eyes on the son of her beloved Adora. Adora had always been such a loving child but when she gazed at Jeb, she saw more of his father in him. The years since Wyatt's capture had been difficult for both of them and had changed Adora and Jeb into fierce warriors. Now that Alana knew Adora was murdered she knew the time had come to prepare her great-grandson to accept his own destiny or perish.

"You would have been proud of her, Nana," Jeb said still using the nickname his mother had given the older woman. "But I don't understand what she said before Zero killed her."

"What did she say, my child?"

Jeb smiled. He would never forget how brave his mother had been as she kneeled on that scaffold wearing her wedding dress. He knew she had to be thinking about his father, him and the brother he never got the chance to see. The words she spoke before the blade of the sword struck played over and over in his mind but he didn't understand what they meant.

"The executioner has come
And my time in this realm is done
Good Ozian people, never fear
For hope of freedom is near
There is a legend that has rarely been told
Of the saviors of the OZ, two young, two old
Soon they will be reunited through love, the strongest magic of all!"

Alana looked away. As she predicted, the princess had survived the darkness's attack years ago and
by severing their bond Wyatt had damned himself to the cruelest of punishments, confinement in
the darkness's lair until his bondmate released him and having to sacrifice his life with Jeb and
Adora.

She'd heard rumors that there was a resistance fighter trapped in one of the tin suits that had been
dragged back to the Sorceress's tower repeatedly to be read by viewers but no matter how hard she
probed, he would not reveal his secrets. Many viewers died in the attempt, not by the fault of the
one being tortured but by the electric prods the alchemist used to make them obey.

Either he had enough magic left in him to put a blocking spell on his heart or there is still a trace
left of the soul of the OZ in Azkadellia that she was able to take control and perform the spell
herself.

It was this possibility that forced her to summon her great-grandson to her. His parents had been
unaware of his purpose for the OZ but she was. She had sensed it in him the day he was born.

"Nana?" Jeb prodded when he noticed that his great-grandmother seemed distracted. "What did
Mother mean when she said all that stuff?"

"Your father is alive, Jeb." she said softly.

"No he isn't." the younger man said bitterly.

"He..."

"No! Do you know how many times over the years I've wanted that to be true? We went back there
Nana. He wasn't there!"

"When did you go back?" she inquired.

"The last time was two years ago," Jeb explained. "And we found nothing...not even a suit. Now
that part of the guild is so heavily guarded we would need a larger army to break through. I'm not
going to let you fill my head with false hopes like you did my mother's!"

"It wasn't false hope!" Alana cried.

"Then why didn't we find him?"

"Because he is the resistance fighter the Sorceress has been torturing but unable to break! When
they saw you getting close to finding him, they moved him." She loved her great-grandson but he
tried her patience as much as his father did. It was a Cain trait.

"If he is Nana, then they probably killed him when they realized they couldn't get anything out of
him. They caught him not long after the war started. What information could he possibly have that
would make them torture him for years?"

"The information the witch wants is in his heart," Alana explained. "You know he succeeded Jeb
Mysticos as the Talon of the Dragon Master. Once that transition began, all of his knowledge and
sorcerery passed to your father. Your father was born one but couldn't use his powers."

"My father was not a sorcerer," Jeb scoffed. "I knew he was a Talon warrior but I never saw him
use magic."

"His powers were not unlocked until just before Princess Dorothis's death."
"What does she have to do with it?"

"She unlocked them by binding herself to him but it is not complete."

"Now I know you're insane! The only time he ever saw her is when he was carrying her coffin to its grave. I know. I was there!"

"He met her before that but he didn't remember it."

"Bullshit!"

"Watch your language, young man!" Alana snapped.

"It is!" the younger man snapped, sounding and looking every inch like his father as his anger took control of him. "You have no idea how much my mother suffered all these years holding onto the hope that my father was still alive...hope you drilled into her. And what happened? She was killed by the same man who killed him! It's not going to happen to me! I'll kill that son of a bitch first." He spun on his heel and walked out of the room.

Alana pressed her hand to her heart and the room began to spin. Medira rushed to her mistress's side and caught her before she fell to the floor. Callux lifted the older woman into his arms and carried her into her bedchamber.

"He has so much anger in him...just like Wyatt..." Alana wept as Callux gently placed her on her bed.

"Yet the dragon's rage can be soothed by the return of what was lost," Medira reminded her. "In two months' time the princess will return and Wyatt will be awakened. Once the dragonspawn sees his sire, it will soothe his anger. Have faith, Mistress. Lurline will help heal the dragons' angry hearts."

Alana smiled up at Medira. "You've served me well over the years. Both of you have," she said, indicating Callux. "As your parents did before you."

"And we would give our last breaths to protect you and yours, Mistress." Callux said softly.

"When Jeb leaves, you must go with him," Alana ordered.

"Mistress, we cannot leave you!" they cried in unison. "We will send our youngest to watch over him since they are the same age." Callux said.

"Are you sure that's such a good idea after what happened...?" Medira asked her spouse.

"They have to learn to deal with each other," Callux explained. "What happened was Xenia's mistake not his. She was not destined to be his bondmate. The OZ has determined that she is to guard him and his destined bondmate."

"That was why you summoned us here, was it not, Mistress?" Medira asked.

"He must be prepared for when his bondmate comes to claim him just as his father must be prepared for when Dorothea comes to claim him because their powers will be unlocked. All four must be at full strength when the final battle comes."

"The double eclipse?" Callux asked.

Alana nodded. She crawled out of bed and walked over to the closet and took out a cloth back that
she handed to Medira. Medira opened it and inside was a gold staff with the image of a sleeping dragon on top of it. "I will give this to Xenia, Mistress."

"Should've known you were the one causing the ruckus," Jeb heard a familiar sarcastic voice say from behind him and turned around to face Xenia Benu, Medira and Callux's youngest daughter.

"Hello to you too, Xenia. It's been awhile."

"Not long enough for me," she said bitterly.

"Still hate me?"

"With every fiber of my being," the girl said angrily. "If I had my sword right now I would cut your heart out but since you don't have one, it would be a waste of my blade's energy."

He sighed. He first met her not long after his father was captured. He and his mother had taken sanctuary in Alana's temple so that his mother could recover from her miscarriage. He and Xenia were the same age and had forged a friendship that had lasted until Xenia had confessed to him two years ago that she'd fallen in love with him. Jeb felt it was best for them to stay friends. Xenia hadn't taken his rejection well.

"Can we just bury what happened in the past and let it stay buried?" he pleaded.

"I would rather bury you!" she growled. "Why are you so damned afraid to let anyone care for you?"

"You know why," he reminded her. "I won't let another woman go through what my mother did all those years."

"So it is much easier for you to subject both of us to a fate far worse than death...to spend this life and the afterlife alone?" Xenia demanded coldly.

"If I have to," he said.

"Unfortunately now you're not going to be alone," Xenia muttered.

"Why?"

"It is now my duty to protect you," Xenia said angrily, every word she spoke feeling like bile in her throat. She handed him a cloth bag. Jeb opened it and took out the silver staff.

"What is this?"

Xenia unsheathed her sword and kneeled, thrusting the blade into the ground. "I pledge my last breath to guard you, Jebediah Cain, Son of Light, Son of the Dragon, Guardian of the East Gate, Bearer of the Staff, and Keeper of Air."

"What the hell..." Jeb breathed.

Xenia smirked. "If you thought your life was hard before, it's gonna get worse like your father's did once he finally found out what he was...if he was even told everything."

"Would you please make some sense here?" Jeb demanded. Xenia returned her sword to its scabbard.

"You are the four Guardians of the Balance. You each represent a point on the compass, have one
of the four elements that you can control and a symbol."

"Which one was my father?"

"Wyatt Cain is Dorothis's bondmate. He guards the West Gate, his element is fire and his symbol is the blade...or sword. Since he is also the Talon of the Dragon Grand Master, his symbol has become the sword he carries."

"He doesn't have his sword, I do!"

"You must return it to its rightful owner."

"I can't. He's dead!"

"There are only two beings that can kill him and she never will..."

"Who?"

"The Princess Dorothis or he will do it himself."

"You're as crazy as the rest of them. She's dead and buried. Let's say for argument's sake she is alive, how can she kill my father?"

"By launching an attack at where his strength lies...his heart. If she breaks his heart, he will lose the will to live."

Jeb shook his head. "My father, even if he was alive, would never let a broken heart bring him down especially if it was the princess doing it. What would give her a reason to break his heart?"

"By betraying their love. Just as his betrayal of their love is lethal to her heart now that they're bonded."

Jeb laughed bitterly. "What would my father see in a girl half his age?"

"What does any girl see in you that makes you worthy of love?" Xenia retorted.

"Answer your own question Xenia. What do you see in me?"

"Bastard," she hissed. "Before you took my heart and trampled on it, I loved you because you have a gentle side but you don't like to show it unless you really trust someone. And we did trust each other completely...once."

"That still doesn't answer how my father and Dorothis would fall in love."

"Watch it happen and you'll understand." Xenia challenged. "But do not interfere with anything having to do with their bond because doing so comes with a punishment and it is terrible one."

"Did my mother know about...?" He still had trouble believing what he was hearing but Xenia had never lied to him in her life, even if she was angry at him.

"Yes. Your father didn't know how to love until he met her. Her task was to teach him how but then she had to surrender his heart when Dorothis came to claim it."

"I guess her dying made that a lot easier," Jeb said sarcastically.

"Not if his heart has not accepted that it can be free to love another." Xenia said. "If that happened,
her spirit must be called on to release it."

"Oh, and how can we do that?"

"We can't. You can. You are the child created from that union and if your mother has not completed her task and released Wyatt's heart from their bond she must be summoned to do so."

"What happens if she doesn't?"

"The memories that he loved another and cannot love again will act as the poison that will slowly kill your father and the princess."

Jeb sat down and buried his face in his hands. "So even if my father is alive, he's going to die again anyway," he asked sadly. "He loved my mother with all his heart, Xenia. He'd never replace her with anyone, even the princess."

"Then the Balance will continue to shift and the prophecy will come to pass," Xenia said sadly.

"What prophecy?"

"The one that can never be spoken." Even as she said these words, Jeb saw her tremble. He shook his head, agreeing with his father that all their lives would be much better without all the magic and superstition. "There's work to be done and time is running out."

Paradise

Ozian Heaven Realm

"...Welcome home sister," Lurline said softly as Adora appeared in her throne room back in her true form. "You've done well."

The younger woman kneeled before her mistress, hiding her agony behind a false smile. She would never reveal it but she'd secretly hoped that Dorothia would fail and Lurline in her mercy would allow Wyatt to stay with her. She'd loved him for centuries yet that mattered little to Lurline. To her he was just another human to use as she saw fit.

"Forgive me Mistress but I wish to be alone," Adora said softly and rose to her feet. Once the doors to her chambers were closed behind her she sank to her knees and burst into tears, crying for herself, her husband and their children, her adult son who would now lead their army and the child she lost.

"My Ozmalita," Lurline said softly as she embraced her.

Adora shoved the goddess away, glaring at her hatefully. "Do you enjoy torturing me so?" she demanded. "Why can I not have a mate?"

"You serve me Ozmalita and no other. Never forget that," the goddess said sternly. "And have you forgotten the chaos that ensued in this realm when I allowed myself to take a lover? The tainted offspring I spawned on him….his twisted visions?"

"So you punish me for your own mistake?" Adora cried.

"Ozmalita..."

"My name is Adora!" Adora screamed.
"Don't you talk back to me!" Lurline yelled.

"Admit it!" Adora hissed. "The only reason why you've never allowed me to keep a lover is because you've wanted me to be as alone and miserable as you've been all these centuries. Well, you've succeeded...again."

"Ozmalita, I..."

"I just want to be alone for now," the angel sobbed brokenly.

Lurline sighed and retreated to her throne room. Once she was alone she allowed her own tears to fall as she thought of the man she once loved.

Ephesis
Ozian Hell Realm
The Realm of the Forgotten

Later that night Adora awoke and reached under her pillow for a pendant that had been given to her centuries ago. She pressed it between her palms and closed her eyes. As the stone heated up her chamber in Paradise vanished and she found herself standing outside a stone fortress in Ephesis that was being guarded by two mobat demons.

"Mistress Ozmalita," one of the demons said as he bowed.

"Hello Braxus," she said. "How is he?"

"His mood has improved now that he knows you've come," the mobat replied as he escorted her inside and opened the door to a cell "Master Aramon, look who has come to visit!"

"Ozmalita," Aramon, the former consort said softly as he longed to embrace the angel he considered a daughter but his shadow form prevented it. "You've been crying, precious. What's wrong?"

"I've lost him again, Papa." she sobbed.

"You knew you would have to darling."

"I know but this time...we were together longer and...I've born his child."

"I should have known," Aramon said bitterly. "And I am assuming your child is the East Gate's replacement if Rumplestiltskin cannot banish Alemedia back here?"

Adora nodded. "He doesn't know it yet."

"Lurline denies the truth. The Final Eclipse will come and if the proper order is not restored before that time, the price will be paid by all. Even if the dagger Rumplestiltskin holds is neutralized, she can still use the other two keys to seek out a vessel to carry her over to that side. She wouldn't dare risk a crossing in her true form."

"What are the other two keys? Surely you have seen them."

"Alemedia is clever. She's cloaked them from my sight."

"Then we must find them and neutralize them or destroy them."
"Only the Guardians can do that, dear heart but there are trials they must face first and it will be up to you to guide Rumplestiltskin through his though he will need my talisman when that time comes."

"Alemedia will never allow him to come here to retrieve it and the lock requires pure hearts from each side of the bloodline to open it."

Aramon smiled. "Then we shall see if the bondmates you have chosen for him and Azkadellia are worthy of such a task and I have every confidence they will be as will the one who will be bound to the East Guardian. Ozmalita my child….it is not your son. This is a truth you must accept. No other must stand at the East Gate but Henry Strogoff. He is has the purest heart of the four and it is to him that our full powers will be bequeathed when he reaches his hundredth birthday. The others will prepare him for that time."

"Then what is Jeb….a decoy then?"

"His duty is protect the East Guardian and his bondmate and he cannot do so if he remains in Oz. Soon he will have to cross over to the other side and return the staff to its rightful owner."

Adora sighed. "There is no chance of changing the order?"

"Ozmalita, have you not suffered enough for defying the will of the OZ?"

"If I help restore the proper order Lurline owes me a debt…and she will pay it!"

Aramon smirked. "Make one last deal with her, my dear. One more chance as a human to find your true love and be close to your son but not as he remembers you."

"It's not what I want but it will have to do," Adora sighed. She embraced the man she loved as a father. I hope to see you again Papu…one last time."

"I will see you…in one form or another….but soon I must return to Mother Russia. My soul wishes to rest beside my beloved sister Elizaveta."

And he would do so when West Guardian's bondmate came to claim his emerald and his talisman.

Storybrooke, Maine

Two months prior to the breaking of the Dark Curse

Thirty days prior to the Double Eclipse

He lived in a grand mansion, had every material possession his heart desired and his mother was the mayor of their town and yet Henry Mills still was not a happy child. He didn't approve of how his mother seemed to enjoy walking all over everyone in the town except for the pawnbroker Mr. Gold. He was the only person the boy observed that his mother actively feared. He was a little intimidated by the older gentleman himself but Mr. Gold was always kind to him when their paths crossed on the streets.

One day Mary Margaret Blanchard, one of his favorite teachers brought by a book she found in her closet in the hopes that it would cheer the boy up. When he opened it and gazed at the beautiful drawing of a couple at their wedding he couldn't help noticing how much the woman looked very much like his teacher and even more surprising, the book claimed this couple was Snow White and Prince Charming. He spent the rest of his lunch break reading. It was not the version of Snow White he was used to seeing when he went over to his friend Grace's house. His mother wouldn't
allow him to watch any fairy tale movies or even read them.

"You don't need to be filling your head with that garbage," she said.

He didn't see any harm in it but he didn't dare disobey her…at least not at home and his mother became increasingly paranoid over his obsession with it that she made him start seeing Doctor Hopper once a week. Henry liked Doctor Hopper but the poor man absolutely refused to accept the truth that he was actually Jiminy Cricket and in a way, he was a bit like Roger Dearly from 101 Dalmatians since he owned a Dalmatian named Pongo and his best friend was none other than Geppetto himself.

His only hope of making everyone believe he wasn't crazy was to find the Savior. He wasn't shocked at all that she was his birth mother. It was meant to be. Once she came to town the curse would start to weaken and everyone would start standing up to the Evil Queen but only Emma could free everyone from the curse.

He called his mission Operation Cobra. It was the perfect name. Though his adoption records were supposed to be a sealed, he'd done a little snooping around in his mother's room and found all the paperwork she had on Emma and courtesy of Miss Blanchard's credit card, he was able to locate her in Boston.

"Are you Emma Swan?" he asked when a blond haired woman twenty-eight years old opened her door for him. It was her birthday today according to the information he learned from the website he'd been using.

"Yeah, who are you?"

"My name's Henry. I'm your son." He ducked under her and strode into the apartment.

"Whoa, hey, kid! Kid! I don't have a son! Where are your parents?" Emma demanded.

"Ten years ago, did you give up a baby for adoption? That was me."

My son. Neal's son. HERE in Boston!

"Give me a minute." She raced off to the bathroom, unable to believe this sudden twist of fate. She'd never expected to see her son again and there he was….bearing a striking resemblance to the only man who ever broke her heart.

"Hey, do you have any juice? Never mind, found some. You know, we should probably get going," Henry was saying to her when she returned to the kitchen.

"Going where?"

"I want you to come home with me."

"Okay, kid, I'm calling the cops." She picked up her phone.

"And I'll tell them you kidnapped me."

"And they'll believe you because I'm your birth mother." Clever kid, clever, she thought and set her phone back down. Just like both of us. Dammit! No. I do not want to think ab out that! It's done. We're done!

"Yep."
"You're not gonna do that."

"Try me."

"You're pretty good, but here's the thing. There's not a lot I'm great at in life, but I have one skill. It's called a "superpower." I can tell when anyone is lying, and you, kid, are."

"Wait. Please don't call the cops. Please come home with me," he pleaded.

"Where's home?"

"Storybrooke, Maine."

"Storybrooke? Seriously?"

Emma shook her head as she led them out of the apartment to her car, the old yellow Bug she and Neal stole what seemed like ages ago. Now she was reunited with the son she may have conceived in it at some point and was taking him back to his home.

Oh God! I do NOT want to think about that but dammit….this old thing was our home sometimes…

"I'm hungry. Can we stop somewhere?"

"This is not a road trip; we're not stopping for snacks."

"Why not?"

"Quit complaining, kid. Remember, I could've put your butt on a bus; I still could."

"You know, I have a name? It's Henry."

Emma glanced over to the passenger seat and saw a book laying across the boy's lap. "What's that?" it was called Once Upon a Time.

A book of fairy tales. A town called Storybrooke. This whole thing is getting weirder and weirder.

"I'm not sure you're ready."

"Ready for some fairy tales?"

"They're not fairy tales. They're true. Every story in this book actually happened."

"Of course they did."

"Use your superpower. See if I'm lying."

"Just because you believe something doesn't make it true." Yet when she looked at him, her bullshit detector seemed to be failing her. That was odd.

"That's exactly what makes it true. You should know more than anyone."

"Why's that?"

"Because you're in this book."

"Oh, kid. You've got problems."
"Yup. And you're going to fix them."

"Okay, kid, how about an address?"

"Forty-four, not-telling-you street."

Ha ha. Good one kid.

"Look, it's been a long night, and it's almost ...eight-fifteen?" she said when they got out of the car in Storybrooke, something no one else would have been able to do because of the barrier that prevented anyone not born from their world to cross through.

"That clock hasn't moved my whole life. Time's frozen here."

"Excuse me?"

"The Evil Queen did it with her curse. She sent everyone from the Enchanted Forest here."

"Hang on. The Evil Queen sent a bunch of fairytale characters here."

"Yeah. And now they're trapped."

"Frozen in time, stuck in Storybrooke, Maine. That's what you're going with?"

"It's true!"

"Then why doesn't everybody just leave?"

"They can't. If they try, bad things happen."

Out of the corner of his eye he could see Archie approaching with Pongo, hoping the doctor wouldn't say anything to make Emma continue to think he was crazy. It would make getting her to see the truth far more difficult.

"Henry! What are you doing here? Is everything all right?" Archie inquired worriedly.

"I'm fine, Archie." Henry petted the Dalmatian.

"Who's this?" Archie asked, gazing at Emma. She was the first newcomer to their town in ages.

"Just someone trying to give him a ride home." Emma answered.

"She's my mom, Archie."

"Oh.. I see..."

The mayor is not going to like this one bit...and she's going to think I put him up to it!

"You know where he lives?" Emma was asking him, interrupting his thoughts.

"Oh. Yeah, sure, just uh, right up on Mifflin Street; the Mayor's house is the biggest one on the block."

"You're the mayor's kid?"

"Uh. Maybe?"
"Hey. Where were you today, Henry, because you missed our session," Archie asked his patient.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you. I went on a field trip."

Archie crouched down so that he was at eye level with the boy. "Henry, what'd I tell you about lying? Giving in to one's dark side never accomplishes anything," he reminded the boy softly.

"O-kay! Well, I really should be getting him home."

"Yeah. Sure. Well, listen—have a good night, and uh, you be good, Henry," Archie said as he walked away.

"So that's your shrink."

"I'm not crazy."

"Didn't say that. Just—he doesn't seem cursed to me. Maybe he's just trying to help you."

"He's the one who needs help. Because he doesn't know."

"That he's a fairytale character."

"None of them do. They don't remember who they are." And some of them are not aware of what they can do, a voice in his head was telling him though he was unaware that it was Ozmalita speaking to him. The balance must be reset and you are the key to doing so. You are the staff that must bring forth the winds of change.

"Convenient. All right. I'll play. Who's he supposed to be?"

"Jiminy Cricket!"

The heart of the soul forgotten…

"Right. The lying thing. Thought your nose grew a little bit."

"I'm not Pinocchio!"

"'Course you're not. 'Cause that would be ridiculous."

"Please don't take me back there."

"I have to. I'm sure your parents are worried sick about you."

"I don't have parents. I just have a mom, and she's-evil."

"Evil. That's a bit extreme, isn't it?"

"She is. She doesn't love me; she only pretends to."

"Kid. I'm sure that's not true."

When they pulled into the driveway of the mayor's house on Mifflin Street, Regina came out followed by Graham, sheriff of Storybrooke, once the huntsman.

"Henry? Are you okay? Where have you been? What happened?" regina cried as she hugged him.

"I found my real mom!"
"You're Henry's birth mother?" Regina eyed the blond woman suspiciously.

"Hi."

"I'll... just... go check the lad, make sure he's okay," Graham said and went upstairs to check on Henry.

"How'd you like a glass of the best apple cider you ever tasted?" Regina invited.

"Got anything stronger?"

She waited in the foyer while Regina made them each a glass of cider. She returned a few minutes later and handed one of them to Emma.

"How did he find me?" Emma asked her.

"No idea. When I adopted him, he was only three weeks old. Records were sealed, I was told the birth mother didn't want to have any contact."

"You were told right."

"And the father?"

"There was one."

"Do I need to be worried about him?"

"Nope. Doesn't even know." And he sold me out, the bastard.

"Do I need to be worried about you, Miss Swan?"

"Absolutely not."

"Madam Mayor, you can relax. Other than being a tired little boy, Henry's fine," Graham assured her when he came downstairs.

"Thank you, Sheriff." He smiled at her and left the house. Regina escorted Emma into the living room. "I'm sorry he dragged you out of your life. I really don't know what's gotten into him."

"Kid's having a rough time. Happens."

"You have to understand, ever since I became mayor, balancing things has been tricky. You have a job, I assume?"

"Uh, I keep busy. Yeah."

"Imagine having another one on top of it. That's being a single mom. So I push forward. Am I strict? I suppose. But I do it for his own good. I want Henry to excel in life. I don't think that makes me evil, do you?"

Evil isn't born...it's made and YOUR mother made me what I am by taking away MY true love.

"I'm-sure he's just saying that because of the fairytale thing."

"What fairytale thing?"

"Oh, you know, his book. How he thinks everyone's a cartoon character from it. Like his shrink is
Jiminy Cricket."

No….no…NO! This will not do…at all! Regina thought frantically. She was going to have to have a talk with that cricket and remind him to do his job properly or else he was not going to be anything in this town.

"I'm sorry, I-really have no idea what you're talking about."

"You know what, it's none of my business. He's your kid. And I really should be heading back."

"Of course."

As Emma was driving out of town the curse and even a bit of fate intervened. She looked down and saw the book sitting on the seat, chuckling. "Sneaky bastard." When she looked up a lone wolf came out of the woods and directly into the path of her car. She swerved to avoid hitting it and crashed on the side of the road, her head striking the steering wheel. The book was on the floor, open to the page depicting the instrument that had taken her out of her own world and into this one, the enchanted wardrobe.

The sheriff discovered her while out on patrol. Her injuries were mild but he'd assumed, with plenty of coercion from Regina who removed his heart from its hiding place in her vault that the young woman had been drunk driving and put her in a holding cell back at the station next to Leroy's.

"What are you looking at, sister?" Leroy, once known as Grumpy the dwarf demanded angrily.

"Hey, Leroy—manners! We have a guest! So you are eh, Henry's mother. How lovely for him to have you back in his life," Geppetto, now Marco in this land greeted her politely.

"Actually, I was just dropping him off."

"Don't blame ya. They're all brats; who needs 'em," Leroy scoffed.

"Well, I'd give anything for one. My wife and I, we tried for many years, but, uh... it was not meant to be," Marco said wistfully.

"Well cry me a river," Leroy mocked.

"Leroy! I'm going to let you out; you need to behave. Put on a smile, and stay out of trouble." Graham advised his former prisoner. The man gave a faint false smile and left the station.

"Seriously?" Emma rolled her eyes.

"Regina's drinks; a little stronger than we thought."

"I wasn't drunk; there was a wolf, standing in the middle of the road."

"A wolf. Right."

That's a new one, Graham thought.

"Graham? Henry's run away again, we have to- …what is she doing here? Do you know where he is?" Regina demanded of Emma when she saw her in one of the cells.

"Lady, I haven't seen him since I dropped him at your house, and... pretty good alibi. Did you try his friends?"
"He doesn't really have any. Kind of a loner."

"Every kid has friends. Did you check his computer? If he was close to someone he'd be emailing them."

"And you know this how?"

"Finding people's what I do. Here's an idea; how 'bout you guys let me out, and I'll help you find him."

Regina didn't trust the girl as far as she could throw her but desperate times often called for desperate measures as that damned imp would often say to her.

She took them back to the house and watched with interest as Emma navigated through the system with very little effort. Even she could not do that.

"Smart kid. Cleared his inbox. I'm smart too, a little hard disk recovery utility I like to use," Emma explained and plugged it in.

"I'm a bit more old-fashioned, in my techniques. Pounding the pavement, knocking on doors, that sort of thing." Graham said.

"You're on salary; I get paid for delivery. Pounding pavement is not a luxury that I get. Ah, there's a receipt for a website, —it's expensive. He has a credit card?"

"He's ten."

"Well, he used one. Let's pull up a transaction record. Mary Margaret Blanchard, who's Mary Margaret Blanchard?" Emma asked as she read the screen.

"Henry's teacher."

"...What you're making is a home. Not a cage. A bird is free, and will do what it will. This is for them, not us. They're loyal creatures. If you love them and they love you, they will always find you." Mary Margaret Blanchard released the bird in her hand and it flew into a bird house while the children in her class watched with delight. "We'll pick this up after recess. No running! Why thank you!" she praised a student who left an apple on her desk. "Miss Mills, what are you doing here?" Regina walked into the classroom and from the expression on her face, Mary knew her presence meant trouble.

"Where's my son?"

"Henry. I assumed he was home with you." Mary said nervously.

"You think I'd be here if he was? Did you give him your credit card so he can find her?" Regina pointed to where Emma waited.

"I'm sorry, who are you?" she asked Emma.

How lovely, Regina thought gleefully. Your daughter is a stranger to you.

"I'm—I'm his—"

"The woman who gave him up for adoption." Regina said smarmily.

"You don't know anything about this, do you?"
"No, unfortunately not." She picked up her purse and began to search through it, her credit card missing. "Clever boy. I should never have given him that book."

Just like his father. Neal could pick the toughest pockets…taught me well enough.

"What in the hell is this book I keep hearing about?"

"Just some old stories I gave him. As you well know, Henry is a special boy: so smart, so creative, and as you might be aware, lonely. He needed it."

"What he needs is dose of reality. This is a waste of time. Have a nice trip back to Boston." She knocked over several books as she left the room. Emma knelt down to help the teacher pick them up.

"Sorry to bother you," she said to Mary.

"No, it's-it's okay, I fear this is partially my fault."

"How's a book supposed to help?"

"What do you think stories are for? These stories? The classics? There's a reason we all know them. They're a way for us to deal with our world. A world that doesn't always make sense. See, Henry hasn't had the easiest life," Mary was explaining as they left her classroom and walked down the hall.

"Yeah, she's kind of a hard-ass."

"No, it's more than her. He's like any adopted child. He wrestles with that most basic question they all inevitably face: why would anyone give me away? I am so sorry. I'm so sorry, I didn't mean in any way to judge you..." Mary Margaret said guiltily when she realized she'd probably hurt the other woman's feelings.

"It's okay."

"Look, I gave the book to him because I wanted Henry to have the most important thing anyone can have; hope. Believing in even the possibility of a happy ending is a very powerful thing."

"You know where he is, don't you."

"You might want to check his castle."

"You left this in my car. Still hasn't moved, huh?" Emma inquired when she found Henry sitting at his wooden castle in the park, gazing out at the clock tower, disappointed.

"I was hoping that when I brought you back, things would change here. That the final battle will begin."

Light meets dark in the stillness between

North and South shall unite

To banish the dark mistress's servant in a blaze of light

Face the father as a mortal shall the Western son

Through the love of his blood kin, shall the Dark One be undone
"I'm not fighting any battles, kid."

"Yes, you are. You're here because it's your destiny. You're going to bring back the happy endings."

"Can you cut it with the book crap?" Emma snapped.

"You don't have to be hostile. I know you like me, I can tell. You're just—pushing me away because I make you feel guilty. It's okay; I know why you gave me away. You wanted to give me my best chance."

"How do you know that?"

"The same reason Snow White gave you away."

"Listen to me, kid. I am not in any book. I'm a real person. And I'm no savior. You were right about one thing, though. I wanted you to have your best chance. But it's not with me. C'mon, let's go."

"Please don't take me back there! Just stay with me for one week, that's all I ask! One week, and you'll see I'm not crazy."

"I have to get you back to your mom."

"You don't know what it's like with her. My life sucks!"
Not from what I see kid. You have everything.

"Oh, you wanna know what sucking is? Being left abandoned on the side of a freeway; my parents didn't even bother to drop me off at a hospital!" She choked back a sob. "I ended up in a foster system and I had a family until I was three but then they had their own kid so they sent me back... Look. Your mom is trying her best. I know it's hard. And I know sometimes you think she doesn't love you. But at least she wants you."

"Your parents didn't leave you on the side of the freeway; that's just where you came through!"

"What?"

"The wardrobe. When you went through the wardrobe you appeared on the side of the street. Your parents were trying to save you from the curse."

This ain't Narnia, kid. My parents probably were kids. Selfish, spoiled little kids who didn't want to be shackled with one.

Kinda sounds like you, doesn't it?

That was different!

Was it?

Yes! I wanted to give him his best chance. My parents didn't give a shit. At least I did!

"Sure they were. C'mon, Henry."

Regina breathed a sigh of relief when the Swan woman brought her son back home. To her dismay, he ignored her and raced upstairs to his bedroom.
"Thank you."

"No problem."

"He seems to have taken quite a shine to you."

Emma laughed nervously. "You know it seems kind of crazy. Yesterday was my birthday. And—when I blew out the candle on this cupcake I bought myself, I actually made a wish. That I didn't have to be alone on my birthday. And then Henry showed up…"

"I hope there's no misunderstanding here."

"I'm sorry?"

"Don't mistake all of this as invitation back into his life."

"Oh…I…"

"Miss Swan, you made a decision ten years ago," Regina reminded her icily. "And in the last decade, while you've been…well, who knows that you've been doing…I've changed every diaper, soothed every fever, endured every tantrum. You may have given birth to him, but he is my son!"

I raised him, you bitch! Not you! And I WILL keep him!

"I was not…"

"No. 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 gonna 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!"

Emma started to turn away but she stopped and turned to face the mayor. "Do you love him?"

"Excuse me?"

"Henry. Do you love him?"

"Of course I love him!" Regina insisted. "Leave. Now!"

Emma was still uneasy when she left the house, feeling for the first time that motherly instinct to protect her offspring. Something wasn't right in this town and with the mayor and she was determined to find out what it was.

It was rent day again. Gold walked into Granny's Bed and Breakfast to collect it when he spotted a blond haired woman standing at the counter getting ready to check in. He hadn't seen her in town before and no one ever visited Storybrooke. Everyone liked it that way. The news was filled with reports of outsiders causing problems in cities and towns all across the United States and they didn't need that in their safe haven.

"Now, what's the name?" Granny was asking the girl.

"Swan. Emma Swan."

Gold flinched as if he'd been struck by something. Images started playing in his mind like a movie on fast forward as well as voices and faces from his past...
You coward. You promised! Don't break our deal!

And all you'll have... is an empty heart...and a chipped cup...

A child can't have a child Rumple!

I never loved you!

You changed the contract Rumple. You only get your own child. And any baby I have, it won't be yours.

In this new land, should I ever come to you for any reason, you must heed my every request. You must do whatever I say. So long as I say "Please".

You do realize that should I succeed, you won't remember any of this?

Oh well, then what's the harm?

Missy, missy..you know I'm right. Tell me. What's her name?

Emma. Her name is Emma.

"What a lovely name," Rumplestiltskin said softly. So this girl was their savior?

"Thanks," the girl said while Granny held out a wad of cash.

"It's all here."

"Yes, yes of course it is dear. Thank you." Normally he would have counted the money as Mr. Gold used to do but he was not Mr. Gold anymore. "Enjoy your stay," he said to Emma and left the inn with a smile on his face.

I am Rumplestiltskin. I am the Dark One. And now the savior has arrived. It's time to break this damned curse and find my son!

When he returned to his shop he opened the safe and took out the shawl, caressing it. It along with most of his possessions had been transported from the Dark Castle to his shop and Victorian style mansion.

"It's almost over Bae...it's almost over," he chanted, draping the shawl over his shoulders. When he returned home, he glanced over at the china closet, Belle's chipped cup sitting on its saucer on the top shelf. It was all he had of her now...and his memories. He sat down in his chair and wept softly holding her cup in his hand and his son's shawl around his neck. His happy ending would have been perfect if there was a chance Belle was still alive but being reunited with his son was now all the happy ending he needed.

Now it was time to set up his chessboard again and enjoy the living hell that was about to become the Evil Queen's life and the next day he learned that under his cursed persona he'd made a move that ensured that the Savior would stay in town. As it turned out, Regina's boy Henry was Emma Swan's son and the boy had a book filled with stories about all their lives. He smiled, remembering the day he broke into Mary Margaret's loft as Mr. Gold and planted the book in the closet. He'd created it shortly before the curse was cast and enchanted it so that it would fall into the hands of the one person who could deliver it to the Savior, her own mother. Somehow the spell was able to force his cursed self to carry out his instructions. Snow hadn't given it to the Savior but she'd done the next best thing...given it to her grandchild and he used it to late Emma and bring her to
Storybrooke to break the curse.

He had to give the boy credit, he was clever. A lot like him if he wanted to be honest. Regina was trying to make it sound like he was crazy, even forcing him to attend therapy sessions with Dr. Hopper. By doing so she was alienating Henry, making him want to form a bond with his birth mother...just what Rumple needed to happy. It would give Emma more of an incentive to stay.

And Regina was being her usual Evil Queen self, doing everything she could to force the girl out of town, first by having her arrested for stealing Dr. Hopper's files. Rumple eagerly awaited the results of Regina's scheme. It would show him just how strong the Savior was...and she didn't disappoint. He watched in the distance with a smirk on his face as the girl walked right into Regina's backyard and took a chainsaw to her precious apple tree.

"What the hell are you doing!??" he heard her screaming at Emma.

"Picking apples," Emma declared and dropped the chainsaw.

"You're out of you mind!"

"No, you are if you think a shotty frame job's enough to scare me off. You're gonna have to do better than that. If 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 am capable of. Your move," Emma challenged as she walked away.

"Well done dearie," Rumple murmured proudly. "Well done."

Regina wasn't done with the girl yet. She made certain Granny evicted her from the inn, a boot was placed on her car. Any other person would be ready to throw in the towel but not the savior and seeing the way Regina acted with her and everyone else in the town would bring Emma's maternal instinct to protect her child to the surface. He did not have his powers or his sight in this land but he sensed that Henry was the key to breaking the curse.

Later that night he decided to pay his former apprentice a visit to give her a friendly reminder of what he was capable of if she continued to interfere in his plans to get the damned curse broken.

"What a mess." he said.

"Not for long. What can I do for you, Mr. Gold?" Regina asked.

"I was just in the neighborhood, thought I'd pop by. Lovely to see you in such high spirits."

"Well, it's been a good day. I just rid the town of an unwanted nuisance."

"Emma Swan? Really?"

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

"Oh, I wouldn't bet on that," he said, picking an apple from the tree. "I've just seen her strolling down the main street with your boy. Thick as thieves, they looked," he taunted.

"What?"

Perhaps you should have come to me. If Miss Swan is a problem you can't fix, I'm only too happy to help, for a price, of course."

"I'm not in the business of making deals with you anymore," she said with a laugh and turned her
back to him.

"To which deal are you referring?"

"You know what deal."

"Oh, right, yeah. The boy I procured for you. Henry. Did I ever tell you what a lovely name that was? How ever did you pick it?"

"Did you want her to come to town? You wanted all this to happen, didn't you? Your finding Henry wasn't an accident, was it?" she demanded as she faced him.

"Whatever do you mean?"

"Where did you get him? Do you know something?"

"I've no idea what you're implying."

"I think you do. Who is this woman, his mother, this... Emma Swan?"

I would say you think you know exactly who she is." He smirked. "I really must be going."

Regina blocked his way. Tell me what you know about her!"

"I'm not gonna answer you, dear, so I suggest you excuse me. Please." He bit into the apple and walked away while she only stood still from the power of the enchantment. He tossed the apple over his shoulder, still smiling during the walk back home. It may have started out as a good day for her but it was an even better one for him when he'd ruined hers with the piece of news that her little scheme backfired.

Soon history would repeat itself as he moved himself on the chessboard into the position of benefactor to the girl. There was so much she could do...she just needed someone to show her how. It was once again time for that silly Cinderella to play her part.

Now that time started again, Cinderella's pregnancy would progress normally meaning her child would be due any day and she would have to give it up for adoption per their agreement in this land. He, however, had no intentions of honoring the agreement. If he knew Ms. Swan as well as he thought he did, she would try to talk the silly girl into not repeating her own mistakes and find some way to keep the baby. Emma was every inch her parents' child, looking for a silver lining in the dark clouds although she hid it well. He'd done some digging of his own into her past shortly after she arrived in town just as Regina did. The girl's life had been more difficult than he expected but those obstacles were needed to give her the strength she had to have to complete her task.

He closed the shop up late and walked back to the rear parking lot about to get in the car when he heard the sound of glass breaking. He limped around ot the front of the store to see that one of the panes in the shop door's window was broken, the window pane closest to the doorknob. Well, the intruder was smart, he had to give them that. He entered the shop and saw Ashley Boyd with her back to him, poised to open the safe behind the counter.

"Ashley, what are you doing?"

"Changing my life!" she shouted and sprayed something in his face. He cried out and staggered backwards, his head striking the edge of the counter and he fell to the floor.

When he woke up later his eyes burned like hell and his head ached even worse and the keys to his
safe were now inside the lock. There was only one thing the girl would have been after in that safe and it was the agreement to put her child up for adoption. Someone had given her the incentive to try to prevent it and he had no doubts it was Emma Swan.

"Another job well done, dearie." He washed out his eyes and cleaned his head wound. He knew he should go to the hospital to have it looked at but Frankenstein wasn't exactly the most qualified doctor in Storybrooke. This was one of those days when he wished he had his magic back. He could've healed all of his injuries with a simple wave of his hand. They would, however, give weight to the tale he was about to spin for the Savior so that when the time came she would have no choice but to enter into an agreement with him or else Cinderella would never see her child again.

He drove over to Snow's loft, pleased when he saw a familiar yellow car parked in front of it. What better place would there be for the Savior to stay than with her own mother? It was perfect. Snow still had some of her old spirit in this land but not much of it. It was just enough that she would be able to steer her girl in the right direction. Once he stood outside Snow's door, he lifted his cane and tapped on it with the knob.

"Ms. Blanchard, is Ms. Swan here?" he asked Snow when she opened the door. Emma walked up to them "Hi, my name is Mr. Gold, we met briefly on your arrival."

"I remember."

He smiled. "Good, I have a proposition for you, Ms. Swan. I need your help. I'm looking for someone."

"Really? um..."

"You know what? I am going to jump in the bath," Snow said and left them alone in the room when he gave her a look as cold as ice.

"I have a photo. Her name is Ashley Boyd and she's taken something quite valuable of mine." He handed her the photograph from his shop's security camera.

"So why don't you just call the police?" Emma inquired suspiciously.

"Because uh... she's a confused young woman. She's pregnant, alone, and scared. I don't want to ruin this young girl's life, but I just want my property returned." He was a master of being vague. Had he told her what it was he was referring to, she would never agree to it.

"And what is it?"

"Well one of the advantages of you not being the police is discretion. Let's just say it's a precious object and leave it at that."

"When did you see her last?"

"Last night. That's how I got this." He pointed to the bruise. "It's so unlike her. She was quite wound up, rambling on and on about changing her life. I have not idea what got into her. Ms. Swan, please just help me find her. My only other choice is the police, and I don't think anyone wants to see that baby born in jail, now do they?" he asked, knowing those were the right words to reel her in.

"No, of course not."
"So you'll help me then?"

"I will help her."

"Grand." He smiled again.

They heard the front door open and Henry walk in. "Hey Emma, I was thinking we..."

"Hey Henry, how are you?" Rumple greeted the boy.

"Okay."

"Good. Give my regards to your mother, and um... good luck Ms. Swan." he added to Emma before he left.

Hours later he was at his pawnshop taking inventory when the phone rang.

"I just had a very interesting visit," Mitchell Herman was saying.

"Oh? Who?"

"Emma Swan. She was asking a lot of questions about Ashley and Sean...and the baby. I thought you talked to her about all this and that she's supposed to just deliver it to you when it's born...no questions asked."

"I may have omitted a few details."

"Why?"

"I'll be asking the questions here. What did you tell her?"

"That uhhhh...she was being paid to give up the baby and you would find it a good home," Herman replied nervously, surprised Gold wasn't raking him across the coals for opening his mouth.

"And I will...as soon as she brings it to me."

"The way she was talking, she wasn't going to let you have it."

"Let me worry about that."

As soon as he hung up the phone he got another call, this one from Dove who was monitoring Emma and Ashley. He listened to his assistant's account of both women's activities that day, pleased that everything was going according to plan. At that moment Ashley was at the hospital delivering her baby. When he reached the maternity ward he could hear the doctor talking to Emma.

"Ms. Swan, the baby is a healthy six-pound girl, and the mother is doing fine."

"What lovely news. Excellent work, Ms. Swan. Thank you for bringing me my merchandise." He walked over to the coffee machine to get a cup. It was awful, not his own blend but it would do. When the machine wouldn't start he struck it and the cup started brewing without charging him.

"Well, well. Must be my lucky day. Care for a cup, Ms. Swan?"

"A baby? That's your merchandise? Why didn't you tell me?" she asked angrily.

"Well, because at the time you didn't need to know." And he didn't particularly care for referring to
the child as merchandise but it had ensured her cooperation thus far.

"Really, or you thought I wouldn't take the job?" she accused.

"On the contrary, I thought it would be more effective if you found out yourself. After seeing Ashley's hard life, I thought it would make sense... to you. I mean if anyone could understand the reasons behind giving up a baby, I assumed it would be you."

"You're not getting that kid."

"Actually, we have an agreement. And my agreements are always honored. If not, I'm going to have to involve the police, and that baby is going to end up in the system, and that would be a pity. You didn't enjoy your time in the system, did you Emma?"

"That's not gonna happen."

"I like your confidence. Charming, but all I have to do is press charges. She did, after all, break into my shop."

"Let me guess, to steal a contract."

"Who knows what she was after."

"You know, no jury in the world will put a woman in jail whose only reason for breaking and entering was to keep her child. I'm willing to roll the dice that contract doesn't stand up. Are you? Not to mention what might come out about you in the process. Somehow I suspect there is more to you than a simple pawnbroker. You really want to start that fight?" Emma threatened. He smirked as they now danced around each other like gladiators in the ring except neither was willing to surrender.

"I like you, Ms. Swan. You're not afraid of me, and that's either cocky or presumptuous. Either way I'd rather have you on my side."

"So she can keep the baby?"

"Not just yet. There's still the matter of my agreement with Ms. Boyd."

"Tear it up."

"That's not what I do. You see, contracts, deals, well they're the very foundation of all civilized existence, so I put it to you now. If you want Ashley to have that baby, are you willing to make a deal with me?" he proposed.

"What do you want?"

"Oh I don't know just yet. You'll owe me a favor." You will bring me my son.

"Deal." she said coldly as she gave him a cold stare.

"Excellent." He shook her hand. "I trust we'll be seeing each other again very soon."

She ignored him and took Henry in to see Ashley.

The next several weeks proved to be interesting. The shepherd prince was trying to recover his lost memories while finding himself drawn to Snow who in this world wasn't his wife. Regina was going to have her hands full trying to prevent them from being together in this land and making the
Savior's job a bit more complicated. Now, however, thanks to Regina's huntsman slave, the girl was now in a position to make Madam Mayor's life even more of a living hell. Regina was getting more and more desperate and it was only a matter of time before she did something foolish and his pawnshop was getting a lot more visitors than he was used to. He didn't mind it at long as they brought him news that gave him hope his curse was about to be broken.

One night while he was in the backroom repairing a broken doll he heard the bell over the door ring.

"Hello?" David Nolan's voice called out. Rumple approached the doorway to the backroom and watched as the shepherd prince looked around. He finally stopped at his daughter's mobile dangling from the ceiling.

"Charming," he said now from behind the counter, testing to see if the boy had a reaction to being called by the nickname Snow had given him back in their land.

"I'm sorry?"

"The mobile. Isn't it charming? Exquisitely designed, masterfully crafted. I could get it down if you'd like?" he offered.

"No, it's...very nice. Actually I'm looking for the Toll Bridge. The mayor said there was a fork in the road by your shop but..."

Rumple wanted to laugh. Oh she'd certainly botched this up nicely. It was true, men did not always ask for directions...unless they were on a mission and meeting a lover in secret was a mission worthy of swallowing one's pride for the moment. "It seems Ms. Mills has led you astray."

"Yeah...you'd think the mayor would know her own town," David laughed nervously.

"One would think. Out of the door, turn right, two blocks you'll find a trail. Can't miss it."

The boy smiled. "Thank you." He turned to leave and stopped again when he saw a windmill figurine.

"See something you like?"

"Where did you get that?"

"That old thing? That's been gathering dust for...for forever."

David reached out and spun the blades. "I think...I think this belonged to me."

"Really? Are you sure?"

"Yes," David whispered. "I remember."

Rumple smirked. "Remember, what dearie?"

"I...umm...gotta go," David said and hurried off.

Rumple stepped out from behind the counter and touched the windmill. "Talismans. Any object can be a talisman...even for memory," he murmured then walked over to the safe, opened it and took out his son's shawl, caressing it gently. "And this is mine, Bae. He picked it up and carried it into the back of the shop and placed it on his worktable then took out a candle and some matches. He lit the candle. "I'm so sorry Bae...I've forgotten for twenty-eight years but I'll never forget your
birthday again...and next year we will be celebrating it together...I promise."

He watched from a distance as Graham and the savior started getting closer, something that didn't suit well with the Queen at all. The huntsman had been her personal slave all these years and now he was desperate to feel anything. He could without his heart but it would not be as fulfilling.

Now that the curse was close to being broken, Rumple had to move his dagger again. When he stepped out from behind the trees he spotted Graham looking troubled. It was no surprise. Being the queen's secret lover and the sheriff was quite a burden to handle.

"Good morning, Sheriff," he greeted. "Sorry if I startled you."

"Right. Sorry, I, I thought you were a wolf," the sheriff muttered.

"Did I forget to shave?" Rumple said at an attempt at humor though he never forgot to shave in the morning even when he was the poor, cowardly spinner.

"What are you doing out here so early?"

"A sport of gardening. Yourself?"

"I was looking for..."

"A wolf. Yeah, I think I've been able to catch on. You know, to the best of my knowledge there are no wolves in Storybrooke. Not the literal kind anyway. Why are you looking?"

"You'll think I'm crazy."

Not crazy, huntsman, dearie. The wolf is your guide and he is leading you back to what you have forgotten. He is your talisman just as Bae's shawl is mine.

"Try me," he challenged.

"I saw one in my dreams and then I saw one for real. Just a few hours ago. Did you- Did you see anything unusual right there?"

"I'm afraid not. I do wish I could be more helpful. You know, Sheriff, they say that dreams… dreams are memories…memories of another life." Rumple advised the sheriff.

Plant the seed, give it water and it will grow, he thought.

"What do you believe?"

"I never rule out anything. Good luck, Sheriff. I do hope you'll find what you're looking for."

Later that day, Storybrooke was in a state of shock when it was learned that Sheriff Graham was dead. He'd dropped dead of a heart attack in the arms of his deputy, everyone wondering how a man so young could possibly have heart trouble. Oh, it was known to happen but it still sounded strange to all of them but Rumplestiltskin. He knew very well what the cause of Graham's sudden heart trouble was. The Queen made him her first causality in her battle with the Savior. The huntsman knew too much and had to be disposed of before the Savior believed.

It fell upon Emma Swan as deputy to act as sheriff until a new one could be announced. Regina could put whatever fool she wanted to up for the job but he was going to make certain that it went to no one else but the Savior. He picked up the phone and dialed the Sheriff's department leaving a message that he needed to speak to Deputy Swan about an urgent matter. That was certain to light a
fire under her feet as he would soon light a fire under Regina's. Lanolin had a terrible odor and when it was used often, one could learn to tolerate the scent especially if you had been using it for three hundred years. It was also flammable and worked perfectly in the duke's castle all those years ago. He heard the bell over his door tinkling. She'd arrived.

"Gold? In here?" he heard her call out.

"Well, it is my shop," he muttered. She entered his workroom while he was coating a sheep's pelt with the lanolin.

"Whoa! What is that?"

"Now, this is lanolin used for waterproofing," he explained.

"Smells like livestock!" she complained.

"Well, it is the reason why sheep's wool repels water."

"It stinks! Umm...if there was a reason why you called the Sheriff's department. If you wanna talk about that quickly or... outside."

"Yes. I just wanted to express my condolences, really. The sheriff was a good man," he said to her when he rose from his chair and approached her, glancing down at her waist, seeing the deputy's badge pinned to it. "You're still wearing the deputy's badge? Well, he's been gone for two weeks now. And I believe after two weeks of acting as sheriff the job becomes yours. You'll have to wear the real badge," he pointed out.

"Yeah, I guess... I'm just not in a hurry. So, ummm... thank you for the kind words," she said with a twinge of sadness and turned to leave.

"I have his things," he said.

"What?" Emma inquired, turning around.

"The sheriff. He rented an apartment that I own. Another reason for my call really, I wanted to offer you a keepsake."

"I don't need anything."

"As you wish. I'll give them to Mayor Mills. Seems like she was the closest thing he had to family," he said knowing that would get a reaction from her.

"Not sure about that," she said bitterly.

"No love lost there, I see. Look, I feel that all of this stuff is heading directly for the trash bin. You really should take something. Look! His jacket?" he offered, holding up the jacket.

"No," she said stubbornly.

"Look, he said again and held up two radios. "Your boy might like these, don't you think? You could play together," he suggested. And carry on conversations away from a certain queen's ears.

"I don't..."

"No, please. They grow up so fast," he insisted. And when you lose precious time with them, you regret it all your life.
"Thanks."

The time together is precious, you know. That's the thing about children: Before you know it, you lose them."

He sat in the backroom of his shop reading through the town charter, smiling to himself. Only the best contracts had no loopholes only Regina wasn't clever enough to think of that. She thought that by firing Emma Swan that would be the end of it. He closed the binder containing the town charter and drove down to Mary Margaret's apartment building to have a talk with the girl.

"Good evening, Miss Swan. Sorry for the intrusion, there's something I'd like to discuss with you," he said.

"I'll let you two talk," Mary Margaret said wisely and left them alone in the room.

"Come on in."

"Thank you. I..I heard about what happened. Such an injustice."

"Yeah. Well, what's done is done," she said, defeated.

"Spoken like a true fighter."

"I know what chance I'll have. She's the mayor and I am - well - me."

Oh but you are so much more than a simple girl but you need to believe!

"Miss Swan, two people with a common goal can accomplish many things. Two people with a common enemy can accomplish even more. How would you like a benefactor?" he proposed.

Just as Zozo was to me. Instead of controlling power, sometimes you need to simply take it.

"A benefactor?"

"Do you mind?" he inquired when he sat down with the binder containing the charter in his hands. "You know, it really is quite shocking how few people study the town charter."

"The town charter?"

"It's quite comprehensive on the mayor's authority. Or maybe she is not quite as powerful as she seems," he said with a smile.

Now that Emma had thrown down the gauntlet Regina was in a rage and looking for someone to unleash her wrath on and he was more than ready for it.

"Regina. Shall I remove some things? Make a bit of space for your rage?"

"You found that loophole in the town charter."

"Legal documents – contracts, if you like. Always been a fascination of mine."

"Yes, you love to trifle with technicalities."

"I like small weapons, you see. The needle, the pen, the fine point of a deal. Subtlety…not your style, I know," he taunted.
"You're a bastard."

He laughed. "I think your grief's getting the better of you, Regina. Shame what happened to Graham."

"Don't you talk about him. You know nothing."

"What is there to know? He died."

"Are you really going up against me?"

"Not directly. We are, after all, both invested in the common good. We're just picking different sides."

"Well, I think you picked a really slow horse this time. It's not like you to back a loser."

"She hasn't lost yet."

"She will."

"Never underestimate someone who's acting for their child."

"He's not her child. Not legally."

"Oh, now who's trifling with technicalities?"

Later that evening Rumple drove over to the town hall with the equipment he needed for his mission…a cigarette lighter and his sheep's wool coated with lanolin. As he had in the past, the sheep's wool served as the torch to light the wood inside the hall. When the flames started to appear he chuckled.

"They burned down the gambling house
It died with an awful sound
Funky Claude was running in and out
Pulling kids out the ground
When it all was over
We had to find another place
But Swiss time was running out
It seemed that we would lose the race
Smoke on the water, fire in the sky…." he sang and left the town hall. He knew Emma and Regina were inside and now it was Emma's chance to show the town what she was really made of. And once she found his all too telling clue behind, the choice she would make on how to handle it would show him just what she was made of.

She stormed into the shop on cue, holding out his makeshift torch. Oh, her playing the hero and rescuing Regina was a high form of bravery but not enough. She would only, truly be brave…and a hero if she defied him, the man everyone, even Regina when she chose to admit it, feared. He chose his words carefully, allowing her to weigh the options exposing him would present. It was
possible her son would be disappointed in her as his was by his choice to take the dark path.

"Loads of visitors today," he remarked. Do hope you're not going to break my little bell."

"You set the fire," she accused.

Thank you for stating the obvious. I'm washing the rest of the evidence from my hands as we speak. Are you going to point that out too?

"I've been right here, Miss Swan."

"Take a whiff. It smells like your sheep crap oil. Turns out it's flammable."

"Oh. Are you sure? There's some construction working on at City Hall at the moment. There's loads of flammable solvents used in construction."

"Why did you do it?"

"If I did it…if I did it that would be because you cannot win without something big. Something like, uh I don't know. Being the hero in a fire?"

"How could you even know I'd be there at the right time?"

"Regina's not the only one with eyes and ears in this town. Or maybe... I'm just intuitive where I involved."

"I could've run and left her there."

"Not the type."

"I can't go along with this."

"You just did. This is just the price of election, Miss Swan," he said with a smile.

"A price I'm not willing to pay. Find another sucker!"

"Okay. Go ahead, expose me. But if you do …just think about what you'll be exposing and what you'll be walking away from. Oh, yes. And ummm, who you might be disappointing," he added as parting shot while she was leaving.

He sat in the audience at the town hall for the debate that would decide who would become the sheriff of the town….the lovestruck former genie or the Savior herself. He barely paid attention to Sidney's speech and when it came time for Emma to deliver hers, he was on the edge of his seat as was the entire town.

"You guys all know I have what they call an ahh…troubled past. But, you've been able to overlook it because of the um, hero thing. But here's the thing: The fire was a setup. Mr. Gold agreed to support me in this race, but I didn't know that that meant he was going to set a fire. I don't have definitive evidence but I'm sure. And the worst part of all this was…the worst part of all this is I let you all think it was real. I can't win that way. I'm sorry," she declared.

Rumple rose from his chair and walked out of the town hall leaving its citizens with a great deal more of respect for their newcomer. The next morning he paid a visit to the sheriff's office, hanging Graham's jacket on the rack.

"The sheriff's jacket. I thought you might want it after all," he said, startling her.
"You do know I'm armed…right?" she asked, trying not to sound terrified.

He laughed. "It's all part of the act m'dear. Political theater in an actual theater. I knew no one was gonna vote for you unless we gave you some kind of extraordinary quality. I'm afraid saving Regina's arse from the fire wasn't gonna do that. We had to give you a higher form of bravery. They had to see you defy me. And they did."

"No way," she whispered. "There's no way you planned that!"

"Everyone's afraid of Regina…but they're more afraid of me. By standing up to me, you won them over. It was the only way."

"You knew I'd agree."

"Oh yeah. I know how to recognize a desperate soul."

"Why did you do this?"

"We made a deal sometime back Miss Swan," he reminded her. "We established that you owe me a favor. I know that can be a bad feeling…owing someone. Now that you're sheriff, I'm sure you'll find some way to pay back what you owe me. Congratulations," he finished and left the girl alone with her thoughts.

Later that night, he moved another piece on his chessboard. "Checkmate, Regina….checkmate."

It was now her move and he had her trapped. He eagerly anticipated her next move. The queen's carelessness would be her undoing.

Paradise

Adora watched from her seeing globe, smiling in triumph. The Eastern Guardian had at last revealed himself and had summoned the wind of change that broke through the time barrier spell cast upon the town. Soon the curse itself would shatter and all those who dwelled in that small town would recall their pasts and the final battle would begin.
The Winds of Change

Chapter by cjmoliere

Storybrooke, Maine

One month prior to the breaking of the Dark Curse

Two months prior to the double eclipse

Rumple looked through his ledger as he always did on collection day, a twisted smile forming on his lips as he read over the list of loans that were now past due and nothing pleased him more than seeing Belle's son of a bitch of a father at the top of the list. Even without magic he still had the means to make the bastard suffer for taking away his beloved Belle...by taking away his livelihood. Without a vehicle to make deliveries Moe wouldn't be able to pay the rent on Game of Thorns and Rumple would have the power to evict him. He would cast him out just as Moe cast Belle out. He made a quick phone call to Dove and the two of them walked down to Game of Thorns where Moe was loading up his van to make deliveries.

Not today, you bastard. Not ever again, he thought bitterly.

"Well this is just perfect. I've been looking for you, Mr. French," he said with a grin. Ah, Belle, if only you were here to see this.

"I'll have your money next week," Moe informed him.

"Terms of the loan were fairly specific. Take the van," he commanded Dove.

"Wait! No! Tomorrow's Valentine's Day! It's the biggest day of—I've got a grand in roses in the back!" Moe protested.

As if I give a damn about that blasted holiday. Perhaps I would have been able to celebrate it myself...with Belle but I will never have that chance...because of you!

"Stop! You've gotta let me sell them!" Moe cried as he stepped in front of the van. As much as he would have liked to see the bastard squashed under the tires of his own van, somehow he felt Belle wouldn't approve of that.

"I'm gonna leave you two to continue this conversation," he said as he walked away.

"Oh, this is no way to do business, Gold! You are the lowest! People aren't gonna put up with this!" Moe screamed as Dove drove the truck away.

Little they can do about it now can they, dearie, he thought enjoying this small victory. What started out as a lovely day was starting to turn into a terrible one when he saw Regina waiting for him on the sidewalk.

"Mr. Gold. That was quite a show back there."

Indeed it was.

"Well, Mr. French is just having a bad day, happens to the best of us," Rumple said smartly.

"I've been meaning to talk to you."
"Yeah, and the moment you have something I wanna discuss, we'll have that little chat," he said, not in the mood for the Evil Queen's little games.

"No, we're gonna do this now. I'll only take a moment," she insisted.

That's what you think, dearie. "Is there something eating you, dear? Something you need to get out in the open? 'Cause it's gonna have to wait, please." He smirked when he saw her dazed look and walked away. Now that he'd gotten that out of the way, all he wanted to do now was go home. For twenty-eight years this day was a painful reminder of the second worst mistake he'd ever made when he ordered the one woman who loved him even with his faults out of his life.

When he pulled into his driveway, his day seemed to have gotten worse when he limped up the front steps and saw his front door open. He took the Walther pistol out from its hiding place and stalked through the house in rage that someone would dare steal from him. He heard a noise behind him and turned to fire, pausing when he saw Emma Swan behind him, her own gun drawn.

"Sheriff Swan..."

"Your neighbors saw your front door open and they called it in," she explained.

"It appears that I've been robbed."

"Funny how that keeps happening to you."

"Yeah well, I'm a difficult man to love." he said as they lowered their guns.

You have no idea how difficult, he thought bitterly.

Emma started walking around the house, taking pictures on her phone. "Honestly Gold, how can you find anything around here? This place is packed floor to ceiling with junk. Maybe you ought to see Doctor Hopper about your major hoarding issue."

"I do not need to see that damned cricket about anything!" Rumple grumbled. "And this is not junk. If you knew exactly what it was or where it came from, you wouldn't be calling it junk. Do you hear me calling your things junk? I think not."

"Okay, okay, calm down." she said and started texting on her phone while Rumple went through the house, mentally taking inventory of what was missing. Most of the items were from his china closet, his heart skipping a beat when he saw the saucer that Belle's chipped cup belonged on, the precious cup itself missing.

You son of a bitch. You miserable lowlife son of a bitch. And you bitch...you jealous bitch! I'll make you both suffer for this.

"Sheriff Swan, you can go now. I know exactly what was taken and who did it. I've got it from here."

"No, you don't. This was a robbery, a public menace. And if you don't tell me what you know, I'll have to arrest you for obstruction of justice. I have a feeling you don't want to be behind bars."

"Indeed not."

Let's just say, dearie, my previous incarceration, courtesy of your parents was less than enjoyable even if it did serve its purpose.
"All right, his name is Moe French. He sells flowers. He recently defaulted on a loan. A short time ago we had a little disagreement over collateral."

"Okay. I'll go get him...check him out."

"I'm sure you will. Assuming, I don't find him..." He laughed. "Let's just say bad things tend to happen to bad people."

"Is that a threat?"

"Observation. Good luck."

He would let her retrieve his stolen items but that was as far as he was willing to go with her. He would dispense his own justice. He returned to the shop, keeping himself busy with his accounts. After seeing or hearing about the confrontation with the owner of Game of Thorns, people were flocking to his door to pay back their loans before he swooped in and took what they offered as collateral on them. Even some of his tenants were scurrying in to pay their rent before he started evicting them.

He'd just finished depositing all the cash and checks he'd gotten into his bank account when he heard the Rolling Stone's Sympathy for the Devil playing. He had to admit, his cursed self's musical tastes were interesting to say the least. The song was his phone's ringtone and a certain verse of it appealed to him.

Pleased to meet you

Hope you guess my name

But what's puzzling you is the nature of my game...

He picked up the phone pressed the send button.

"Hello?"

"Mr. Gold, would you mind coming down to the station?" Emma was asking.

"This had better be worth my time, dearie."

"It is."

When he arrived Emma was standing in front of her desk, covered with a sheet. She yanked it off to reveal the items stolen from his house. "You're welcome," she declared arrogantly. "You're right. Your man Moe ripped you off. It was all still at his place," she went on and lounged in her chair, relishing her victory.

"And the man himself."

"Closing in on him."

He looked down at the items. All was accounted for except for one precious thing! "So...job well half done then."

"In less than a day I got everything back. Is something wrong?"

"You've recovered nothing! There's something missing!" he hissed.
"I'll get it when I find him!"

"Not if I find him first," he threatened.

But he had a few errands to run first.

It was very busy at the pharmacy, mostly men scrambling to find last minute gifts for their wives or lovers. He would've been one of them had it not been for the two people he wanted to stake to the ground and drive his car over...or if he had magic, rip their hearts out and crush them to dust. He still had his dark heart and it it had been crushed the day he learned his beloved Belle threw herself off the tower after being tortured...for loving him. And they called him a monster?! He took his place in the checkout line with his supplies in hand...duct tape and rope. He would have preferred a long set of chains and his dungeon to keep the bastard in while he made him see the error of his ways but alas, he was no longer in the Enchanted Forest and would have to make do with this world's tools...and interesting tools they were. While he was waiting Charming got in line behind him with two Valentine cards in his hand.

"Two Valentines. Sounds like a complicated life."

"Oh, no...I just...couldn't decide," Charming said nervously.

"These are both for the same woman?" And I have a donkey's tail. Who does he think he's fooling?

"Well, they're both so...us."

"I see. Well you're fortunate you have someone who loves you."

"I really am."

"Love...it's like a delicate flame and once its gone...it's gone forever," he said as he placed his supplies on the counter along with some money. "Best of luck to you," he added, picking up the bag with his items and leaving the store. Gone, like my Belle.

When he returned to his shop, Dove was waiting for him. "We've had a bit of trouble, Mr. Gold."

"What kind of trouble?"

"Mr. French came over to try to reclaim his van."

Rumple tossed him the bag. "Put him in the van when you're done. We're going to go for a ride and have a little chat." Dove smiled and hurried off while Rumple went back into the shop to retrieve the gun he kept under the counter. Once Moe was loaded into the van, Rumple got in and started the engine, heading toward a cabin he owned but rarely used in the woods.

"Walk!" he demanded when he opened the back doors to the van and pointed the gun at Moe. Inside the cabin he pulled back the trigger. "Now, you see, here's the thing: I don't normally let people get away. Sit your ass down in that chair!" As soon as French was sitting Rumple yanked the tape off.

"Let me explain...okay?" Moe asked fearfully. "Let me explain..."

Rumple grabbed another chair and sat it down, straddling the back of it. "Oh, that is...fascinating...truly fascinating." He shoved the tip of his cane into the other man's throat. "I'm gonna let you breathe in a second and then you're gonna say two sentences. The first is gonna tell me where it is. The second is gonna tell me who told you to take it. Do you understand the rules?"
"Yeah."

"Good. Let's begin."

"I needed that van."

"Ah, ta, ta, ta, ta. Now, you see, that is not a good first sentence!" He brought the cane down delivering a painful blow as the other man begged him to listen. "Tell me where it is!" he demanded, delivering another blow. "Tell me where it is!" he yelled again when Moe pleaded with him to stop.

"It wasn't my fault."

"'My fault' what are you talking about 'my fault'? You shut her out. You had her love and you shut her out!" Rumple cried, lashing out again. "She's gone! She's gone forever! She's not coming back and it's your fault. Your fault! Not mine. You are her father! Yours! It's yours! You let them hurt her...you let them violate her you bastard! She was innocent and you punished her...it's your fault!"

He kept swinging, all the heartache and rage he felt unleashed after so many years as her beautiful face appeared in his mind. He was ready to deliver another blow when someone grabbed his hand.

"Stop!" Emma cried.

"This does not concern you!"

"The hell it doesn't! I knew you were up to something. Outside! Now!" she barked and took out her phone to call an ambulance. Rumple glared at her as he walked outside. This wasn't over. Not by a longshot. He waited by her squad car while the paramedics she called tended to Moe.

"So I hear you managed not break anything he needs. You're lucky, Mr. Gold," Emma said as she approached him.

"You got a funny definition of lucky."

"You have a funny definition of justice. What did he really do?"

"He stole."

"That reaction was about more than taking a few trinkets. You said something about how he hurt 'her', what happened to 'her'? Who was that? What did he do? If someone needs help, maybe I can help."

No one can help.

"No. I'm sorry, Sheriff. I think you heard that wrong."

"You really don't wanna cooperate."

"Look, we're done here," he said and started to walk away. She grabbed his arm.

"Actually... No, we're not. You're under arrest." she pronounced and cuffed him.

"Aren't you going to read me my rights? After all, dearie, that is how it's done," he quipped.

"All right smartass: you have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to an attorney...but since I hear you are one; I don't think I need to go on about the court finding you one if you can't afford one. Now watch your head," she
"I won't be there long, dearie."

"Don't count on it, Gold. You nearly beat that man half to death and you're not a very popular guy in this town so I'm pretty sure no one will be willing to let you off with just a slap on the wrist. I for one am not."

"Oh...now isn't this the pot calling the kettle black? Now that you have a badge you seem to have forgotten your own...unsavory past Ms. Swan. A badge that you never would've gotten without my help."

"At least I haven't beaten people half to death and tried to torch them," she pointed out. "Come on, Gold. Tell me: what did he really do and who is this woman you were talking about? Was she your girlfriend...wife?"

"It's none of your damned business!" he growled and turned his head to look out the window.

He was once again locked in a cell only this one was a bit more comfortable than his last and he had as much trouble sleeping in it as he had in the other one, his dreams haunted by the son he'd abandoned and the woman he tossed aside.

The next morning found him sitting up in his cell while Emma was at her desk eating a sandwich.

"Pastrami. You want half? You know, I still owe you that favor. Nice fatty pastrami. Delicious way to clear the books." she tempted.

Did she honestly think he would make it that easy? Oh no. Not at all.

"Well, I don't need a reminder that you owe me a favor. And when the day comes that I make my request, it'll be for more than half a sandwich," he cautioned, not surprised a bit when Regina showed up with Henry in tow. Emma however, was shocked.

"Sheriff Swan? I'm letting you have thirty minutes with Henry. Take him out, buy him ice cream," Regina ordered.

"You want me to leave you alone with a prisoner?" Emma asked, finding it odd that Regina would want to be alone with this particular prisoner. What was it with them anyway?

"Twenty-nine and a half minutes."

"Hi Emma," Henry greeted his other parent.

"Hey."

"Bring me back a cone?" Rumple asked softly.

"Just this once. Come on, let's go!"

"Well... You really wanted that little chat, didn't you?" Rumple asked Regina once they were alone. She smirked as she approached the cell.

"Apparently, this is the only way I could do it."

"Please, sit. Now when two people want something the other has, a deal can always be struck. Do
"you have what I want?" he asked her.

"Yes," she replied with a smile.

"So you did put him up to it, then."

"I merely suggested that... strong men take what they need."

"Oh yeah, and you told him just what to take, didn't you?"

"We used to know each other so well, Mr. Gold. Has it really come down to this?"

"It seems it has, yeah. But you know what I want. What is it you want?"

"I want you to answer one question. And answer it simply. What's your name?"

"It's Mr. Gold."

"Your real name," she ordered sternly.

"Every moment I've spent on this earth, that's been my name."

"But what about moments spent elsewhere?"

"What are you asking me?"

"I think you know. If you want me to return what's yours, tell me your name."

"Rumplestiltskin," he replied with a laugh and gripped the cell bars. The gloves were off now.

"Now give me what I want!"

"Such hostility."

"Oh yeah."

"Over this?" Regina taunted when she removed Belle's cup from her purse, moving it around while he tried to reach for it. Such a...sentimental little keepsake." He snatched the cup from her.

"Thank you... your Majesty. So... now that we're being honest with each other, let's remember how things used to be, shall we? And don't let these bars fool you, dear. I'm the one with the power around here. I'm gonna be out of here in no time, and nothing between us will change!"

"We shall see," Regina taunted, standing up and gripping the cell bars herself while he sat with the cup in his hands. She walked away. He stood up, clutching Belle's precious cup in his hand, glaring after her retreating form.

The little door to the cell opened and Lacey gasped in horror, recognizing the face of the woman who came to visit her, always taunting her about things she didn't understand.

"He remembers now, dear...but not you. And you never will. But not to worry. It's better this way. I told you before, that monster you call a lover is beyond saving. If you did remember, you'd be thanking me. As long as he holds on to his memories of you, I can weaken him. Love is weakness!"

"Go away!" Lacey screamed. "No...no...please...not again!" she begged when the door opened and the orderlies came in along with the nurse, her screams echoing through the basement of the
hospital. The sounds were like music to Regina's ears. He may have the cup, but she had her and could kill her whenever she pleased. It was just a matter of waiting for the right moment to present itself.

Regina was getting careless...and desperate. The shepherd prince and her hated stepdaughter were taking some initiative and now their secret was out, tossing, yet another wrench into her plans only she wasn't willing to surrender yet. And Rumple wasn't willing to spend what time remained of her curse trapped in a jail cell. It was time to strike another deal and he had the perfect bargaining chip.

He found her at her window, her late fiance's ring in her hand.

"Remembrance of things past?" he asked her.

"What do you want?"

"I need a favor."

"You need a favor from me?" she scoffed and turned to face him.

"Well, as you know, there are battery charges against me pending. I really don't relish the thought of spending any more time locked up in a cage. Now...someone with your influence could make the D.A. suddenly realize what a flimsy case they have." he said as he stood in front of the table. "Isn't that right... Your Majesty?" He grabbed one of the apples.

"What do I get out of it?"

"Help with your Mary Margaret problem," he proposed with a smirk. "You see, I've noticed that no matter how hard you seem to try to stop them, she and her charming friend just keep finding ways to be together."

"What are you suggesting?" she asked, sitting down.

"If you want to inflict pain..." Rumple began, setting the apple down, "then you must inflict pain. If something tragic... were to happen to David's wife, and if Mary Margaret should take the blame..."

"She'd be ruined."

"And you'd have your victory, at last."

"A trial could be very messy."

"A trial? Now who said anything about a trial? No, once Miss Blanchard has been incarcerated, you can plant one of your lovely skeleton keys in her cell. And once she tries to leave Storybrooke, well... we all know what happens to people who attempt to leave town...bad things..."

"Give me one good reason why I should trust you."

"Because I always honor my agreements. Do we have a deal?" he asked, tossing the apple at her.

"Deal!" she said sweetly and bit into the apple.

He put in a call to Dove, giving him specific instructions as to what was to be done regarding Kathryn Nolan. He made it quite clear she was not to be harmed in any way and taken directly to the cabin. He would see to it that her confinement was somewhat comfortable for her until the right moment to release her presented itself. Two days later he walked out of the courtroom a free man and Albert Spencer was ready to spit nails. Even back in the Enchanted Forest the poor excuse for
a king had no power over him...what made him think a little curse would change that? They'd all forgotten whom they were dealing with. Soon the time would come to remind them. Until then he would remind them the best way he could...with past due rent notices and his commanding presence. Now it was time to put a certain Blue Fairy in her place. The rent was due on the convent and nothing would please him more than to toss that jellyfish's arse out on the street for taking his son away from him but he'd underestimated Snow White. Even with a reputation as a homewrecker hovering over her, she managed to raise enough money selling candles to keep the convent running with a little sabotage of course by that dwarf Grumpy. Clever, very clever.

Adding to the queen's anxiety was David's determination to locate his missing wife but with the curse still active he was prone to having convenient blackouts and sent to Dr. Hopper for a psychological evaluation. Knowing Regina as well as he did, Rumple suspected the curse would only make Charming recall events from his past that would be damning to Mary Margaret rather than helpful but the heart she planted in the forest would make the outlaw princess look like the ultimate jealous lover and the murder weapon in her apartment would put the nails in her coffin and this time no true love's kiss was getting her out of it.

Meanwhile he would have to play his part in the game. He entered the police station as Emma was questioning the former princess about finding crucial evidence in the heating vent.

"Okay, what are you saying?" Mary was asking.

"I'm saying you should think about hiring a lawyer."

"An excellent idea," he said.

"Mr. Gold. What are you doing here?"

"Offering my legal services."

Emma eyed him suspiciously. "You're a lawyer?"

"Ever wondered why I'm so adept at contracts? I've been following the details of your case Miss Blanchard and I think you'd be well advised to bring me on as your counsel."

The former princess was hesitant as he suspected she would be until she thought about it. No one else was powerful enough to defend her except Mr. Gold.

"I can't pay you."

"I didn't ask for money."

"Then why are you doing this?"

"Let's just say I'm invested in your future."

Again.

Archie didn't want to believe Mary Margaret was guilty of such atrocities but the evidence was undeniable. He'd heard through the grapevine, namely the miners that the heart found the schoolteacher's jewelry box did indeed belong to Kathryn Nolan. He was also shocked when he opened his office door and found her widower standing on the other side.

"David? What can I do for you?"
"Dr. Hopper, I need your help."

"Okay, what is it?"

"I've been having these blackouts and I need to remember what happened during them."

"Why?"

"I think I might know something that can help Mary Margaret."

"All right, let's see what I can do."

When Emma returned to Mary's apartment she was shocked to find Henry waiting for her.

"Mom framed Mary Margaret. I have proof." He held up a set of skeleton keys he'd stolen from the house earlier. "This is how my mom got in your apartment. This is how she framed Miss Blanchard."

Henry attempted to demonstrate by using one of the keys to open the door but it did not work. Just as he was about to give up he saw an apple shaped ornament on one of the keys. His mother had given Snow White a poisoned apple…that one had to be it. He tried it in the lock and successfully opened the door.

"Do you believe now?"

Not in the magical nonsense but now it seemed Madam Mayor had a few things to answer for. Back at his office, Archie made David lie down on the couch and placed him under hypnosis.

"David, listen very closely. Can you hear me?"

"Yes."

"Good. I want you to go back in your memory, back to the last time you and Kathryn spoke. The last thing you remember. Tell me, where are you."

"In my bedroom."

"When?"

"The night she left."

"And what were you doing?"

"I called her on her cell."

"What did you talk about?"

"She said she'd realized she needed to start a new life without me. She thought Mary Margaret and I should be together."

"And how did that conversation end?"

"She said she was hurt but she wanted me to be happy."

"Do you remember anything after that?"
"Yes. I saw Mary Margaret in the woods."

Archie tensed. The box with the heart in it had been discovered in the woods.

"What was she doing there?"

For several minutes he didn't answer and there was a terrified expression on his face. Archie tried calling his name several times. "David! David!"

His eyes flew open. "What happened?"

"I had to wake you up. You went too deep into hypnosis and something was disturbing you. What did you see?"

"It was…" He stopped.

"What? Tell me David. I can help you."

The younger man jumped off the sofa toward the door, Archie meeting him before he had a chance to leave. "David, tell me. What did you see? I can help you," he insisted.

"You can't," David declared grimly and left the therapist standing there stunned.

Rumple was at his shop working on his inventory when Emma arrived.

"What can I do for you Miss Swan? Any developments on the case I should be aware of?" Other than the obvious which I hope by now you have enough intelligence to have figured out.

"Yes. Regina set her up."

Bingo, dearie!

"And that surprises you? Show me your evidence and we will get this over with immediately."

"That's the thing. There isn't any. Anything that's court worthy but I know it now."

"Look who's suddenly become a woman of faith. Why are you here Miss Swan? To spin conspiracy theories?"

"I need help."

"From me?"

"Every time I've gone up against Regina I've lost. Except for once, when I became Sheriff. When you helped."

"As I recall you don't exactly approve of my methods."

"I approve of your results. And this time I have something more important than a job. I need to save my friend."

"And you're willing to go as far as it takes?"

"Farther."

He grinned and nodded. "Now we're talking. Fear not Miss Swan. Regina may be powerful but something tells me you may be more powerful than you know."
And according to plan Mary Margaret had discovered one of Regina's keys in her cell but not according to plan; Jefferson kidnapped her to stop her from leaving town and Emma along with her so that she could fix his silly hat. He knew very well she couldn't, not without magic in this land. Soon, very soon the magic he'd bottled for a rainy day would at last be put to use.

Ah, but it was a pleasure to see the look on Regina's face when her nemesis was found in her cell safe and sound. His next course of action was to have her talk to Albert Spencer, formerly known as King George who had his own reasons to hate Snow White though he didn't remember them….which worked in her favor but Regina wasn't quite ready to give up yet.

He put in a call to Dove after Regina managed to make the evidence proving she buried the heart in the woods to vanish.

"Release her," he said.

"Right away sir."

"You broke our deal," Regina accused when she stormed into the shop the next day.

"I broke one deal in my life and sadly….it wasn't this one."

"Kathryn was supposed to die and Mary Margaret was to get the blame."

Murder for pleasure may be one of your vices, dearie, but not mine.

"Yeah, murder seems so much worse here though, doesn't it? You can't just turn someone into a snail and step on them, can you? You didn't say 'kill her'. We agreed that something tragic should happen to her and abduction is tragic."

"The intent was perfectly clear."

"Oh let's not talk about intent. Intent is meaningless."

"Intent is everything."

"Please."

"This is going to raise all kinds of questions about where she was and how the test results were faked."

"Oh yes, and who put the key in her cell?"

"It's all gonna lead to me, isn't it? You bastard! This isn't making any sense. You and I…we've been in this together…from the start!"

"Have we?"

"You created the curse for me. The curse that brought us all here and built all this."

"Yes. The one time you said thank you."

"Why did you do it?"

"Well you're a smart woman, Your Majesty. Figure it out."

"I don't know what to think anymore."
"And that's your problem dearie. Not mine."

She growled and stormed out of the shop.

It's almost over Bae. Almost over.

Now all he had to do was sit back and watch Regina's scheme unravel, not knowing that his own past was about to come back to haunt him.

There was a stranger in town, a writer named August Wayne Booth, a phony name if Rumple had ever heard one and the man seemed a little too interested in him for his liking but it wasn't until he followed him to the convent and threatened the Blue Fairy into telling him what she knew of the stranger that his hopes and his fears came back to the surface. His Bae! Here in Storybrooke! He was elated…and terrified at the same time. What if he wanted to use the dagger to kill him?

He drove over to Dr. Hopper's office hoping the cricket would have some advice for him. He knocked once, his courage faltering. He wasn't comfortable talking with anyone about his personal life. He didn't trust them. The only other person he had trusted was lost to him forever. As he was about to leave the door opened.

"Mr. Gold? Are you here for the rent?" Archie asked him.

"Why does everyone ask me that?" Rumple asked, frustrated.

"Oh, because you…never mind." His landlord seemed distraught, not like himself at all. "Would you like to talk?" he offered gently.

"I don't know."

"If you'd like to get something off your chest, please come in."

Rumple sighed and stepped into the office. Archie sat in his chair and made Rumple sit on the sofa. The older man sat there for a few minutes before he finally began to speak.

"I have a son…." he began. "And I may have found him…"

"A son? I didn't know you had a son. How old is he?" Archie inquired, shocked. He was getting quite a few surprises from his new patients as of late. David thought he might have seen Mary burying a heart that didn't even belong to his wife and now Mr. Gold had a son.

"Let's start with something easier."

"What do you mean to say that you may have found him?"

"Let's just say there's someone acting like I would expect him to act."

"So, you recognize him?"

"Maybe." He shook his head. "Perhaps I'm just seeing what I wanna see. I don't know."

"Wouldn't he recognize you?"

"There was conflict. I'm not sure he's ready for a tear soaked reunion."

"So he sought you out and he's hanging back? Maybe he's watching to see if he's welcome. Looking for a sign that all is forgiven."
"No, no, no. He's not that one that needs to be…” He sighed. "I think he might still be very angry."

"Anger between parent and a child is the most natural thing in the world."

"I think he might be here to kill me."

Archie was taken aback. "Ah, right. That…that's not."

What did you do to him that makes him want to kill you?

"I let him go. I've spent my entire life trying to fix it and now he's finally here. And I just don't know what to do."

"Be honest. Just tell him what you've told me and ask him for forgiveness. And when you're face to face, you'll know what to do."

"Honesty has never been the best color of me."

"There's no other way. Tell me, why did you let him go? Were you too young when he was born, terrified of being a father? Was there a financial hardship and you placed him up for adoption to give him a good home? What about his mother?"

"She's dead," Rumple said bitterly.

"I take it your marriage…it was a marriage, correct? Your marriage was not a good one?"

"Before our son was born it was….but Milah….spent most of her time at bars…with other men. I was basically raising our boy by myself and we had very little money…but that wasn't why…"

"What was it?"

"I was a coward," he said angrily. "I made a deal with the devil and the price I paid was losing my son because when I had the choice to go with him or stay….I wasn't strong enough to go…and I lost him…He's not gonna care one iota that I didn't want to let him go. He's believed all these years that my power meant more to me than he did but it's not true. He was EVERYTHING TO ME! He IS everything to me."

"Then you need to tell him that. There was no way you could get him back?"

"I didn't remember…something happened that my memory…is not as good as it used to be."

"I see. Mr. Gold, I honestly believe if the two of you sat down and talked things out he would be able to forgive you and my door is always open if you want to come in and talk with me too."

"I want to make things right, Doctor Hopper. My son…he was the only person in this world who truly loved me. There was another…but I lost her too…I drive away everyone I love because all my life I've believed no one could ever love me."

Archie leaned forward. "Did someone make you feel that way…a parent perhaps?"

"My father…" he croaked. "He let me go…just like I let my boy go….I'm just like him…"

He didn't know why he trusted the former cricket with some of his darkest secrets but once the dam burst there was nothing holding him back. For so many years he'd buried his pain deep within his soul.
"Did your father ever try to come back for you?"

"No! The bastard left me with two spinsters he knew and they raised me. He never came back for me. He didn't give a damn. All he cared about was his youth…and I was robbing him of it."

"That's what makes you different from your father. You loved your son enough that you at least made an attempt to try to find him until you started having memory issues. Does he know…what happened with your father?"

"I never told him. And he's gonna think the same thing I do…I'm just like that son of a bitch."

"I think not."

"Then you're in the minority, Doctor."

"Talk to him, tell him everything you've just told me and I'm certain you'll be able to work things out between you. If you love your son as much as you say you do and truly want him to be a part of your life, you'll find the courage to do what you need to do to keep him in it."

Rumple stood up, feeling more confident than he had in centuries. "What do I owe you?"

"Nothing. However, I would like to see you and your son out and about sometime…and happy."

"No, no…I do owe you and I always repay my debts. Consider your rent waived for a year."

Archie's mouth dropped open. Had he heard the man right?

"Mr…Mr. Gold…I can't possibly…"

"I insist, Doctor."

"T..Thank you…but I…"

"No buts. This is the most confident I've felt since…since my son and I…never mind. Thank you again, Doctor Hopper."

Rumple left the office with a smile on his face. I can do this. I can get my boy back.

Unfortunately for Rumple, the boy that he was hoping was his son was only Pinocchio, the puppet turned son of Doctor Hopper's friend Geppetto. They now stood out in the woods, Pinocchio holding the dagger and attempting to control him. Rumple laughed bitterly.

"My curse isn't active now, dearie!" he said menacingly. "My Bae would have known that. It was the reason why he wanted to come here. Now, the question is: what shall I do with you?"

"I'm already dying without magic." He lifted his pant leg to reveal the evidence, instead of a human limb; he now had the wooden legs of the puppet he used to be.

"Magic comes with a price dearie and you're paying yours from living a decadent lifestyle, aren't you?"

"Please…you have to help me…"

"Why should I? You pretended to be my son, got my hopes up and then….then you tried to use my dagger to control me. I owe you nothing boy! You're damned lucky I don't have my magic or so help me I would blast you into oblivion! But since you're going to die anyway, there's no sense in
me wasting my energy on it. Go."

The terrified young man ran out of the woods and hopped onto his bike, riding hell for leather back into town. Rumple walked back to his own car smiling.

"That certainly lit a fire under his arse! Maybe now he'll work a bit harder on getting the Savior to do her damned job!"

Despite his best efforts, Emma still refused to believe and Regina grew even more desperate. She summoned Jefferson to her, wanting him to use his hat one last time but it would not work without magic.

Emma was not having a good day herself. She asked Archie to lunch to discuss taking custody of Henry and his opinion was not the one she was expecting to hear.

"Emma, I'm sorry, but I'm afraid you don't have any case for custody!"

"Even after everything she's done?"

"Which you can't prove! Why don't I ask you a question: with this war raging on, who do you think's really getting hurt?"

"I know. Henry! But don't you think it's a good thing he's spending time with me? I'm his mother!"

"Yes, you are. And so is Regina. And... well, look, the court is gonna come in and look at him and see how he's been since you've come into his life."

"And he's been happier, right?"

"M... maybe? Uhh. He skips school, he's stolen a credit card, he's run off, he-he's endangered himself, repeatedly, and so in the eyes of the law it's not so..."

"What about in your eyes? What do you think?"

"I mean, a while ago, I told you to engage him in his fantasy life, and... perhaps I was wrong. Because he's only retreated further into it."

"You think he's better off with her?"

"I've never said that."

"Do you think that she would ever hurt him?"

"No. Never. Everyone else, but not him. Look, right or wrong, her actions have all been defensive. I'm not judging, but..." He sighed deeply. "In many ways, your rival has woken a sleeping dragon."

"Tell me honestly. Has he been better off since I got here?"

"Oh. That's not a matter of better off. It's a matter of "this war has to end." If you two are going to be in his life, you have to figure out the best way to do that."

"Why do I get the feeling I'll only be part of his life over her dead body... or mine...?" Emma mused aloud. Both of them shivered.

"This is all the magic I saved from our world," Regina said as she and Jefferson kneeled on the
marble floor in her vault, holding the ring Daniel had given her, kissing it and dropping it into the hat. It spun and a small portal between the worlds opened.

"It's not enough for us to go through, but large enough to retrieve something," he said.

She smiled deviously, knowing just what she wanted to retrieve. She directed the portal to the place where she and Snow had their final encounter before her nemesis fell victim to the sleeping curse. The apple with one bite rolled down the hill, through the portal and into Regina's outstretched hand. She returned home with her prize in hand confident that she now had the means to take care of her Emma Swan problem once and for all. She couldn't kill her because it meant the curse would be broken…but…putting her in an enchanted sleep would do.

Emma arrived at the house a short time later.

"We need to talk," she said firmly.

"Yes, I imagine we do. I was just about to call you. Come right in. Do what you're so skilled at and make yourself at home. I believe you came to see me."

"Look. This isn't easy. I think that this…whatever it is between us—needs to end."

"At last, something we can agree on."

"I wanna make a deal with you about Henry."

"I'm not making any deals with you."

"I'm leaving town," Emma announced.

"What?" The former queen was not certain whether she was disappointed or overjoyed.

"This—what we're doing is a problem. And I'm gonna go. But I have conditions. I still get to see Henry, I get to visit, and spend time, whatever."

"And you get to see him; you're still in his life."

"In any deal both parties are a little unhappy. But let's be honest: we both know a world where I'm not in his life no longer exists and there's no one who can do anything about that."

The oven beeped in the kitchen.

"You're right. Would you mind following me for a moment?" Regina led the younger woman into the kitchen, donned her over mitts and pulled the tray with the turnover out of the oven. "So, what are you proposing?"

"I don't know. Just—figure it out as we go."

"But he's my son."

"Yeah."

Emma started to leave.

"Oh, Miss Swan. Maybe a little something for the road?" Regina called out.

"Thanks."
Regina placed the turnover into a Rubbermaid container.

"If we're going to be in each other's lives, it's time we start being cordial. My famous turnovers. Old recipe. But delicious." Regina handed the box with the turnover to Emma.

"Thank you."

"I do hope you like apples."

Once Emma left, Regina drove over to the pawn shop.

"I hope you bought travel insurance. Because no one's going anywhere," she taunted.

"Oh really. And why's that?"

"Because I found the solution to my Emma Swan problem."

"Oh, yes."

"An old, reliable solution."

"A sleeping curse. Might I ask how you managed to obtain one here in Storybrooke?" Rumple inquired curiously.

"By sacrificing the last bit of magic I had left."

"So you made magic from magic. Well, I'm sure I don't have to remind you that uh... all magic comes with a price."

Regina leaned forward on the counter and glared at him. "Then you can pay it. Because now? The curse is gonna be stronger than ever and you will be right here, where you belong!"

Tired of listening to her mad ravings, Rumple started to walk away.

"Don't you understand? I won! So whatever plan you had, whatever reason you wanted the curse broken... too bad. Because it's never going to happen!" Regina walked toward the door, spinning the globe as she left.

"That's what you think dearie," Rumple hissed, glaring at the closed door. "Whatever malice you've done will be returned threefold," he predicted.

He had no way of knowing just how right he was.

Henry was distraught. Now he was the only one left who believed in the curse. Pinocchio had given up, Archie refused to believe him and now they were about to lose the Savior. He couldn't let it happen. He wouldn't let it happen. He snatched the turnover and held it up.

"I'm sorry it had to come to this. You may not believe in the curse or me. But I believe in you." He raised the turnover to his lips and took a bite.

"See. You want some ice cream with that."

The young boy's eyes closed and he collapsed to the floor as his mother looked on in horror.

"Henry. HENRY!"
Terrified, she raced to the phone and called the ambulance, trying to keep herself calm while she explained to the dispatchers what happened and gave them the address of Mary's loft. Many times during the ride to the hospital and once they arrived she pleaded desperately with her son to open his eyes to no avail and Doctor Whale was at a loss to figure out what was going on.

Emma grabbed the storybook. It began to glow in her hands and she could hear her son's voice along with images of David holding a baby in his arms and placing her in a wardrobe, pleading with her to find them. She could see a blanket with the name Emma embroidered into it.

She lowered the book, her eyes blazing with anger, accepting at last who she was: the daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming...and now she would be the Savior...for her son. She could hear Regina in the room and turned to her in a rage.

"You did this!" she snarled, grabbing her and dragging her into a supply closet, shoving her against a shelf.

"No!"

"You did this!" Emma insisted.

"What the hell are you doing? Stop this....my son..."

"He's sick because of you! That apple turnover you gave me. HE ATE IT!"

"It was meant for you!" Regina cried.

"It's true isn't it? All of it?"

"Yes," the former queen admitted brokenly.

All magic comes with a price...

"I was leaving town, why couldn't you just leave things alone?"

"Because as long as you're alive, Henry will never be mine."

"He will never be anyone's unless you fix this. You wake him up!"

"I can't!"

"Don't you have magic?"

"That was the last of it. It was supposed to put you to sleep!"

"What's it gonna do to him?"

"I don't know. Magic here is unpredictable."

"So... so he could..."

"Yes."

"So what do we do?"

"We need help. There's one other person in town who knows about this. Knows about magic."

"Mr. Gold..."
"Actually, he goes by Rumplestiltskin."

News traveled fast in town and no news travelled faster than bad news. The moment Rumple was informed of Henry's condition, he went to the backroom to retrieve Charming's sword. The Savior was going to need it if she was going to get the true love potion back from Maleficent. He knew Henry would be fine until her task was finished, the two women would not. He didn't enjoy lying to Miss Swan whom he was beginning to respect but she had to have the well being of her son in her mind as she fought the dragon. It would give Emma focus and the strength she needed to defeat her.

The two women walked into the shop a few minutes later.

"Do my eyes deceive me, or is that the look of a believer?" he asked Emma.

"We need your help."

"Indeed you do. It seems quite the tragic ailment has befallen our young friend. I told you magic comes with a price," he chastised Regina

"Henry shouldn't have to pay it," she said sadly.

"No, you should, but alas, we are where we are."

Just like your mother. Have to learn your lessons the hard way.

"Can you help us?"

"Of course. True love, Miss Swan—the only magic strong enough to transcend realms and break any curse. Luckily for you, I happen to have bottled some."

"You did?" Regina inquired, stunned.

"Oh yes. From strands of her parents' hair, I made the most powerful potion in all the realm. So powerful, that, when I created the Dark Curse, I placed a single drop on the parchment. Just a little safety valve."

"That's why I'm the savior, that's why I can break the curse," Emma said softly.

"Now you're getting it."

"I don't care about breaking the curse. All I care about is saving Henry."

"Which is why it's your lucky day. I didn't use all the potion. I saved some. For a rainy day."

"Well, it's storming like a bitch. Where is it?"

"Where it is, isn't the problem. Getting it is what should worry you."

Regina was becoming irritated. "Enough riddles. What do we do?"

"You do nothing. It has to be Miss Swan."

"He's my son. It should be me."

"All due respect, but it's her son. And it has to be her. She's the product of the magic. She must be the one to find it."
"I can do it," Emma insisted.

"Don't trust him."

"What choice do we have?"

"That's right dearie, What choice do you have?"

"Where is this magic?"

"Tell me, your Majesty, is our friend still in the basement?"

"Oh, you twisted little imp. You hid it with her?"

"Oh no no no, not with her. In her. I knew you couldn't resist bringing her over."

"Who is 'her'?"

"Someone you should be prepared for. Where you're going, you're gonna need this. " He opened the case.

"What is that?"

"Your father's sword."

"A sword? You've got to be kidding me! I don't know how to use one."

"You'll have to learn quickly, won't you?"

The two of them drove back to the hospital to see Henry for a few minutes, agreeing to meet up at the library. Jefferson stopped Regina as she was leaving to remind her of their deal; a deal she never intended to keep. The portal jumper watched her leave, his eyes narrowed to slits. Now he was going to play his trump card and the Evil Queen would need to start running. Once Rumplestiltskin discovered his precious Belle was alive, Regina was going to be roasted on a spit and Jefferson would enjoy watching the show.

Emma felt as if she'd walked onto the set of a fantasy movie. Hidden in the basement of the library was none other than a dragon. She drew her gun, firing several shots at the dragon. The creature howled and sent a blast of fire at the terrified sheriff. Emma ducked behind a rock and fired again.

I gotta do this…for Henry!

She threw the gun down and picked up the sword, hurling it at the dragon. The blade buried itself in the best's belly, the dragon shattering to pieces leaving only a golden egg. Emma picked it up and ran to the elevator, expecting to find Regina there but it was Rumple. He'd already taken care of the queen, tying her up in the lobby.

"Mr. Gold? What are you doing here?"

"I've come to check on you. I'm glad I did. Regina abandoned you and sabotaged the elevator," he lied smoothly while Regina protested as loudly as she could through her gag only Emma was too far down in the shaft to hear her.

"What? I'm coming up!"

"No there's- there's no time for this. You can't possibly scale the wall and carry that."
"Yeah? Well I can try."

"No you can't, just toss it up. Your boy's gonna be fine. I promise. We're running out of time, toss it up."

"Okay. You hold on to it, I'll be right up." She tossed him the egg. He turned and walked out of the library, pausing by Regina's chair. "Now who won, dearie!" he sneered at her.

"Mr. Gold? Gold!' Emma yelled from inside the shaft and climbed back. She hurried back to the lobby and found Regina tied to a chair. She pulled the gag from the other woman's mouth "Regina?"

"He tricked you! How could you give him that?"

"Where is he?"

"Gone. Gold. He manipulated all of this," Regina said angrily as Emma untied her bonds.

"Come on, he can't be that far!" Suddenly both of their cell phones started to ring. "It's the hospital," Emma declared worriedly.

Paradise

The Ozian Heaven Realm

Henry was walking down a long corridor into a dimly lit room where a woman with silvery blond hair with wings awaited him. She smiled.

"Hello Henry," she greeted softly.

"Who are you?"

"I am known by many names but my true name is Ozmalita."

"Are you an angel?"

"I am the servant angel to our world's goddess, Lurline."

"Am I dead?"

"Oh no dear child but you are standing on the barrier between the living world and the immortal one. It was your destiny." With a flourish a silver staff with a dragon's head appeared before him. "You are the east guardian, the staff that summons the winds of change."

"I don't understand….I'm what?"

"It does not surprise me you are not aware of your special heritage. Unfortunately once you awaken your memories of it and your time here must be cloaked again until the time is right for the truth to be revealed to those who must hear it."

"What am I?" he asked again.

"You are the son of Baelfire, grandson of Rumplestiltskin."

"Wh…what? Mr. Gold's my grandfather??"
"He is, little one. He is also the West Guardian, holder of the blade, wielder of fire." A circle appeared on the floor at their feet. She moved him into position on the east side and a shadow of Rumple appeared in the west position along with the images of two women in the north and south. "You are the Strogoff, the most powerful of the circle. The women who stand at the north and south are the Ozopov. Like your grandfather, Azkadellia Ozopov's soul is in the grip of darkness. It must be freed."

"How?"

"Soon their trials will come. Azkadellia will face hers first and then it will be Rumplestiltskin's time. You are the key to freeing him, Henry."

"Me? How?"

"Accept the gift that he sends to you and return to him a part of yourself as your gift and the darkness will surrender its hold on his heart and soul."

"My mom...she said my father was dead."

"Your father lives, Henry. And you must lead your grandfather back to him."

"If Grandpa has my dad back...what will that do?"

"The Alemedia Demonia's hold on your grandfather's heart is only strong when he has no one to anchor him to his humanity. Reunite him with the three that are his sources of strength. You are one of those three. Your father is the second and the fourth is his bondmate."

"Belle," Henry whispered. "She's here in Storybrooke, isn't she?"

Adora nodded. "Soon she will be freed and her search for her bondmate will begin. If Azkadellia succeeds in freeing herself, she must be reunited with her bondmate as well." She smiled. "And you have done well with him."

"I have?"

"The North Guardian is the stone of the land and the voice of logic and reason. Whom among you has this same trait now when the curse deprived him of it?"

Henry gasped. "Archie?"

"Yes. Now the time has come for you to go. I shall see you again very soon dear."

With his treasure in his hands, Rumple raced back to the shop to retrieve its key from the cabinet where he kept some of his most prized items. Just a little while longer, Bae, he thought while he unlocked the egg with the key, extracted the true love potion and tucked it into his pocket. He put the egg back in its box when he heard the doorbell tinkle. Dammit, didn't anyone in this town know how to read?! "Excuse me...are you Mr. Gold?" he heard a woman's voice call out.

"Yes, I am but I'm afraid the shop is closed," he said with his back to her. When he spun around the sight before his eyes left him breathless.

It can't be...I'm imagining this...or I am dreaming...

Her hair was disheveled, her skin pale, and she was wearing the most awful clothes yet it was still
the same beautiful face he'd seen in thousands of dreams...the same blue eyes.

"I...I was told to find you and tell you that Regina locked me up. Does that mean anything to you?” she asked him.

He approached her slowly, terrified that if he touched her she would vanish before his eyes leaving only another painful memory. "You're real...you're alive..." he whispered, and reached out to touch her shoulder, his heart nearly bursting when he discovered she was not a ghost at all but living and breathing. "She did this to you..."

"I was told you'd protect me..."

"Oh yes..." he sobbed, pulling her into his arms. "Yes, I'll protect you!"

"I'm sorry...do I know you?"

"No," he croaked. "But you will."

"I don't understand."

"It's all right. You don't have to right now," he said softly. "There's someplace I have to go." He took her hand and led her outside to his car. His Belle...alive! Along with joy there was also anger not at her but Regina.

She was going to use her against me. Keep her alive so that she could kill her when it suited her...a fate worse than death. Well, dearie...that is exactly what I have in store for you when I get my hands on you!

He knew he would have to get in line, however, because once the savior actually did her damned job, the whole town was going to want Regina's head on a pike, however the final punishment would be his alone to deliver. He drove them out to the wishing well.

"Mr. Gold...ummm...where are you taking me?"

"There's just somewhere I have to be right now. You'll understand...soon enough I hope."

Don't disappoint me now Emma. Although he had the true love potion, it was not strong enough to break the curse. That had to be done by the product of the magic that created the tiny drop he'd placed on the parchment. They got out of the car and made the trek up the hill, a difficult one with his disabled leg.

As Regina sobbed by the door, Emma approached the bed of the son she barely knew, silent tears falling down her cheeks. The medical staff had tried desperately to save him but it had been too late.

This is your fault, she thought sadly. Had you believed, believed in him he never would have eaten that turnover. He knew what it would do to him. You, like everyone else in this town just chalked it up to an overactive imagination.

Oh Henry, it wasn't supposed to be like this. When I gave you up I said I couldn't be a mother. Now all I want is another chance to make things right, to be the mother you need. But it's too late. I am not a savior. I am a failure.

She bent over and kissed his forehead...his so cold forehead. "I love you Henry," she whispered through her tears.
The moment her lips touched his cold flesh Henry gasped and his eyes opened.

"Henry!" Emma cried.

"You did it!" Regina whispered.

A wave of golden light swept through the town and memories of a past forgotten returned to its residents.

Archie Hopper was walking down Main Street when he was nearly knocked over by a strange light.

My God! Henry was right…..I am Jiminy Cricket! he thought.

But along with pleasant memories of their pasts, painful ones also returned and he was reminded of his past with his con artist parents including the one incident he would have given his very soul to take back….taking away Geppetto's parents. Now that his old friend remembered who he was, he feared Geppetto's anger would return as it had shortly before the curse was cast. As he continued walking, another set of memories returned.

It was time to free his wife.

"You did it. You saved me!" Henry declared happily and several people came into the room, one of them the Blue Fairy.

"What's going on?" Emma asked her son.

"The curse…I think you broke it."

"That was true love's kiss," Blue confirmed.

"No…no!" Regina gasped knowing well what it meant for her. The nightmare she had about the people in town wanting her head was about to become very real.

"If I were you, Your Majesty, I'd find a place to hide," Blue suggested.

Regina hurried over to the bed and glanced down at her son. "No matter what happens, no matter what they tell you…I still love you," she said softly and fled the room.

Up on the hill Belle recoiled with shock as her own memories returned; the months she'd spent in captivity in Regina's castle, being assaulted by a hook wielding pirate when she refused to tell him anything about Rumple…..the clerics…..and finally Rumple, who looked different in this world but still the man she loved, the one she would never stop fighting for.

"Wait!" she cried out.

"No, no, we're very close."

"Rumplestiltskin...wait."

He paused. Had she just...?

She hurried to him. "I remember...I love you!" she declared. He threw his arms around her and held her tightly.

At last, she thought.
"Yes! And I love you too. But hey...there'll be time for that. There'll be time for everything but first there is something I must do." He released her and continued up the hill to the wishing well.

"What is this?"

"This is a very special place, Belle. That waters that run below are said to have the power to return that which one has lost." He retrieved the true love potion from his coat pocket, removed the stopper and dropped it into the well. A thick cloud of purple smoke drifted out of it.

"I don't understand..."

"We live in a land without magic Belle...and I'm bringing it. Magic...is coming."

"But why?"

"Because magic is power..." he murmured, feeling all of his powers returning to him...and it felt wonderful. He could now be certain no one would ever be able to hurt Belle or his son again...once he found him. "And it is one way I can certain no one EVER harms you again. You have to tell me what happened," he said softly.

"I was abducted."

"By Regina!" he hissed.

"She locked me away until she cast her curse and I've been the asylum ever since."

"All these years...you've been here? Alive?"

She nodded. "She wanted to use me as leverage against you."

"I cannot let this stand Belle! I will not let this stand! She is not going to get the satisfaction and when we get back to town she is going to get a very unpleasant reminder of why she should never cross me," he growled.

"As much as I would like to see her punished for what she's done Rumple, you have just given this town magic....and that means she will have hers too and she will fight you!" Belle cried worriedly.

He took her into his arms. "Let me worry about that, sweetheart. Your safety is the only thing that matters to me right now. What did happen after you left...?"

"I traveled a bit...and met a nice young woman named Mulan and defeated a creature called the Yaoguai. He was cursed like you were but I found a way to break it. It was then that I realized what a fool I was for leaving. When you love someone, truly love someone, you never give up on them." She gazed into his eyes. "And I am never going to stop fighting for you!"

He cupped her face in his hands and kissed her softly. She wrapped her arms around his neck and pulled him closer as she kissed him back with all the love she felt in her heart, praying this time she would be successful in breaking his curse. For several moments nothing else existed but the two of them. He reluctantly detached himself from her embrace and stepped back.

"I'm still cursed Belle," he said sadly.

"But...I thought....true love broke all curses..."

"This is more than a curse, Belle. You are an intelligent woman, well read. Surely you know who the Alemedia Demonia is."
She gasped. "Oh, Rumple!"

Tears brimmed in the corners of his eyes. "I gave my soul to the devil herself, Belle…for my son and I lost him because of it too," he croaked. "When you first kissed me….you started bringing me back to the man I was but this curse, it will take more than a kiss to break…and without it how can I protect you?"

"You don't need magic to protect me, Rumple though I have a suspicion that you'll retain your magic even without being under the influence of Alemedia Demonia," she said confidently.

"How can you be so certain?"

"Because, my love, I am, as you've said well read and one of the things I've discovered about magic is that you are either born with it…or you learn it. You've spent centuries learning it so now it has become part of you…or you may have been born with it and not even known it." She took his hand and led him over to a fallen tree trunk to sit down. "I thought you might want to rest." She glanced down at his leg. "Your old injury returned while you were cursed."

He nodded. "I briefly mentioned my son back in my castle. Now it's time I told you the truth."

Belle listened attentively as Rumple opened up to her in a way he never had before and she loved him all the more for it. There was no doubt in her mind that he regretted losing the child he loved so much, even forsaking her so that he could devote his time to finding his beloved Bae. "I chose to stay cursed for Bae; Belle though hearing that you were dead shattered my heart as much as when I lost my boy."

"Regina lied to you."

"How much of what I was told was a lie, sweetheart? Did your father send in the clerics?"

"Yes," she croaked. "It…it was horrible! My own father…violating me….without even having to touch me….." She buried her head in his shoulder. "I…I knew I had to escape and then I met Mulan. I was on my way back to you when Regina took me. She would come to my cell and taunt me while I was in the asylum."

"She will not come near you again. I will see to it."

Belle smiled through her tears. "And now that the curse is broken…we can find your son."

"You…you'll go with me?"

She took his hand in hers and kissed it. "I'll go anywhere with you. Nothing can keep us apart now."

Not even his silly former apprentice. She was going to have her own problems once the townspeople recovered their memories. He smiled devilishly as he imagined a mob bearing torches and pitchforks running after her. Unfortunately, they would be heading into a slaughter if she had her magic and there were still a few of them he didn't want to see get themselves killed over the likes of her.

"Come on, sweetheart. We'll go back to my shop and find you some decent clothes to wear." He put his arm around her waist and led her back to the car.

Her cursed memories had educated her on this world and its advantages over the one they left behind and she was not as frightened of them as she should have been. Nor would she ever fear
anything knowing he would be at her side. They could be strong when apart but together they would be formidable.

Nothing can hurt us if we stay together, she thought.

Ephesis

The Realm of the Forgotten

"...And now it begins..." Aramon murmured. He and Adora were gazing into a small pond he often used as a Seeing portal, watching the pieces of the puzzle begin to fall into place.

"You must prepare yourself my child. The double eclipse is coming."

"The prison will not hold with only bonded guardian to open it," she reminded him.

"It will hold long enough for two of the bonds to be consummated but Rumplestiltskin is not ready to divide his heart. Not yet."

"But will the bond still be strong enough without the heart being divided."

"Oh yes. It will weaken Alemedia's hold on him dramatically to the point where she will not be able to take control at all. And then he will banish her."

"Still the prison will not be strong enough. Dorothea's bond will have to be consummated."

Aramon frowned. "And that one will be the hardest to complete but it must be done. Pride comes before the fall ...her folly will damn them all..."

The scene shifted to one that could have been taken from every disaster movie, volcanos exploding, hot lava flowing down the mountains, tsunamis, earthquakes and the screams of millions as they fled their homes and towns only there was no safe place to go. The only escape routes to their world would be sealed off and the people of the OZ would perish.

This shall not come to pass, Adora thought determinedly. I will unite the Guardians and they will save our people.
New York City

"I am looking forward to this collaboration Neal. We're going to do great work together."

Baelfire smiled. Zelena Strogoff Sabitini was one of the top interior designers in the country and the prospect of entering into a partnership with her was a dream come true. Her husband and partner Angelo Sabitini had been blinded in an accident on their honeymoon but now he would need Zelena and Neal as Bae was now known to bring his visions to life. Bae met the couple at an exhibition in Italy two years earlier and they became fast friends.

"I'm honored you asked me, Zee. You could've picked anyone in the world."

"No one else captures my visions as well as you do," Angelo praised.

"And I hear a wedding may be in the works."

"I asked Tamara two weeks ago and she accepted," Bae murmured. He met his fiancee Tamara Giffen when they collided into each other on a busy New York street six months earlier and he was stunned to see how closely she resembled Alexis 'Lexie' Green, a woman he'd been in love with years ago in Miami Beach. Bae's past in Miami had been as painful as his past in Portland with Emma but he'd come close to losing his life in Miami. He took a job at a gentlemen's club called The Prime Catch unaware that the owner, an ex cop named William Roasch, was using the club as front for drug smuggling and prostitution. One night Bae had been the reluctant witness to the murder of Maria Rivera, one of Willie's girls. The woman claimed the son she had was Willie's child and she was threatening to turn states' evidence against him unless he started paying her more money or married her. Willie had his men beat Neal to the brink of death, tie him up, toss him in the trunk of a car and take him down to the beach to let him get swept out to sea.

Bae was fortunate that he was found by a young woman named Channon McDermott. She took him in and put him to work as one of the bodyguards at her club, The Oasis. Though the Oasis was also a brothel, Channon's girls were not involved in narcotics and her clients were some of the most prominent people in the state. He was assigned to Alexis but after a year their relationship evolved and Neal had proposed marriage to her, wanting her to get out of the business and fulfill her dream of becoming a singer but Alexis was not ready to settle down and Neal left Miami with his heart broken once again.

He was looking forward to his upcoming wedding to Tamara. He would finally have the chance to put his past behind him and move on. He was hoping Emma would be able to do the same even with the enormous burden of being the 'Savior' hanging over her head. Damn his father! Had it not been for his meddling he and Emma would've been able to find their Tallahassee together. He didn't care if he ever saw the bastard again. That night back in the Enchanted Forest he realized his father would never love anything more than power. When anyone asked him about his family he told them his parents abandoned him. It wasn't that far of a stretch from the truth.

"Wonderful! Why don't you come to dinner tonight and we'll celebrate!"

"What time?"

"Six," Zelena said with a smile.
"We'll be there," he said and walked out of the office. He put on his earbuds and Lou Reed's Charley's Girl came on, putting a little more stride into his step along with his joy that working with Zelena would give him more financial stability and he and Tamara could finally afford the larger apartment they were looking at in Harlem. It had been a wonderful day until he got back to his apartment to find that it was raining and he'd left the window open all day, not a wise thing to do in a place like New York City. He was fortunate he hadn't been burgled but he doubted anyone would want to take all of the vintage items he had in the apartment unless they were collectors or wanted to sell them for a quick profit on Ebay. He started to pull the window down and groaned when it was stuck again and his phone slipped out of his pocket and tumbled down the fire escape.

Oh well. I can afford a new one now, he thought. Just then a pigeon landed on the windowsill with something attached to its foot. Bae lifted the bird's foot and removed the item, a postcard. On the back of it was one word written in black marker.

BROKEN

He flipped the card over to see the image of a clock tower printed on the other side along with the words Greetings From Storybrooke!

She did it. She broke the curse.

But now his father remembered too...and he could only pray the bastard didn't come looking for him.

Neverland

The sands in the top of the hourglass were dwindling away as each day passed and soon Pan would revert back to his old, mortal self. It was a fate worse than death and one he desperately needed to avoid.

"We're running out of time," his second in command Felix said.

"Don't remind me!" Pan yelled and flicked his wrist, sending his friend flying against the wall and crashing to the floor of the cave on Skull Rock. "Send a message with the Shadow. Tell Tamara and Greg to stop playing around in San Francisco and get to Storybrooke. I want the Heart of the Truest Believer in my hand before the last sands fall or I'll incinerate this entire island and everyone in it!"

"Right away!" Felix said when he got to his feet, coughing. As he was walking through the jungle he passed the exiled fairy Tinkerbell. Were it her choice she would leave that miserable realm and go somewhere else but the Lost Boys needed her and she would never abandon them. Word was circulating around Pan's camp that Queen Regina's curse had been broken and Pan's desperate search for the Strogoff heir would begin again.

San Francisco, California

SFPD Homicide inspector David Molk stepped aside as the photographer took another series of
photos of the crime scene that would go into the file that was growing thicker by the day. The victim, a woman in her early twenties lay on her bed dressed in a Snow White costume holding an apple with a large bite mark in the center. A large glass dome had been covering the body until the techs removed it to dust for prints. It, along with everything else would go into the evidence logs.

"First Cinderella, now we got Snow White. Who's next, Sleeping Beauty?" his partner Edgar Navarro inquired while he wrote notes on the pad he carried. David winced, thinking of his wife Elizabeth, whom he'd given the nickname 'Sleeping Beauty' while they were dating because of her love of the classic fairy tale, the Disney film version of it being her favorite. She'd also been diagnosed with Kliene-Levin Syndrome, also known as the 'Sleeping Beauty' syndrome in her early twenties, her episodes of prolonged sleep increasing after they met but he loved her enough that he married her anyway and would never leave her.

"I'll bet my next paycheck the tox report is gonna come back with some kind of poison," David muttered. "Snow White ate the poisoned apple, our Cinderella was stabbed with the heel of her glass slipper. You hear anything back from those convention companies yet?"

"Not yet. I'm gonna call 'em again when we're done and tell 'em to get a move on it."

One of the techs pried the apple loose from the dead woman's fingers and bagged it.

"You thinking this might be that cult the guy from the NSA tipped us off about? The one called Home Office?" Edgar whispered.

"The MO matches. The victims were wearing costumes from fairy tale characters, dying they way they would in the stories. No witnesses. Now his other theory about them actually being fairy tale characters from another world...I'm chalking that one up to being on one of those drugs the government tests." The two inspectors left the technicians to finish their work and went outside. Suddenly David began to tremble as if he'd been struck by lightning.

"Molky? You okay, man?"

David looked up at his partner, not seeing him but a cat wearing black leather boots, a cape and a hat with a yellow feather in it, brandishing a sword.

"Puss?" he asked and waited for his partner to ask him if he were losing his mind only he knew he wasn't. Puss In Boots had been one of his closest friends back in the Enchanted Forest, a shapeshifter outlaw named Domingo Montoyo who acted as a spy for Prince Phillip and his father.

"I like my cursed name better," Edgar joked and helped him to his feet.

"The curse is broken," David murmured. "Rose...oh God! Rose! We gotta find her Navarro."

"Your brother might know where she went."

"I hope so. She went through the portal alone, dammit! That had to be Maleficent's doing. When I get my hands on that witch..."

They were both started when a navy blue convertible screeched to a halt beside their car and a petite brunette in her late thirties got out and ran over to them holding a little boy in her arms.

"Oh boy...this can't be good!" David sighed. Elizabeth would only show up at his crime scenes as a free lance writer but when he saw her holding their infant son Jasper in her arms he knew something was terribly wrong.

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"I hope so. She went through the portal alone, dammit! That had to be Maleficent's doing. When I get my hands on that witch..."

They were both started when a navy blue convertible screeched to a halt beside their car and a petite brunette in her late thirties got out and ran over to them holding a little boy in her arms.

"Oh boy...this can't be good!" David sighed. Elizabeth would only show up at his crime scenes as a free lance writer but when he saw her holding their infant son Jasper in her arms he knew something was terribly wrong.
"I don't know where my parents are...they didn't come with me when the curse..."

"Beth, sweetheart, slow down. What are you talking about? Why are you driving when you know you're not allowed to? Is the baby all right?" David asked, handing Jasper to Edgar embracing her. "Come on, Sleeping Beauty, talk to me. He raised her chin and gazed into her eyes.

"You...you're gonna have me locked up...you'll think I've gone crazy or I'm having one of my episodes." She buried her face in his chest. "She gave me this illness so I've been sleeping through most of my life, put my mother to sleep and probably killed my father! Go on and say it! You think I'm having a nervous breakdown!"

"Rose..." he whispered, praying that what he sensed in his heart was true, shocking though it may have been that the little girl he knew back in the Enchanted Forest had grown into the beautiful woman he loved more than anything in the world.

She raised her head. "H...How did you know my name?"

He reached out and caressed her cheek. "What's our son's name, Sleeping Beauty?"

"Jasper, but...what does that have to do..."

"He's named after his father and he doesn't know it."

"Jasper!" she cried. "But...you...you were a cricket! I thought..."

"I was born human but turned into a cricket because my twin brother made a wish that he could be one."

The Princess Rose will only be awakened by the kiss of a knight, a white knight in blue.

He cupped her face in his hands and kissed her tenderly, a wave of bright golden light sweeping over them. "The curse is broken Sleeping Beauty. Both curses are broken."

"My white knight in blue," she murmured, calling him by the nickname she'd given him while they were dating. "David! My parents! We have to find my parents!"

"We will, sweetheart but right now we need to get you and Jasper home."

And he had two homicides to solve.

Beth looked up at the apartment building. "There's been another one, hasn't there? A fairy tale killing?"

"Yes," he whispered. "A Snow White but not the one from our world. I think our NSA contact is right and this person's targeting people from other worlds. We have to warn the others."

"We don't know where they are!" Beth cried.

"Let's hope your twin sense starts workin again, Molky," Edgar said. "That's gonna tell us where they are."

Come on Jiminy! Where are you? Talk to me!

Oz (The Outer Zone)
Thirty days prior to the Double Eclipse

Sixty days prior to the Final Eclipse

"It's been broken! Oh thank the goddess the curse has been broken!" Az wept joyfully and sank to her knees in front of her bed in the witch's tower. She raised her hand to her lips and kissed the amber stone ring she wore. "And soon my darling baby girl, your father will come and free me!"

One of the mobat demon markings glowed and the demon flew off her chest. "Mistress, what is wrong?" the mobat Perika asked worriedly.

"The curse has broken in Storybrooke, Perika. Pallux and Archie will be coming for us."

"Archie?" The mobat stared at her in confusion.

"That's Jiminy's name on the other side and your mate is now a Dalmatian named Pongo."

"Then I will be Perdy," the mobat declared happily and draped her wing over her mistress. "I am so pleased to see you taking control more now. Her hold on you is weakening and once your mate and your sister return they will shatter it completely. Do not lose hope of that."

"I won't. Perika...return to me...she is taking control again!"

The mobat reluctantly returned to her place on her mistress's skin wishing the double eclipse would come sooner.

Storybrooke

Archie leaned against the side of the pawn shop fighting back tears, his hand reaching under his shirt and pulling out the tear shaped amber pendant his cursed self always liked but never recalled how he'd come by it or the tattoos on his shoulder and lower back and all he could see before his eyes were his precious baby girl and her beautiful mother, both lost to him when he'd gone through that travel storm...to serve the will of the OZ.

Out of the corner of his eye he could see the people in the town coming together, rejoicing that twenty-eight years of pain and loneliness had finally come to an end but he knew worse was yet to come and the indigo cloud of magic that swept over the town was only the beginning.

He held up his umbrella and waved his hand over it, a small smile on his lips when it transformed into the sword he hadn't used in a decade. His magic had returned...but so had Regina's and Rumple's but his would have to remain a secret from them...for now. But in the OZ there would be one person who needed to quake in fear now that his magic was back and that woman was Bastinda. The double eclipse was approaching and so was her death.

"Archie!" he heard Geppetto call out happily. Archie tucked his pendant back into his shirt and waved his hand over his sword, turning it back into his umbrella.

"Geppetto!" He hugged him. "Y...You're not angry with me?"

"No, my friend. I told you. You are forgiven. But my boy...I still cannot find my boy."

"We'll find him."
"And your brother...what of him and young Rose?"

"I know where they might be and I'll find them. We'll find all of them," he vowed.

"I don't understand...what...what happened when you summoned that portal?"

"Geppetto I promise I'll tell you everything but I can't now. There's going to be a lot of confusion now that the curse is broken and Snow and Charming are going to need our help."

They heard voices raised in anger and turned around to see an angry mob led by Dr. Whale crying out for Regina's blood heading to Mifflin Street. Archie shook his head.

"Idiots! Come on! We need to find Emma."

"She must pay for what she's done."

"If she has her magic back we're the ones that will be paying! Come on!"

Emma watched her parents reunite with their old friends, still reeling from the shock that woman who became her best friend was also her mother. A mother who looked to be about the same age and her father not much older.

I'm the daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming. Of all the scenarios I dreamed up...not this. Never this. I didn't believe in fairy tales. Hell, I didn't even like them except for the Ugly Duckling because that's how I felt. I was the ugly ducking but I wanted to be a swan. But I never will be. Nor will I be a princess.

She was so lost her own thoughts that she barely heard the others talking until they mentioned the word 'magic'.

"Magic? In Storybrooke? But you're the Blue Fairy. Do something magical." Henry was saying to Blue

"It's not quite that simple, Henry. No wand. No Fairy Dust. Matters are complicated now."

"Let's go to the person responsible for bringing it, the Queen," Leroy said angrily.

"No. Wait. It wasn't Regina. It was Gold."

"Gold?" The dwarves were puzzled.

"Rumplestiltskin. Mr. Gold is Rumplestiltskin. He had magic hidden here, told me it would save Henry so I went to retrieve it. It was hidden in the belly of a dragon."

"Maleficent," her father clarified. "Where I hid it before you were born, in exchange for his help in finding your mother."

"Bastard double crossed me. He wanted that magic for himself," Emma growled and started walking away.

"Emma, wait!" Snow pleaded. "Is there anything that you wanted to ask us? I mean, you must have questions."

"The only questions I have are for Mr. Gold. Why did he double-cross me, and what did he do to this town?"
"Uh... Shouldn't we talk about "it" first?"

"What?"

"Us. Your life. Everything?"

My life's been no fairy tale lady and you're better off not knowing!

"Can we do "everything" maybe later? Like, with a glass of wine. Or several bottles. Maybe a few truckloads. Yeah, get completely wasted because after I talk to that jerk, it's what I want to do. Get completely wasted."

"I know it's a lot to take in. For all of us."

You have no idea...Dad.

"And we don't want to push, but we've waited for this moment for so long..." Snow stammered.

"Yeah, so have I! I've thought about this moment my entire life. I've imagined who you might be. But of all the scenarios that I concocted, my parents being... I-I just need a little time. That's-that's all!"

They suddenly heard voices raised in anger.

"Snow?!" David could see a flock of angry townspeople running through the streets and a frantic Archie coming around the corner.

"There you are. Come with me, I need your help. Dr. Whale's whipped everyone into a frenzy. They're going to Regina's house. They're gonna kill her!" he exclaimed.

"Great, let's watch," Leroy muttered.

"No. No, we cannot stoop to her level. No matter who she is or what she's done, killing her is wrong!"

And she cannot be killed. She's too important to restoring the Balance and to Henry, little as I might like it!, he thought but that information would have to remain a secret for now. He would not stand by and watch a child's mother be murdered right before his eyes.

"He's right. Please. She's still my mom," Henry begged Emma.

"We have to stop them," Emma said. Archie breathed a sigh of relief. At least someone still had some sense.

"If the Blue Fairy is right and magic is here, Regina could have her powers back. They could be marching into a slaughter," David spoke up. "We'll find another way, Henry. Come on."

"...I should've known you'd drive a car like this," Belle joked during the drive back to town. "Like the Godfather."

Rumple frowned. "You were locked away. How do you know so much about this world's culture?"

"I had a nurse at one time who was kind to me. She smuggled a TV set into my room and we would watch movies all night long. She was my only other contact with the outside world. She brought me the TV, books and sometimes new clothes to wear. Then Regina found out and she was gone. But I remembered everything from that time. I think it was in the late 80s or early 90s."
"The Godfather was made in the 70s sweetheart but they play it on TV. Ah, here we are."

He pulled into his parking space behind the shop and turned off the engine. "The curse transported most of my possessions here and to my house. What?" he asked when she began to giggle.

"I should've known you'd be a pawnbroker. Deals are your specialty."

"Indeed they are." He unlocked the door and led her inside. "You wait here, Belle. I'm gonna find you something to wear. You've spent enough time in these rags."

"Thank you."

But there was something else he needed to do first. He donned a pair of black leather gloves and unlocked the cabinet in the backroom of his shop where he kept one of his most dangerous magical items. Another was hidden beneath the floorboards, both items prized possessions of the goddess that inhabited his soul. She'd stolen them from Hades centuries ago to allow her vessels to use them as weapons against light mages only Regina was no light mage and would be getting exactly what was coming to her. He took out a gold octagonal shaped box and set it on his worktable. Inside was an amulet that would summon one of the most feared creatures in Ephesis; the Wraith. It had the ability to remove one's soul, preventing them from entering Paradise, damning them to spend eternity in Ephesis unless Ozmalita released them. He tucked the amulet into his pocket. If the townspeople would not be smart enough to see justice done, he would.

Regina heard the raised voices on her front lawn. So the rabble had finally come for her. She'd been expecting them and it was time to give them a reminder that although this was not the Enchanted Forest, she was still the Queen and always would be.

"Open up or we're coming in!" Whale yelled as he pounded on the door. She opened it with a smirk.

"Can I help you?"

"That smirk isn't gonna last forever, Regina. You took everything from us. And now..."

"What? Now you're gonna kill me?"

"Eventually. But first, you need to suffer."

"Listening to you has been enough suffering for all of us." She gave Whale a shove. "That's right. You wanted to see your Queen? Well, my dears." She raised her arms, ready to scatter them all like leaves. "Here she is! She stretched out her hands, relishing seeing the crowd duck in fear from the magical blast she expected to see but there was nothing. No light. No magiv.

"She's powerless!"

"What?" Regina gasped. What the hell was going on with her magic?

"Get her!"

No, no, no! It's not supposed to be like this! Where is my magic?

Whale seized her by the arms ans shoved her up against one of the columns on her front porch. "Now, where were we?"

He was going to enjoy choking the life out of her.
"Let her go! Let her go! Let her go!" Emma yelled, grabbing Whale's arm as he was about to wrap it around Regina's throat. For Regina, this was a day to mark, actually being grateful to the woman who was the bane of her existence, one of them anyway.

"Why should I listen to you?"

"Because I am still the Sheriff."

"Because she saved you. All of you!" David reminded the crowd.

"And because no matter what Regina did, it does not justify this!" Snow added.

"We are not murderers here." Emma said firmly.

"Well, we're not from this world." Whale glared at her.

'Yeah, well, you're in it now'.

"Okay, Whale. We're done." David stepped between Whale and Regina, forcing the doctor back.

"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. We have a lot to figure out. And this isn't the way to do it."

"And Regina's death won't provide any answers. She needs to be locked up. For her safety, and more importantly, for ours," Snow informed the angry crowd.

"We still want justice!" yelled Happy.

"We'll have our justice but it has to be done the right way. Do any of you really want to murder this woman in front of her child?" Archie demanded angrily. "She is one of Henry's mothers, or have you forgotten that?"

"I am his ONLY mother!" Regina snarled.

"You're both his mothers and you have to learn to work together in the best interest of your son. But first you need to take responsibility for what you've done." Archie said as he approached her.

"You stay out of this Cricket!"

"You have NO idea who you're dealing with," he hissed. "Pray you never find out!" he added as a parting shot and walked over to where Henry stood with Ruby.

"Thank you Archie," Henry murmured.

"Archie, I don't think this is a good idea...she may not have magic now but she might later and..." Ruby protested.

"Right now my main concern is Henry." He glanced over at Emma and her parents. Emma had handcuffed Regina's wrists and David walked her down the sidewalk amidst cheers from the townspeople. Regina glared at them and continued to concentrate, praying she could summon up
even a small portion of her magic to teleport out or at least break the handcuffs.

"Would you still be interested in sparing her life if she wasn't Henry's mother? You were the one who suggested we execute her back in the Enchanted Forest."

"I know but now that she is Henry's mother we need to take that into consideration. She can't die Ruby. You just have to trust me on this."

They took Regina down to the station and placed her in one of the holding cells. Everyone had been expecting to return to their cushy little lives in the Enchanted Forest after the curse had been broken but they could never return. She'd seen to that. She enjoyed this new land and its wonders and if having to stay here even after the curse was broken made them miserable, it was a small victory for her. Now all she needed was her magic back.

"Magic is different here, dearie." Rumple taunted when he walked into the station.

"I noticed. I assume this is all your doing."

"Most things are."

"Get to it, Rumple. What do you want? You here to finish the job?"

"No, no, no. You're safe from me."

"I feel so relieved."

"I wouldn't enjoy it for long, dearie. Why should I kill you when I have other methods of getting it done. You have to answer for Belle."

"She's alive?"

"You are a dreadful liar."

"I could have killed her. But I didn't."

"Yeah, you did much worse than that. You kept her alive, so you could kill her when it suited you. A fate worse than death. Which, incidentally, is exactly what I've got in store for you." He reached between the bars of her cell and pulled her arm out toward him, pressing the amulet into her palm.

"Is that..."

"Yes, dearie. The one thing no one can escape. Destiny. And I promise, yours is particularly unpleasant." He released her arm. She looked down at her palm. The mark had not yet appeared but it would soon enough. She glared up at him.

"You're summoning an Ephesian Wraith. You bastard!"

"Like I said, dearie: Why do the job myself when others can do it for me. Delegation!" He giggled. "And I'm going to enjoy seeing your soul being ripped from your body and your arse dragged down into Ephesis. Enjoy your long stay in the Realm of Retribution. Heard the accommodations are painful."

"Well you've got your own spot waiting too, Rumple!" she taunted.

"That remains to be seen."
"Does it? You turning over a new leaf? Becoming a hero? Don't make me laugh. We're villains. We always will be."

"Keep an eye on that palm Regina. The mark is coming...and so is your death. Get your affairs in order."

"You might as well get yours in order too. Emma's going to be gunning for you now."

"She can try but she's no match for me." He smiled and teleported out into the woods, dropping the amulet onto the ground. He took his dagger out of his pocket and held it out in front of him. "The Dark One summons thee!"

In her cell Regina felt the skin on her palm head up and looked down in horror to see the symbol of the Ephesian Wraith burned into her skin as the creature emerged from the the portal that had opened to the Realm of Retribution. It floated in the air above its new master with the amulet around its neck, awaiting his instruction.

"Take the soul of Regina Mills," he commanded. The wraith screeched and flew away in search of its prey. Rumple laughed and teleported back to his shop to check on Belle. She was in the basement as he suspected she would be looking through all the beautiful clothing he'd collected over the years trying to decide what to wear but kept getting distracted by the books on his shelves. He left her to her little adventure and went back upstairs to make them some tea. Moments later the bell above his door tinkled and a furious Emma Swan walked in followed by her parents. Right on cue.

"What can I do for you?"

"What you can do is tell us what you did."

"I'm sorry, you're gonna have to be more specific."

"You know damn well what we're talking about," David barked.

"You double-crossed Emma, you, uh, took your—uh—potion from her." Snow added.

"And did who-knows-what to this town."

"And worst of all you risked Henry's life!" Emma raged.

"Well, that is quite a litany of grievances, now, isn't it?"

"Maybe I don't need answers. Maybe I just need to punch you in the face."

"Oh really, dearie?" he laughed and came out from behind the counter. "Allow me to answer your questions with some of my own, all right? Did your dear boy, Henry, survive?"

"Yeah."

"Is the curse broken? And let's see here, Miss Swan, how long have you been searching for your parents? Looks like you're reunited. Seems like rather a punch in the face, I deserve a thank you.” And a you're welcome while I'm at it because I made you be the one to do it.

"Twist my words all you want, what was the purple haze that you brought?"

"You know, magic." he replied with a flourish.
"Why?" Snow demanded.
"Not telling."

They heard rumbling outside and the store began to shake as if it has been hit by an earthquake.
"What the hell was that?"

David and Snow looked outside, hearing the Wraith shrieking as it flew into one of the streetlights and broke the bulb and into one of the power lines. Sparks emitted as the line severed and all the lights on the other side of the street went out. Rumple heard the gas powered generator he had installed in the basement turn on when his own lights flickered.
"That is my gift to you. That is gonna take care of Regina."

"Emma, come on" Snow ordered.
"We need to go take care of this."

"We're not done." Emma said angrily, glaring at Rumple.

"Oh, I know. You still owe me a favor." And he would collect it when he was ready to begin his search for his son. He went back to making his tea as the Charmings left the shop. Suddenly his hand paused over the cup.

"Returning to the place of your birth is where you will heal the wounds of your past and discover who you truly are," he murmured. He blinked several times and saw Belle standing in the doorway leading to the backroom, a frown on her face.
"You released an Ephesian wraith."
"Sweetheart, she had to answer for what she's done to you!"

"And she will but Rumple, but look outside. It's destroying the town, these people's homes! You've endangered innocents. Please, call it off and find another way!"

"I can't," he said sadly.

She went into the backroom and came out with a book.
"Belle, what are you doing?"
"I'm going to try to find it and call it off myself."
"You can't. It won't stop until its mission is complete."

"Oh Rumple, the more you give in to your darkness, the harder it will be to banish her."

He lowered his head, picked up his tea cup and went down to the basement to his spinning room.
"You still have it? My chipped cup," she said softly and picked it up.

He stood up and took the cup from her. "There are many, many, things in this shop. But this... This is the only thing I truly cherish. And now you must leave."

"What?"
"You must leave, because despite what you hope, I'm still a monster."

She placed her hands on his shoulders and gazed into her eyes. "Don't you see? That's exactly the reason I have to stay. True love's kiss may not free you from the Alemedia Demonia but true love can. I told you. I'll never stop fighting for you."

"You sound like a Guardian's bonded."

"A what?"

"The four Guardians of the Balance. They are the descendants of Hades and Persephone and the Ozian gods Aramon and Lurline, the Strogoff and Ozopov. They're represented by the four points on the compass, each has their own element and a symbol. Their bondmates represent the fifth element, spirit and are known as their 'Hearts'. The bondmate's task is to keep a Guardian anchored to his or her humanity. Protecting their hearts and souls so to speak. There hasn't been a united circle of Guardians in centuries."

"Why?"

"Ah because Demeter cursed their bloodline to be at war with each other until the line dies out."

"Have you ever considered the possibility that you may be one of the four, Rumple?"

"That's ludicrous Belle. I'm the bastard son of Peter Pan and some young girl he seduced after getting drunk one night."

"P...Peter Pan is your father?"

"He's nothing like the celluloid version, believe me. He abandoned me in Neverland so that he could be young forever and live a carefree life. He always used to brag that he was from a line of Scots-Irish warlocks on this side but he never showed any magical ability until we arrived there."

"Rumple, what you've just said proves my theory about your magic! You were born with it and so was he! What if your father wasn't boasting and you are a descendant of Scots-Irish warlocks? Did he give you any names?"

"McDermott," he muttered.

"Then we have another mission along with finding Bae and breaking your curse. Finding the family you have here."

"Nothing is more important than finding Bae. I need to find him and make things right between us. I'm just like my father...I let him go like Papa let me go!"

"No, you're not the same. You've never given up hope of finding him and when we find him he needs to know that."

"I can't ask you to share this burden with me."

"You don't have to. I am sharing it. We're doing this together."

He could only hope she was up for the task.

Charming lay on the floor, his eyes wet with tears, Jefferson's hat crushed beneath his chest, the image of his beloved wife jumping into a portal that lead to who knew where after the wraith had taken the daughter they'd just been reunited with imprinted on his brain. He slowly rose to his feet.
holding the hat in his hands.

"No! Where are they?"

"I don't know."

"Are they dead!"

"The curse, it destroyed all the lands..."

"ARE THEY DEAD!?"

"I don't know!"

"I should've killed you myself!"

"Well, then, what's stopping you?" She felt a her magic spring forth and throw him against the wall, the vines in the wallpaper wrapping around him and holding him in place, one of them winding itself about his throat. "You think you're some heroic Prince? Please. You're nothing but the son of a shepherd. I should've killed you when I could. And now... Now I can."

"Mom?" Henry cried out as she was about to order the vine to do its work, Ruby at his side.

"Henry, what are you doing here?"

"What are you doing?"

"It's okay. You're safe now."

The vines vanished and David fell to the floor coughing. Ruby kneeled beside him.

"Where's my mom? Where's..."

"..They're gone. They fell through a portal. They're... Henry, I'm sorry."

"No, you're not. You really are the Evil Queen. I don't wanna see you again."

Regina felt her heart shatter with those words. "No, don't say that. I love you."

"Then, prove it. Get Emma and Mary Margaret back. And until then, leave me, leave everyone alone!"

"Where will you go?"

"With me." David spoke up and wrapped his arm around his grandson's shoulders, leading him out of the office.

Regina sank to the floor in tears and held out her hand, hoping that her magic would respond to her again but it refused.

"I will get him back!" she sobbed. "I'll get it all back!"

She would let them enjoy their victory for now but in the morning her work would begin again.

Prince Phillip and Princess Aurora's Castle
The Enchanted Forest

Their had been an arranged marriage but Aurora grew to love her husband in the ten years they’d been husband and wife, their beautiful daughter Rose the ultimate symbol of their love. Now Phillip lay on the bier that had been her resting place in the twenty-eight years Queen Regina's curse had been in effect, his soul taken by an Ephesian Wraith that had somehow wandered into their safe haven. His companion, Mulan, stood off to the side in silence after she'd revealed the terrible secret Phillip asked her to keep immediately after awakening his wife; that Aurora not be told about the curse until the proper time.

"This corner of the land was untouched. No one knows why. But something saved us. And for 28 years we were frozen. And then, time started again. The terrible curse's power was weakened. Phillip and I were able to resume our search. We found you. But the land is ravaged with dangers more fearsome than you can imagine. For those of us who remained, we found a safe haven. We must go there now."

"Our daughter," Aurora sobbed.

Mulan froze. "Daughter? You have a child together? Phillip didn't tell me this."

"Rose was ten," Aurora smiled softly. "It was no jest when I said you are not the only one who knows about sacrifice. I sent our daughter away with our advisor to try to escape the curse Maleficent placed on us. She'd already turned Phillip into the beast you encountered and cursed me to an enchanted sleep as she cursed my mother. All the women in my bloodline would be cursed with this enchantment. We thought that if we sent Rose to the new world she would not fall under curse." Aurora brushed tears from her eyes. "She will be a woman now, thirty-eight...and older than me if she did not go to the new land the Queen created. I have to find her Mulan. I have to tell her about her father."

Mulan nodded silently. Aurora's earlier assumption that she'd been in love with Phillip was correct. She was...and had been in the twenty-eight years time was frozen but she was not so callous that she would break up a marriage. Only now there was no marriage to break, only a widow grieving the loss of her husband and a woman in another world who would never be reunited with her father.

"I can understand why you loved my Phillip. He was an easy man to love," Aurora added.

Suddenly they heard rustling from the pile of debris covering the entrance to the portal the wraith had emerged from. Mulan drew her sword. "Something's in there. Stay back."

"What did it bring? What is it? What do you see?" she demanded while her new friend lifted up a large piece of flooring and threw it aside. "Mulan, what is that?"

"That? That is what brought the wraith here. That is what murdered our prince," she said angrily.

In the rubble Emma began to stir, her mother lying beside her still unconscious.

"Get up!" Mulan ordered, pointing her sword at Emma.

"Hey watch where you're sticking...Ow!" Mulan made a small cut on her arm.

"Now, or I'll cut something else!"

Snow groaned and opened her eyes, blinking several times. "Where...where are we?"

"You too. Get up! Aurora, get me some rope out of my sack."
The princess did as she was told.

"Now tie them to the rope and hand me the end of it."

"Just a minute..." Snow protested.

"Be quiet!" Aurora growled, binding them tight and tossed the end of the rope to Mulan as she mounted her horse. Aurora climbed onto her own horse and the two women set off pulling their prisoners behind them.

"What the hell is going on? Where are we?" Emma demanded of her mother.

"I don't know but we have to get out of here."

And then they needed to find a way back home.
Oz (The Outer Zone)

Four years prior to the end of the Dark Curse

Four years prior to the Double Eclipse

Time passed slowly for the dragon who was locked inside a cold dark prison. The only sounds and sights he heard and saw were from his past, of the last time he saw his mate and his son. Although he held out hope they would escape from their pursuers, that hope slowly died as the years went by and so did his hope that he would one day escape his prison. He retreated once again into his slumber, yearning for the day when he would never have to awaken again.

Then it came...a scent that shattered the barries of time and space and forced him to awaken again. It was the scent of a rose beginning to bloom, the scent that would only be produced by his mate. It was not the same scent of the mate who bore his son; his former mate now carried the scents of steel and tin from the sword she wielded in battle against their enemies. But he would never catch her scent again for their separation had severed the bond between them.

He was angry. She was the mate he'd chosen, the mate that had given him a child but somewhere in the realms another mate was calling to him and he would not be able to deny her call. He felt himself being pulled into the realm of dreams. It had been his refuge since his imprisonment began only now he would not be there alone. All he could do was wait patiently until her heart's memories brought her to him.

When she thought back on it, DG could trace the source of this particular set of dreams to being talked into reading Sherrilyn Kenyon's Dark Hunter series, particularly the book Dragonswan. She'd always enjoyed reading books and watching movies that had science fiction and fantasy elements in them and she filled her sketchbooks with drawings of mythical places and creatures.

She'd just turned sixteen and finally worked up the courage to ask the captain of the football team out on a date. It was her first date and unfortunately it ended in disaster. What should have been a good time turned into a play by play account of a football game because that was all he wanted to talk about.

As she always did when she was upset, she turned on music, opened her sketchbook and started drawing, her colored pencils seeming to take on a life of their own. She glanced down and saw that she had drawn a beautiful black dragon asleep in a forest, a pair of crossed swords lying in the grass in front of him. As she stared at it, she could feel her eyelids growing heavy and within minutes she was asleep.

She found herself walking in a forest similar to the one in her drawing, the skirt of the blue satin dress she was wearing fanning out in the breeze. She enjoyed wearing dresses about as much as having a tooth pulled but it seemed that she wasn't able to control her wardrobe in her dreams and she had to admit that that strapless dress with a long flowing skirt was beautiful and it made her feel like a princess. As she touched her head she was stunned to see a silver tiara resting on it.

She could see something shining in the distance and walked toward it. Lying in the grass were a pair of Japanese swords called Katanas, the blades crossed as they had been in her drawing. She
kneeled down and picked one of them up.

"Princess," she heard a male's voice say softly.

"Who's there?" she asked, her own voice shaky and she dropped the sword.

"You don't have to be afraid of me, Princess." She turned around and saw a man with long blond hair tied back in a ponytail standing behind her, with his back to her. He was wearing black silk robes with a golden dragon emblem on the back.

"Then why don't you turn around and face me?" she demanded.

"I would if I could, Princess," was his answer. "I'm under a witch's spell that has confined my human body in a prison that renders it immobile but her spell has weakened enough that it allows my dragon's spirit to roam free."

"Okay...so...you're a dragon?"

"If the question you are asking is do I actually turn into a dragon, the answer is no. However the dragon's spirit is always inside me and I can call on it when I need it."

"This has to be the strangest dream I've ever had."

"What makes you think it's a dream?"

"What else can it be?"

"Your destiny."

"Oh, come on. You're pulling my leg!"

"How would I be doing that when I just told you I'm not able to move?"

She sighed with frustration. "I didn't mean literally pulling my leg! What I meant is that you're joking with me."

"This isn't a joke, I assure you."

"Okay, let's say for argument's sake this is real. Why am I seeing part of you?"

"As I said before, part of the spell on me has been broken and when the dragon's mate calls to him, he will always answer."

"Whoa! Does that mean what I think it does?"

"It does. You are my mate, Princess."

"First off, quit calling me Princess. Second, I'm sixteen years old and where I come from older guys get thrown in prison for having sex with underage girls. Third, I'll decide my own destiny, thank you!"

To her surprise he laughed. "You have a bit of the dragon in you. You'll need it. And if I'm not allowed to call you Princess, what should I call you?"

"DG," she answered.
"I don't like it."

"Well excuse me but I really hate my full name so I go by DG. Honestly, who wants to be called Dorothis...ugh! What was my mother thinking? Some people call me Dorothy but I hate that even more. Makes me feel old."

"I'll call you Dottie."

"Fair enough. Now back to issues two and three: my destiny and you referring to me as your mate. I don't like being told what to do. I want to have some say over my life."

"You do have some say over it, Dottie but I do need to tell you that you need to think before you act because your future does depend on it."

"I really need to wake up from this dream."

"You won't until morning."

"I have to put up with you til then?"

"Yes."

"Okay but before this dream's over, you better have some answers for me."

"You've made the transition from a child to a woman. Your scent, since it carries the essence of the dragon was able to breach the shields of time and space to the walls of my prison and weaken the spell on me enough that the dragon in me has been awakened to answer you."

"Gee I hope it was after I took a bath otherwise...gross!"

He chuckled. "It's the scent of a rose blooming."

"Thank God. Did not want a mental image of a dragon man puking from BO overkill."

"What?"

"Body odor but please do not make me go into detail or you will puke and I'd hate to see that beautiful outfit of yours ruined especially since the bitch who locked you up won't even let you change your clothes. Why did she lock you up anyway?"

"To punish me."

"For what?"

"For trying to protect the people I loved."

"You need to get out of your prison and melt her ass. Where's a good bucket of water when you
"Witches cannot be killed by water. Where did you hear that nonsense?"

"Books and I saw it on TV and the movies. Oh, you probably don't know what TV and movies are. Maybe it's a good thing I won't wake up for a while so I can at least tell you about them. I just wish you were able to sit down."

"I'll be fine."

"Can you at least tell me your name?"

"You can call me Talon."

"It's not your real name though, isn't it?"

"No."

"Why can't you tell me your real name?"

"I don't remember it."

"Are you serious?"

"I am...I've been cursed and losing my memories is part of that curse. I know that I had a mate and a child but they were taken from me and I was locked in this prison."

"Seriously Talon, the bitch needs to die."

"I'm not going to deny that. She's brought nothing but destruction to our land."

"How old are you?"

He thought for a moment. "You're sixteen, I'm twenty years older so that makes me thirty-six."

"Wow. I am definitely jailbait to you dragon man and I'm supposed to be your mate? Okay, so there are couples who are farther apart in age than we are but people aren't comfortable with it where I come from."

"You aren't ready to be my mate yet."

"And you being locked up makes it impossible once I'm legal. I will be in two years. Maybe you should come back then so we can hook up."

"Four, Dottie. You are at full maturity when you're twenty annuals."

"That's harsh, dragon man. Where I come from, you're considered an adult at eighteen. Why add two more years on?"

"That's how it's done. Although we cannot complete our bond physically, we have time to get to know each other. It was how my relationship with my first wife progressed."

"Talon, do you have any idea why...why..."

"Why you were chosen to be my second wife?" he finished.

"Yeah...if you really knew how I am, you'd be asking yourself the same question. I'm probably the
last girl on Earth meant to be a dragonswan."

"A what?"

"Oh...there's this book I read about a human woman who ends up becoming the mate of a guy who actually turns into a dragon. He calls her his dragonswan."

"Hmmm...none of the books I've read ever said what we call our mates but I guess dragonswan would be fitting."

"And the more I think about it, you remind me more of Acheron, not the dragon Sebastian."

"I'm guessing this Acheron is from this book you've read?"

"Oh yeah but another one in the same set. He's my favorite character. He's an Atlantean god who was cursed to live as a human until he was twenty-one but he got killed by another god so now his powers are back and he uses them to kick ass. He has long blond hair like you but he changes his any color he wants. And there's a witch who keeps him in a prison in her own way...the Greek goddess Artemis."

"The woman who imprisoned me is also the child of a goddess. She's the goddess of the Underworld, Almedea."

"What did you do to piss off the goddess of Hell? It is Hell in your land, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"She's taken control of the body of our future queen and is using her powers to destroy our land. I was part of an uprising against her authority."

"She thought trapping you was a worse punishment than killing you."

"And it has been a worse punishment. Every day I am forced to watch an image of my family being taken away from me when I can do nothing to prevent it."

"I wish there was something I could do to help you."

"You'll be able to when you're older. My curse can only be broken when our union is consummated."

DG blushed. "No pressure there," she mumbled.

She heard him sigh.

"I realize this is as difficult for you as it is for me."

"You already had a wife you loved and a child...I can't replace them in your heart."

She had no idea how long the dream lasted but it had been long enough for her to realize that she was starting to enjoy Talon's company even if he was unable to interact with her in any other way other than talking.

"I'll see you again, won't I?" she asked hopefully.

"Only if you want to."
"See you tomorrow night then," she said with a smile.

The next day she went to the library and checked out every book she could find on dreams. She was researching methods on how to control them. If Talon actually was a real person trapped by a witch's curse she was hoping that they could possibly find a way to free him when she visited him in her dreams.

Unfortunately, she did not dream of him that night and after a month of silence she was starting to think that it had all been a product of her overactive imagination but in her heart she wanted it to be real. He was older yes, but if that first meeting was any indication Talon would treat her better than the boys she went out with. She just wished she could find a way to reach him again.

So you've awakened...part of you has anyway.

The stink of evil does that. Kind of hard to ignore even if you've been asleep for a while.

I see you haven't lost your sense of humor, Wyatt.

Oh, so now we're on a first name basis? Forgive me if I don't show you the same respect, bitch.

Bastinda gazed up at the tin suit and its captive. His eyes remained closed, his human body still locked in slumber but when she felt his dragon's essence awaken she needed to find out what was causing it.

Where is she?

Where is who?

Don't play innocent with me. She's alive, isn't she?

I thought we had this discussion a few years back. The princess is dead...probably nothing but dust now and why would I care anyway? Never was a fan of the monarchy."

You tell me where she is or I'll find out on my own even if I have to tear you apart to do it.

She heard him laugh.

What was it you said to that poor scared viewer? My heart's no good to you if its dead and once you take it out of me it'll be dead. Try and take me back to him for another reading. You won't get shit.

She motioned to several of her troops. They loaded the suit onto a truck to take it back to the witch's tower. The alchemist gazed at it, frowning.

"Can't we take him out and then hook him up?"

"No! He stays in there but I want him read. Find a way to do it." she commanded and stormed out of the room. The alchemist stared at the tin suit, amazed. No one placed in them had survived more than a week. The knowledge that there would be no escape broke the victims until they lost the will to live. Wyatt Cain had been trapped in his for years. Secretly he admired the man's courage.

Two days later the tin suit with Wyatt Cain's body still trapped inside was connected to a machine for the viewers Lylo and Raw to read him. Both of them remembered the intense pain they'd felt the last time they were forced to read this particular human. It hurt worse than the electric prod the alchemist would zap them with to give them a little "encouragement".
The viewing tank bubbled but the only image that would appear was a snarling black dragon breathing fire, the dragon's spirit guarding his host.

"What has awakened the dragon?" the witch demanded. "Lylo?"

"Dragon angry...wants freedom," the viewer replied.

"Raw?"

"Dragon not letting Raw see. Raw scared of his fire."

"He's trapped in a tin suit. Are you so stupid that you think he can actually breathe fire at you from in there?" She shook her head. This viewer was so cowardly that it affected his powers and made him weaker. "Disconnect this one and throw him back in his cell. Worthless." She turned to the alchemist. "Is the probe ready?"

"Yes, Sorceress."

She opened a small door in the suit and took the probe in her hands, shoving the pointed tip through the hole until it passed through flesh into the heart. This was the first time they'd ever tried a direct connection to the heart. She ran the risk of damaging it beyond repair but she needed to know if her suspicions were correct.

The tank began to bubble again and a wave of light shot the probe back to the machine. The machine exploded, the force of the explosion throwing everyone in the room to the floor. The witch howled with fury.

Zero and a group of his men ran into the room.

"Sorceress! Are you hurt?" he asked worriedly as he helped Bastinda to her feet.

"No," she hissed. "Get that thing out of my sight. Take it back where it belongs."

Zero glared at the suit. "I still say we should just kill him."

"Not yet. Once he gives me what I want, you are free to dispose of him as you see fit."

Zero smiled. "Now that is something worth looking forward to."

She retreated to her chamber, slamming the door behind her. She could hear laughing in her mind.

"You'll never get him to reveal his secrets," Az taunted aloud.

"I'll find out what kind of lock his heart's memories have on them and I'll break it," Bastinda vowed.

"Not if it's forged with the strongest magic."

Bastinda cackled. "Do you fools honestly think love is magic? Oh no my dear. Love is a weakness and yours will destroy you."

"No. It will save me. It will save us all," Az said determinedly.

Tokpeka, Kansas

Two years prior to the end of the Dark Curse
Two years prior to the Double Eclipse

She'd lost track of how far she walked but to her it felt like a thousand miles. She couldn't understand why this kept happening to her. Every time she thought she'd finally met a boy who would be good for her, he turned into an asshole.

It was Prom Night, the most important night in the life of a high school teenager. For the longest time DG thought no one would ask her but Mike, a boy in her Spanish class asked her two weeks before. She always thought he was good looking but when she thought about asking him herself she lost her nerve. When she told her parents she had a date for the prom, they were concerned but she and her mother had a wonderful time shopping for her dress. She'd settled on a blue satin strapless gown with a long, flowing skirt and had her high heeled shoes dyed to match it.

The evening started well enough. She and Mike had a wonderful time talking and dancing together and when the afterglow started, he asked her if she wanted to go for a ride with him. Thinking nothing of it, she accepted. The uneasiness started to creep in when he took her to the school's most popular make out spot.

"Ummm...Mike, this is too fast," she protested when she felt him try to touch her breast.

"C'mon Deege, relax." he said softly as he reached for her again. She shoved him away.

"I'm serious!" she said firmly. "What part of 'no' are you not getting?"

"You like me, don't you?"

"Well, yeah but not enough for that!"

"Come on. You want it. You know you do." He seized her arm roughly and pulled her to him, tearing at her gown and exposing her breasts.

Carefully you must guard your virtue
For it only belongs to a man with the heart pure and true
You address him by Talon but through love will reveal his true name

And that name is none other than Wyatt Cain she heard a voice chanting in her head. A rage she'd never felt before surged through her. She raised her free arm and slapped him. "What the hell do you think you're doing?" she hissed.

He slapped her back, drawing blood, her head slamming against the passenger door. She reached down and took off one of her shoes, throwing it into his face.

"The other guys were right. You're nuts...and a tease! Get the hell out of my car. You can walk home." He opened the passenger door and pushed her out. She landed face first in the dirt.

"Doesn't bother me," DG said calmly as she brushed the dirt off her dress and tried to hold up the bodice as best she could. "What did you do, Mike? Make a bet with your buddies that you could score with me when none of them could? I'm not like some of the other girls in this school who spread their legs for the first boy who notices them. Oh, and by the way, I'll call the cops and tell them how you tried to rape me."

"They won't believe you. You came up here so it'll be like you asked for it."
"That's what every rapist says. You'll try it one too many times and wind up behind bars and the inmates'll eat you alive. Didn't anyone ever tell you rapists and molesters are the bottom of the food chain?"

"Crazy bitch!" he muttered as he started the engine and sped off.

She took off her shoes after she felt blisters forming on the backs of her feet, scolding herself for letting Mike take her so far away from home. Her parents were probably worried but if Mike didn't tell them where he took her it would be hard for them to find her nor did she have any idea where she was either. Also it was dangerous for a girl to be walking at night. She stopped and picked up a stick, wanting to have at least some kind of weapon if she were approached.

When she felt her legs tiring, she stopped and sat down in front of a tree, wrapping her arms around them and lowering her head. She was trying to be strong yet it was difficult for a young woman lost not to feel frightened.

"I should have just let him do it," she sobbed. "I don't want to die out here."

You couldn't. He is not the one you are meant for. It was not just a dream, DG. The one who calls himself Talon is your true mate.

But...I haven't dreamed about him in two years.

When the dragon's mate calls to him, he will always answer. You now have the power of dream control. Use it, dragonswan. Seek out your mate. Make his strength your own. He will protect you.

How? He's locked up.

Yet his heart is strong, energized by his love for you as yours will be strong through your love for him. Your love is the strongest magic of all. It will breach time and space and allow you to protect each other when needed.

Why me? Why did he choose me?

You were chosen because of the powers you do not yet know how to use and the strength of your heart as he was chosen for the strength of his. You are the Guardian of the South Gate, the bearer of the chalice and keeper of water. He is the guardian of the west gate, bearer of the blade and the keeper of fire. Call to him, dragonswan. He needs you as you need him.

"It would be great if I knew how," DG mumbled. Every possibility she thought of, she quickly shot down until she remembered something she read in Sherrilyn Kenyon's Dark Hunter novel Devil May Cry.

"What the hell...if that shithead Kessar can draw a dragon in the ground and bring up Striker I should be able to do the same thing to bring Talon."

She searched until she found a smaller stick and began to draw a crude form of the sleeping dragon she'd sketched when she first dreamed about Talon.

Please God, let this work otherwise I'm going to end up in the nuthouse.

Once again her fingers seemed to be under the control of another force as she worked. She felt her eyelids close and her body sag against the tree, the stick falling from her hand. When she opened her eyes she was back in the same forest from her first dream but she couldn't see Talon. Her heart sank.
"Stupid Deege. Really stupid. Time to call the men in the white coats."

"Who are the men in the white coats and why would you need to call them?" she heard Talon's voice ask from behind her. She turned around and gasped in shock. He was facing her.

"Talon! You're free from your prison!"

"No, I'm still in it," he said sadly.

"But...but you're moving and I can see your face!"

And a handsome face it was. He still had his long blond hair but he'd tied it in a ponytail on the left side. His eyes were as blue as sapphires, his complexion pale. Above his pink lips was a moustache. The black silk samuari warrior robes he wore emphasized his muscular body.

"If you tried to approach me you would walk right through me. Try it." She did and as she feared, she did walk right through him.

"You're like a ghost?"

"A shadow but you get the idea."

"But...this means the spell on you must be weakening. Do you still feel nothing?"

"Yeah."

"I gotta tell you dragon man, when I said for us to hook up in two years, I wasn't serious. Why did you disappear on me?"

"The witch sensed my dragon's essence awaken and she wanted to find out why. I needed all of my strength to block her from picking up your trail in my heart."

"She tortured you?"

He nodded. "And she enjoys it. If she ever found you..."

"I don't think I want to know what she'd do to me."

He noticed the bruises on her, her torn and dirty prom gown, his eyes narrowing to slits and hands on his hips "Who touched you?"

"Some boy I went to the prom with." She heard him growl. "Calm down, dragon man. I held him off."

"The dragon's spirit is stronger in you now. You can call on it when you need it or use my strength but I warn you, I won't be as lenient with your enemies as you are."

She laughed. "Doesn't surprise me, dragon man."

"Why do you sometimes call me Talon then other times dragon man?"

"Well you are a dragon in a way. I just think it would be really cool if you actually turned into one."

"No it wouldn't. I'm not easy to deal with when I'm pissed off as a human and it would be worse as a dragon."
"That's okay. I'd thaw you out," she said softly.

"Dottie..."

"I've missed hearing you call me that," she murmured. "We've only seen each other once before but it felt so much longer. I thought once I learned how to control dreams I'd be able to find you again but the bitch must've been torturing you then."

"You've been trying to learn how to control dreams?"

"Yeah because although I really like this forest, it's not a very romantic setting for a dragon and his mate to get to know each other."

"You still haven't reached maturity yet," he reminded her. "And I'm surprised that you're so accepting of this."

"My reality sucks at the moment. Every boy I've been with so far either bores me to tears or tries to attack me but when I come to you I know I don't have to be afraid you'll hurt me. Oh and if you even think about calling me a kid dragon man, I'm going to cut that nice long hair of yours down to your scalp."

"You can't and if you think a threat like that scares me, you've got another think coming. I've never worn my hair this long and it irritates me. When I get the hell out of that bitch's cage, I'm going to cut it off myself and the moustache along with it."

"Why? It makes you look cute."

"You wouldn't be saying that if you saw it inside my prison. Your hair probably looks bad too when you don't wash it."

"Oh, it does. So much oil in it that it can fry a dozen eggs so I tend to avoid that. I'm studying to be a beautician so I need to set a good example for my customers." She closed her eyes. "Okay...I'm going to try something."

A round table and two chairs appeared in front of her, a white lace tablecloth covering the table. Her brow furrowed as she concentrated harder and dinnerware of fine china and crystal wine glasses materialized, place settings for two.

"Ozma's ghost..." Talon breathed. His master had been a powerful sorcerer but even he couldn't manipulate his surroundings the way this young dragonswan was.

She wasn't finished. In the center of the table a vase appeared holding a bouquet of red roses and a silver cart holding covered serving platters appeared beside the table.

"Dottie..."

"Shhh...I'm not finished yet," she whispered, her eyes still closed. Another small table appeared and sitting on it was an unusual music player. He saw two golden waves of light surround her, removing the tears and dirt from her gown. "I hope this works..."

The beams of light floated toward him and could see his own outfit changing into a black suit with a matching tie and white shirt. His blond hair was shortened to the length it had been before he was locked in the suit and his moustache was gone.

"That...is more than dream control Dottie," he whispered. She opened her eyes.
"Oh my God...I did it...I actually did it!" she cried. "Oh, Talon you looked good with your long hair and moustache but I like you better without it."

"Wyatt," he said softly.

"As in Wyatt Earp?"

"No, my last name is Cain."

"Wyatt Cain. Are you anything like Wyatt Earp?"

"Who's Wyatt Earp?" he asked, his voice taking a new accent, closer to that of a western cowboy.

"He was an old west version of a policeman."

"Where I come from we're called Tin Men."

"Oh, so you were a cop?"

"Yeah. On the Mystic Man's protection detail. After the witch took over I went back home and they made me sheriff there. We formed a resistance army. One of the guys I used to work with joined her side and he's the one who came after me."

"Please tell me you kicked his ass."

"No, as far as I know he's still breathin."

"Damn shame." She smirked. "Now I get another name to call you. Tin Man."

"Oh, no!" he groaned.

"Oh yes. And I have to tell you, that accent is enough to make a girl go weak in the knees. If you ever came back to Kansas with me I'd have to fight them off with a stick."

He chuckled. She loved the sound of his laughter and wanted to make him do it more often. Being locked up in a prison, he had nothing to laugh about. Unless...

"Wyatt, I think I know how to free you!" she cried.

"How?"

"Look around you. Do you see how much your appearance has changed, how this forest has changed?"

"Yeah, but for the life of me I don't know how you managed to work all that magic."

"I do," she said softly.

"How?"

"I was thinking about you...about us. It was prom night where I come from and the boy I was with was my date. Everything was going great until the prom was over. He took me to a place where people go to make out."

"Do what?" He crossed his arms over his chest and his blue eyes were as cold as ice. She smiled. He was damned sexy when he was pissed off.
"Ummm...have sex."

"You refused him and he beat you?"

"It's not that bad.."

"Like hell it isn't!" Wyatt raged.

"Wyatt, please, it's over now," she begged. "He got mad and threw me out of his car. I was walking home when I heard this voice telling me to try to call to you. And here I am."

"Here you are. I should have been there with you," he muttered.

"You were in a way. Can we just forget about that asshole, please? You're thirty-eight, too old to go to a prom so I was thinking about how a date would be for us."

"I take it a date is what you call courtship?"

"Yeah. Although I wish you weren't a ghost because it doesn't give us much to do. Anyway, when you're with me, you're acting more and more like you used to before you got locked up, aren't you?"

"Yes."

She began to pace frantically.

"Dottie, are you all right?"

"I'm thinking."

"You're gonna make a hole in the dirt if you keep that up."

She smiled at him. "Right now my being able to control my dreams is working in our favor. If I can change you based on my emotions, it might be a possibility that you can become human again the same way."

"But you're not a sorceress, Dottie."

"Maybe I don't need to be."

Love is the strongest magic of all...

Was it possible?

She focused her gaze on him and concentrated harder than she'd ever done before and felt herself feeling faint.

Wyatt reached out for her, cursing when she fell through him and crashed to the ground. This half existence was both a blessing and a curse. He had no concept of time while locked in that damned suit and the only company he had until he found Dottie was the bitch when she felt the need to torture him for information he either didn't have or wasn't giving her and memories of his family being taken away from him.

"You know you and Jeb are my life Adora. I don't know what I'd do without you."

"You'll find another reason to go on."
He didn't think he had anything left to live for. His wife and child were gone and the witch wouldn't stop until she crushed what was left of resistance fighters. Grief and despair began to take their toll on him and he was slowly losing the will to go on living until two years ago when his dragon's spirit had been awakened.

The order must not end with you. Find your apprentice and claim your mate.

I had a mate and she's gone. I can't find my apprentice because I can't escape from this hellhole.

You are the dragon. A dragon lives and fights. A dragon never cowers in the face of danger. Force your enemies to face your wrath but never allow them to claim victory or the right to call themselves master. Your heart is not meant to remain imprisoned in darkness. It will love again.

When Dottie first appeared to him Wyatt cursed the dragon and the OZ for what he considered it's sick sense of humor. His second bride was half his age and an Othersider, even more forbidden to him than Adora was yet the dragon in him sensed a passion in her that mirrored his own, a passion that promised to grow stronger with time. Then she returned to the waking world and the witch came for him and once again he felt his reason for living slipping away. Now that she'd returned he wanted to believe she would stay this time.

"Dottie," he said softly as he kneeled beside her. "Wake up, sweetheart."

Her eyelids fluttered open. "W...Wyatt? What happened?"

"You passed out."

"Oh...I'm sorry."

"What were you trying to do?"

"I...I wanted to try to make you human again," she said softly. "I'm sorry it didn't work." She sat up.

"I don't want you trying it again. You could kill yourself."

"You being locked up really sucks," she muttered. "I wish I knew where your prison was because I'd like to take a hammer to it and pound it to bits."

"It's back at my cottage in the Outer Zone."

"Yeah and I'd probably need the Millenium Falcon to get there. It's a ship in a movie that travels to other planets. But," she smiled again. "I got to you without it."

She rose to her feet and they walked over to the table. To her surprise, Wyatt was able to sit down. It wasn't the improvement she was hoping for but close enough.

"You can interact with objects...that's a start. We can have dinner now. Wait, no we can't. Candles. I forgot the candles."

"Dottie, what did I just say about trying to do to much?"

"Oh hush up," she mumbled.

She closed her eyes and a silver candelabra with long white candles appeared on the table. She focused on the wicks and tried to light them but when she tried, she couldn't do it, nor could she conjure up a cigarette lighter.
Wyatt flinched as if he'd been struck by something. He moved his shadowy hand over the wicks of the candles and small flames appeared.

"How did you do that?" DG asked him.

"I don't know," he answered. "My Talon master was a famous sorcerer and while I was sitting here I had a vision of him teaching me how to control fire and me not being very good at it."

"You could've fooled me. It makes sense though since you have the dragon's spirit in you. The dragon's primary weapon is fire."

This was how she'd wanted her prom night to be, a handsome man seated at the table across from her having a conversation with her that she was actually interested in and willing to listen to her when she wanted to talk. He was as fascinated about her world as she was about his. There was so much she wanted to try to show him with her new ability but she knew it would upset him and she didn't like it when his anger was directed at her. He wouldn't hurt her, nor could he in his present form but she wanted the moments she had with him to be pleasant ones.

Wyatt noticed the sun rising over the horizon and sighed. "It's about time for you to go again," he said sadly. "If I never get to see you again, I want you to know this time I've been here with you is the happiest I've been since I got locked up in that damned suit."

"And this has been the best date I've ever had," she said softly. "I will come back this time, Wyatt," she promised and reached across the table, her small hand passing through the shadow of his large one.

She expected to wake up in the woods, still a bruised mess but when the night turned to day she was still with him and he hadn't returned to his slumber inside his prison.

"Something's wrong," she said worriedly. "I'm not waking up. Not that I want to but..." Her outfit suddenly changed into a blue shirt, jeans, sneakers and her favorite black jacket.

"And I should have returned to that damned suit but something's holding us here." Now he was wearing a grey fedora hat with a matching duster coat, a brown leather vest, blue and white striped shirt and tan pants.

"I'm scared Wyatt. What's happening to us?" she cried, running to him, forgetting that she walked right through him.

He cursed the witch again. "I don't know sweetheart but we'll figure it out together."

Wyatt couldn't remember being more confused in his entire life. He knew part of him had been freed from the suit but he couldn't understand what was keeping Dori at his side this time. It wasn't that he wanted her to go but he was afraid of what she'd done to stay even if she wasn't aware of doing it.

"Try to wake yourself up again," he urged.

"I have been and it's not working," DG said. "What about you? The witch isn't trying to come after you again, is she?"

"No, must have other poor souls to torment."

"Wyatt, those clothes you're wearing now, is that how you normally look?"
"Yeah. I'm guessing that's how you normally look too."

"My parents are upset about it but yes."

"They're going to be worried about you the longer you stay away, sweetheart," he reminded her.

"Maybe not enough time has passed for them to notice I've been gone."

"We don't know that."

"Why are you trying to get rid of me?" she snapped. "Don't you want me here anymore?"

"I didn't say that!" he cried.

"Then what is it?"

"All I'm saying is that you have loved ones on the Other Side who need you too and you can't be thinking about yourself."

She crossed her arms over her breasts. "Are you suggesting I deliberately stopped myself from waking up?"

"Did you?"

"I can't believe you had the nerve to ask me that!"

"We've both seen what you can do when you put your mind to it and we have to consider that you may have done it without knowing it," he answered calmly. Ozma's ghost, the girl had a nasty temper like his when she got angry.

"Maybe I did," she said softly. "but even if I did, I don't regret it. I love my parents, don't get me wrong but sometimes I feel like they and everyone else in my world don't really know me at all. Haven't you ever felt that way?"

"Yeah. Mostly when I was a kid."

"Since it looks like I'm going to be here a while, why don't we see how far we can go in this little world of ours?" she suggested.

"What do you mean?" he inquired.

"I was only referring to a walk, Wyatt. We can't do anything else with my being able to walk right through you," she said and blushed.

"I never know what's going on in that mind of yours," he said and chuckled. "Sometimes I don't think I want to," he added.

While they walked, DG was able to get him to tell her some things about his childhood, which wasn't easy for him to talk about, especially when it came to the abuse he and his mother suffered at the hands of his alcoholic stepfather. He talked about Adora, Jeb and his time with the Mystic Man and the Tin Men and although he was afraid he was boring her, she hung onto his every word, her heart aching for the many painful moments he'd had in his life.

You'll never have another day of pain with me, she vowed.

As they were walking Wyatt suddenly stopped, his blue eyes wide with shock. She saw him staring
at a small cottage just outside the woods.

"What's wrong?"

"We're...we're in Elba!" he whispered.

"What's Elba?"

"The village where I grew up," he explained. "And this is the cottage where my pa lived...until he was killed in a battle...along with my aunt Mari and a lot of the people who lived here." She gazed up and him and saw a tear slide down his ghostly cheek. She wanted to put her arms around him and hold him tightly to her but she would only be reaching for air and he wouldn't be able to feel the comfort she wanted to give him.

This is why I can't go. Some higher power put us together for a reason and now I know what it is. Despite the age difference and the fact that we come from different worlds, we're pretty much the same. He feels as alone in his world as I do in mine and the only time we're happy is when we're together. And the more we feel for each other, the more he returns to his old self.

"I'll be right back," he croaked.

"Don't you dare do it Wyatt Cain," she threatened.

"Do what?"

"Go off somewhere so I won't be able to see you cry. I don't give a damn how tough a man acts, he can cry just like everyone else."

"You don't need to see this..."

"I'll just follow you."

"Dammit..."

He sat down on the steps and his control shattered, alternating between crying and screaming out the years of pain, loneliness and heartbreak while she could only sit there and try to soothe him the only way she could; with soft words.

Days and weeks passed and they settled into a somewhat comfortable routine. Used to helping her mother with the housework at home, she took care of the housecleaning but left the cooking to Wyatt because the kitchen in his cottage was at least fifty years behind the times, feeling a twinge of jealousy that the spell on him had weakened enough that he could touch objects but not her. Nighttime was agony. She'd lay awake wondering if he was having as much trouble sleeping in his own room as she was in hers but didn't dare go to look. It still felt strange to her that she was able to sleep in both realities but as long as she woke up in Wyatt's cottage in the morning, she didn't mind it.

She already felt married to him. Although it lacked the physical intimacy of a normal marriage, they had connected with each other on an emotional level and even had their arguments like a long time married couple did. In the back of her mind however, she was beginning to sense that he was holding something back and those suspicions were confirmed when he started spending more time alone and he wasn't talking to her as much as he used to. Tired of the silences, she decided to confront him. She found him sitting on the porch steps. He kept his back to her and she could feel an icy chill in the air even though it was a beautiful summer day.
"You should go home," he said sadly. "You deserve so much better than to be with someone with only half an existence."

"Why are you giving up now?" she demanded. "You're gaining more of your humanity every day. I don't know how to make it come back completely but I can't do it alone."

"You're wasting your life here."

"Why don't you let me be the judge of that."

"Go home."

"No."

"I don't want you here anymore!" he yelled.

"Why don't you look at me and say it then?"

"I don't have to. You heard what I said."

"Then I want you to hear this: if you can look in my eyes and tell me you don't love me and that you want me to leave, I'll find some way to leave here and never bother you again. Then you can spend the rest of your life regretting giving up on someone who loves you enough that she doesn't give a damn that you only have half an existence now."

"Dottie..."

"If you want me to go, prove it. Look at me and say it." she urged.

He sighed deeply. "I can't. I can't do it, Dori because if you left me, you'd take what's left of my heart with you."

She burst into tears. Forgetting again that her arms would pass right through him, she reached out and touched his shoulder and to her surprise it stayed there.

"Wyatt..." she breathed. "I...I'm touching you!"

"Oh sweet Ozma's ghost...I can feel it!"

He turned his head and she could see that he was no longer a shadow but a flesh and blood man, his blue eyes locked on hers. "I love you," he whispered as he pulled her into his arms and kissed her. She reached up and caressed his cheek returning the kiss with a passion that matched his.

"I love you too."

Suddenly the very earth beneath them began to shake. Wyatt wrapped his arms around DG protectively.

"It...it's her, isn't it?" she asked worriedly. "It...Wyatt!" He was shivering, icicles forming on his fingertips and his skin turning pale.

"You have to go now!" he cried. "If you stay she'll find a way to unlock my heart's memories and track you."

"I can't leave you now! Not now that we..."
"D...Dottie, please. She's already taken Adora and my son away from me. I can't lose you too."

As the witch's spell took control of him again she could see that his hair was now long and dirty, the moustache reappeared and his clothes were now dirty as well.

"Wyatt, please don't leave me. I love you..." she sobbed.

"Find my prison and release me..." he pleaded as he began to disappear.

Wyatt's cottage faded away and she was once again back in the woods in Kansas. "I'll find your prison and free you Wyatt, I promise...We'll be together again soon my darling..." she whispered.

"DG! DG, it's okay...it's Officer Gulch," she heard a voice calling out in the distance but she ignored it. She didn't want to be here. She wanted to be with Wyatt, where her heart belonged.

The alchemist removed the probe from Wyatt's heart and shook his head. Three viewers were dead in their chairs behind him while the Sorceress stood in the corner having difficulty controlling her fury. She felt part of the curse on him weakening and brought him back to the tower for another reading, this time taking him out of the suit. She had her suspicions that Princess DG was somehow responsible for it but no matter how hard they pushed, his heart would not betray its secrets.

A pair of medicoats removed the bodies of the viewers from the room and three more were brought in, the viewer Raw being one of them. He was worthless most of the time but when he was given enough 'encouragement' he eventually came up with something. The probe was reinserted followed by a second one to Wyatt's brain. If they could not find answers one way, they would try another.

"We're running out of viewers," the alchemist mumbled as two viewers from this set died after trying to read Wyatt for seventeen hours. Only Raw, Lylo and Kalm were left alive but neither Raw nor Lylo could see anything from Wyatt Cain and his body seemed to be shutting itself down.

"Take him back to his cottage," the witch mumbled. She never enjoyed admitting defeat but it seemed that Wyatt Cain would have the final victory because he was bound and determined to take the secret he was keeping to the grave with him.

When they reached Wyatt's home, the medicoats put him back in the suit while the witch sealed the lock with her magic. The man had been a constant thorn in her side yet no matter how much she wanted him to, he wouldn't break under her will. She only had one more thing to look forward to. If the princess was alive and planning on freeing him the curse she'd placed on them would eventually destroy them.

"...Wyatt, please don't leave me...I love you..."

"DG! DG, it's okay...it's Officer Gulch."

"I'll find your prison and free you Wyatt, I promise...We'll be together again soon my darling..." DG murmured.

The whole town had been searching for her for almost a month, having become convinced that they would only find her body. She may have given Elmer a few headaches speeding through the streets of town on that motorcycle of hers but she hadn't deserved to be beaten, nearly raped and left alone in the woods to die. The boy responsible was cooling his heels in a jail cell and if there was any justice in the town he would spend a long time in prison.

As he rode in the back of the ambulance with her, Elmer feared the worst damage had been done to
DG's mind. She hadn't stopped calling for this person named Wyatt from the moment they found her but that wasn't as bizarre as the babbling she was doing about magic, dragons and witches. Hank and Emily had often said DG had a very active imagination and it seemed to be in overdrive now and causing her to have hallucinations.

Admit it El, he thought. Being left alone in the woods after someone tried to beat and rape you would make anyone go insane.

The next year was the most difficult of all their lives. Because DG had been deemed an incompetent witness, the charges against Mike had been dropped and she had to have regular sessions with a psychologist as well as take antipsychotics. When she went into town she thought she could hear people whispering about her.

Poor kid. She hasn't been right since prom night.

Yet she'd survived. She may have gone a little crazy and had bizarre delusions after the prom but the last thing she wanted was anyone's pity and she was tired of everyone treating her like she was a fragile piece of china that would shatter. She was now twenty years old and determined to show them all that she was not crazy.
Reunions and Revelations

Chapter by cjmoliere

Storybrooke, Maine

Twenty-nine days prior to the Double Eclipse

Fifty-nine days prior to the Final Eclipse

Though Regina had no magic as far as they knew, the town was still in chaos. Many people had their homes destroyed by the Wraith, some were looking for lost family members and others were struggling with two sets of memories. They were looking to David to lead them now that Snow and Emma were missing and presumed dead but the only thoughts on the former prince's mind were protecting his grandson from Regina and getting his wife and daughter back.

Blue and her fellow fae along with Ruby and Archie were trying their best to aid their fellow townspeople. Archie had a sign up sheet for counseling he'd written the night before but even his mind was occupied with trying to find a way to get back to the OZ. The double eclipse would darken the Ozian skies in twenty-nine days and Dorothia's magic and memories needed to be unlocked if she were to be of any use to her sister.

"My boy. My poor boy." Geppetto sobbed, hanging up a drawing of Pinocchio on the wall of missing people. Farther down on the wall was a drawing of Belle posted by her father.

"If you are looking for a family member, come to the front table. If you need counseling, Dr. Hopper has a signup sheet. If the wraith damaged your house, there are cots at the school." Ruby announced.

"This is getting out of hand. People are in a panic. They don't know what to do," Blue sighed.

"It's okay. It'll be fine. We just need everyone to remain calm. I have a feeling our prince is working on something right now."

"I certainly hope so."

Unfortunately for them their prince was as confused as everyone else and the news the dwarves brought back from their mission at the town line brought little relief. Anyone who crossed lost their memories of their true selves and became their cursed selves, the dwarf Sneezy having reverted back to his cursed self during their experiment. And if Regina regained her powers the town wad still in danger.

"Ruby, I'll be right back," Archie said, grabbing his car keys off the table after Charming left. "Call me on my cell if I get any appointments."

"Okay Archie. Where are you going?"

"There's something I need to do," he said evasively.

He drove down to Mifflin Street and spotted Regina coming out of her house.

"Regina. I thought you might want to talk," he said as Regina was about to get in her Mercedes.

"Oh, right, the conscience thing."
"It's what I do."

"I'm in no mood."

"It's too bad, 'cause... 'Cause I think talking about your pain might be very helpful, might help you learn who you truly are."

"I know who I am."

"Do you? Because I don't think you do. I think you're still trying to become the person you want to be. Think about it. My door is always open if you want to talk."

"Oh, just go away!" she snapped and got in the car, slamming the door. She started the engine, the tires squealing on the pavement when she floored the accelerator and threw the car in reverse, barely missing Archie's feet while she was backing up. He stared after her, sighing heavily.

"You really do NOT want to do this hard way!" he growled and returned to his own car and slammed the door.

At the pawn shop Rumple and Belle were in the backroom having spent most of the morning perusing all of his books. Along with their mission to break the Dark Curse, Rumple was eager to begin his search for Baelfire.

"This seeing globe you tried to obtain from Oz, is is possible it might be here?" Belle asked him, sliding the book she was reading over to him. "Or is there a way you can recreate it?"

"No. Cora has it, I'm certain of that. But," Rumple smiled. "Miss Swan still owes me that favor and I'll be ready to collect. Finding people is what she does." They heard the bell above the front door tinkle. "Belle, stay here," he commanded softly. She nodded and picked up another book. Rumple walked out to the salesfloor to see Regina looking through his books.

"The library's beneath the clock tower. You closed it, remember? When you still had power."

"I need the book. I need to get my son back."

"Which book? Ah. So, it's come down to that, eh? You need your mommy's help?"

"Give me the book."

"Do you really need the smell of the written word to get the magic flowing again, love? Maybe if you relaxed, it would just happen."

"I don't have time. It worked once, I know I can do it. I just... I just need a shortcut back."

"Yeah, well, I don't have time, either. Leave. Please."

To his surprise, she didn't obey as she had in the past.

"Well, how about that. Your 'pleases' have lost their punch."

"Well, the fact remains, jumpstarting your magic is not in my best interest."

"You know what else isn't in your best interest? Having everyone know the Enchanted Forest still exists. Knowing that, you and I, are keeping that little secret. You're up to something. And it doesn't involve going back home."
Regina eyed the chest containing some of Rumple's potions and scrolls. The last thing he wanted was the witch getting her greedily little hands on those. He gestured and Cora's spellbook appeared in his hand.

"Careful, dearie. These are straight up spells. Rough in the system."

"I don't care if they turn me green. I'm getting my son back."

I can only hope, he thought bitterly.

She snatched the book out of his hand and walked over to the door.

"Oh my…"

"What?"

"It's just, holding that… I told you once you didn't look like her, but now… Now I can see it."

She gasped and hurried out the door. Belle waited until she was certain the queen was gone before she came out of the backroom. "Rumple, why did you do that? Rumple?" She paused when she realized he was once again in a Seer's trance. He shook his head to clear it. "What did you see?"

"Regina must have her magic back. That is the will."

"The will of what?"

"The will of the OZ," he murmured.

"I do hope you're right," she said and returned to the backroom to resume her reading.

Back at the loft, Charming was making a desperate attempt to compose a speech that he thought would help ease the minds of his fellow townspeople. He'd asked them to meet him at the town hall in two hours but time was running out. Oh, how he wished Snow were there. She always knew what to say. He was a better fighter than a motivational speaker.

"People of Storybrooke, I know we're trapped again and things look... bleak... But... they're not."

"No. Keep going. You were on to something," Henry encouraged.

"No, I wasn't. I did the fighting. Snow did the talking." He set Jefferson's ruined hat on the table.

"Can I see that?"

"Yeah."

"I think I know what this is. It's the Mad Hatter's hat. It's a portal between worlds."

"Mad Hatter."

"You've heard of him?"

"No. I mean, yeah. I mean, the prince-me doesn't know him, but David had memories of reading "Alice In Wonderland" in school. I need to get it to work again. Who is he? I mean, who is he here?"

"I don't know. Maybe he'll check in at the crisis, we could check after the thing."
"What thing?"

"The meeting where you tell us all your plan? Remember the speech you were doing?"

"Right. I'll be back for that."

"Gramps, you gotta use me. Come on! The curse was broken 'cause of me! Let me help! Or not."

But David was already out the door before he could say anything more.

Rumple and Belle were still no closer to a solution to their problems when they heard a door close outside. "Belle, I am so sorry. Keep reading.” She nodded silently.

"It appears when I bought that "closed" sign, I was just throwing my money away," he groused when he went back out to the main floor to see Charming waiting for him.

"Looks like it."

"Sorry to hear about your wife and daughter. If you're looking for a retrieval, I'm afraid portal-jumping is just outside my purview."

"Of course it is."

"So what's the commotion outside?"

"A little stir at the border. A problem crossing the line."

"Do tell."

"Actually, I'm here to buy something... a way to find someone."

"What, like a map?"

"Something with a bit more kick, like the ring you gave me to find Snow."

"Oh, yeah. Magic. Whom are you following?"

"Not telling."

Ass. Alright, Prince, we'll play.

"So do you have something of theirs, this missing person?"

"Yes."

"May I see it?"

"No."

"Pour this on the object and then follow it. So simple, even David Nolan could do it."

"What do you want?"

"Peace. Leave me alone."

"What do you care what David Nolan does?"
"No. No. It's... it's Charming I worry about. I'd like a little... non-interference guarantee."

"Fine. If you give me the same. You and I... we stay out of each other's way."

"Thank you for your business. So, uh, what happens – when you try and cross the border?"

"You lose your memory of everything of our old lives. Looks like we're stuck here," Charming announced and left. Furious, Rumple grabbed his cane and began swinging it at anything and everything he could find. Belle ran out of the backroom and snatched it out of his hands.

"Rumple, Rumple, STOP!"

"We can't cross the town line! He sobbed. "My boy...my boy! I'll never see him again!"

"What do you mean we can't cross?"

"We'll lose our memories, Belle. Our cursed memories will be all we have. I'll never see Bae!"

"No, no! We'll find a way around it. I'm not giving up and neither should you. Please!" she begged. He threw his arms around her.

"I don't know what I would do without you Belle."

She smiled and kissed him. "It's going to take a lot more than curses to keep me away from you now. There has to be something here we haven't tried, haven't read. And aren't you the king of loopholes?"

"Why don't we take a break for a bit and have lunch?"

"What did you have in mind?"

He grinned. "I'll surprise you."

Two hours later a large crowd had gathered at the town hall but there was no sign of Charming, Henry's calls to him unanswered.

"Come on, Gramps. Pick up. Come on…"

"Please, everyone. Just be patient. I'm sure he's going to be here any second," Ruby said in an attempt to soothe the restless crowd.

Her grandmother paced the floor, her crossbow in her hands.

"Granny, do you really need that?"

"We've got a lawless town, Ruby. Damn right I need it."

"Try calling him again," Ruby pleaded.

"He's not picking up."

"Just keep trying."

"My... What a nice turnout. No need for a fuss. It's just little old me." Regina said when she breezed into the town hall.

"Regina, think about what you're doing," Archie pleaded.
"Bug!" Regina sneered and sent him flying with her magic.

"What do you want?!!" Ruby demanded angrily.

"Me. She wants me. Okay, I'll come with you. Just... leave them alone." Henry pleaded.

"That's my boy." She took his hand and led him out of the town hall.

"Are you alright, my friend?" Geppetto was asking as he attempted to help Archie to his feet.

"She is not going to do this!" He picked up his umbrella and stood up, his blood boiling.

"Archie, be careful!" Ruby called out. "Wait for Charming."

"There's no time!" He stormed out of the town hall and waved his hand, casting a temporary locking spell on the doors. "All right Your Majesty. It looks like we're gonna do this the hard way."

He spotted Regina getting ready to get into her Mercedes, a distraught Henry in the passenger seat.

"I'm sorry Henry." He waved his hand and the child slumped over in the seat, fast asleep.

"You're not going anywhere Regina."

Regina turned around, smirking. "Do you think you can stop me, bug? I'll incinerate you."

"I warned you had NO idea who you're dealing with. But you're about to find out and mark my words, this will be the LAST TIME you try to tango with me lady because I've fought far worse than you!"

She threw back her head and laughed. Archie glared at her and gestured, slamming her against the side of the town hall. His eyes had a menacing dark green tinge as he approached her.

"What...what ARE you?" she cried.

"The person who is going to make sure you never hurt Henry, hurt ANYONE else again! I tried, I tried so hard to anchor you back to your humanity but that's not possible for you. You don't care about anyone but yourself...and you don't deserve to have a child! He's not a child to you...he's just another possession and if Emma doesn't want to raise him then I will!"

"Over my dead body," Regina hissed, attempting to blast him back but found that she could no longer use her magic and she could see a white mist emitting from her mouth, watching with horror while her skin began to wither and age.

He's an Ozian Guardian! she thought fearfully. And he was taking her life force, a power only an Ozian Guardian possessed.

"Archie, no! You can't surrender now...I need you! I can't fight Bastinda alone. Please! If you kill her you'll be lost to me forever," he heard Az's voice pleading. "She can change...we all can if we are loved enough and Henry does love her. You can't take his mother away from him. Don't give him the pain that is ours without Amber! I love you Archie. Come back to me..."

Archie released his grip on Regina and sank to his knees, sobbing brokenly. He was expecting her to simply finish him off but instead she merely stood there.

"You're a Ozian Guardian."
He stood up and wiped the tears from his eyes. "I'm also a father Regina. A father who never got the chance to hold his child because she was taken from me before she took her first breath and murdered...MURDERED by a soul as dark as yours will become if you keep going the way you are. Listen to your son. Maybe he can reach you where I can't."

"I don't understand...how...how can you be a father?"

"I haven't been here for the entire curse Regina, only part of it."

"That's impossible! I saw you here the day I cast it!"

"No, you saw a construct created to look like me. I've only been here ten years. When you cast your curse I was sent to the OZ where I trained as a Guardian and I am the Heart of the North Guardian. Now that you know who and what I am, I'm going to warn you one last time: I was sent here to protect Henry and I will continue to do so...even if I have to protect him from you."

"What is Henry to you?" she demanded.

"He's important to all of us, Regina."

"Why are you trusting me with your secret? I assume no one else knows who you really are?"

"They don't, but they will eventually. Listen to your son Regina. Let him help you find the person you used to be, before you gave in to your darkness. And remember...if you hurt him, you deal with me. It was by my suggestion that you be executed back in the Enchanted Forest but Snow granted you mercy. I will not hesitate to rip the life force out of you a second time if that is the will of the OZ."

He spun on his heel and walked back to the town hall, releasing the spell on the doors. An anxious Ruby and Geppetto waited for him inside.

"She took him, didn't she?" Ruby asked. "Archie, are you okay?"

"She won't hurt him Ruby."

"No but she'll hurt the rest of us. You know that."

"She won't. Because of Henry."

"How can you be so sure!"

"Because he's the only person in this town she gives a damn about and if hurting us hurts him, she won't do it."

"Well I dunno about any of you but I'd rather live as my cursed self anywhere else but here with her!" Happy cried.

"Yeah, me too!"

"And me!"

Soon nearly everyone in the town was in agreement.

"I'm going to get David. We have to do something!" Ruby exclaimed and ran out of the town hall.

"Are you going to leave, Archie?" Geppetto asked him.
"I don't know."

"I have to stay. For my boy."

"I know and I give you my word; we will find him. Let's go back to my office. We need to talk."

"Mind if I join you?" they heard Blue ask.

"Mother Superior...Blue...I...Of course," Archie said quickly, yet he didn't dare refuse her. They drove to his office in silence and once they were seated on his sofa, Blue gazed up at him, her eyes wide with shock as the suspicions she had at the town hall after sensing the presence of an Ozian Guardian were confirmed. "You are an Ozian Guardian and a Talon of the Dragon. How is this possible?"

"I didn't come here with the curse. I arrived just before Henry was brought to Storybrooke." Archie unbuttoned his shirt and turned his back to them, baring his shoulder and arm to expose his sword and dragon markings.

"How did you escape the curse?"

He glanced over at Geppetto. "We were trying to find a way to get to Pinocchio without using the wardrobe again and I was given an Ozian travel storm token right before the curse hit."

"Where did you get it?"

"Ozmalita."

"Ozmalita Diosa, the servant angel of Lurline?"

He nodded. "In her human form as Adora Cain. She altered it so that the portal would only take me and it took me to the OZ, to the Temple of Lurline. Mistress Alana took me in once she saw my markings she sent me to General Lannot to train as a Talon. Dellia and Jeb Mysticos helped me learn my magic but Dellia bound my powers before she activated the storm that brought me here. I can't stay here Blue. I have to go back. She needs me. I promised her. I promised our daughter…"

"Your daughter?!" Gepetto and Blue asked in unison. "You have a child."

"I had a child," Archie confessed, his eyes filled with tears. "Bastinda had her murdered as soon she was born. They strangled our child right in front of me and I couldn't stop them!" His blue eyes blazed with fury and he pulled his charm out from underneath his shirt. "This is all I have left of her! A lock of hair!"

"I'm so sorry Archie."

"I need your help Blue. The double eclipse is coming and I need to be back in the OZ. Dellia can't fight Bastinda alone and her sister isn't strong enough yet. She needs me."

"You may still be able to help her without needing a portal."

"Astral projection? I haven't tried that in a long time."

"But you remember how?"

"I do now."

"When you perform magic your aura will be visible to the others, including the Dark One. He may
try to stop you."

"Regina already knows. And the Dark One is a she," he corrected. "What I'm about to say is not to go any further than this room. Rumplestilskin is more than just the Dark One."

"What do you mean Archie?"

"He, his son Baelfire and Henry are the last of the Strogoff bloodline."

"What? How...how is that possible?"

"His mother was Lilliana Strogoff, a descendant of Lurline and Aramon. He is the West Guardian and Henry is the East." He sighed. "And Rumple's father is Peter Pan, a descendant of the McDermott clan, a family of Scots-Irish witches and warlocks burned during the hunts for using light and dark magic. Rumple doesn't know any of this because he isn't meant to...at least not yet. Alemedia's hold on his soul is too strong right now. Finding his son and reuniting them is the key to freeing him from Alemedia's curse just as my returning to Dellia is what she needs to free herself from Bastinda. The four guardians must be reunited and their bonds completed within sixty days or there'll be no preventing the final eclipse."

"What's that Archie?" Geppetto asked him.

Blue sighed deeply. "A prophecy no one dares to speak of because they fear it so."

"And Bastinda and Alemedia were planning for it before Dellia sent me here," Archie added. "Bastinda was tearing the realms apart searching for both emeralds and Aramon's Talisman."

"But the only ones she could use are Lurline's emeralds. The Strogoff emerald and Aramon's Talisman can only be used by Rumplestiltskin or his heirs." Blue pointed out.

"There are only four people in the mortal realm who know where all the stones are hidden; Dellia, Lavinia, me, and DG but Lavinia cloaked DG's memories in case Bastinda attempted to use a Viewer on her. Dellia and I used the same spell on ourselves."

"What is this prophecy you're afraid of?" Geppetto demanded.

"The complete destruction of our world," Blue answered gravely. "The god Aramon predicted that our world be destroyed through the actions of his own descendants. And so far, every event that he has forseen has come true: two of his descendants have become the Dark One, many of the Strogoff and Ozopov heirs were murdered by one of their own and the most powerful servant of the dark goddess would be released from Ephesis. How did that happen Archie?"

"I rarely left Dellia's side from the day I arrived at the palace but that day I completed my final trial as a Talon apprentice and challenged Jeb Mysticos to grant me the rank of Master. I thought the girls would stay at the summer palace with their mother but she decided she was going to have another one of her rendezvous with the royal advisor Ambrose Benu. I found out they were lovers months before and confronted them with it." He snorted. "They tried to convince me it was over but I had my doubts. The girls wandered into the woods alone and discovered the cave with the seal to Bastinda's prison. Everyone assumes Dellia was lured to that seal by Bastinda's siren call but it was DG. Dellia cast a protection spell over them but when DG let go of her hand, she couldn't hold it and Bastinda took possession of her soul. Now she is using Dellia's body and her magic to destroy the OZ. If the OZ falls, the rest of our world will follow."

"H...How...?" Geppetto paled.
"One of the emeralds holds Lurline's life force. If it's destroyed, she dies and so does everyone left behind in our world when the Dark Curse was cast. Every disaster movie we've ever seen in this world is what the people in the OZ, the Enchanted Forest, Wonderland and Agrabah will endure… until there's nothing left…." Archie's eyes met his friend's. "In fifty-nine days. And we'll not just see it…we'll feel it…we'll feel their pain and terror… the price of our survival."

"How does Regina know you have magic?" Blue asked him.

"Because I attacked her with it after she took Henry." He lowered his head. "I almost took her life force."

Blue gasped.

"Regina regaining her magic is the will of the OZ. She is the Heart of the East Guardian."

"That's not possible...the heart is supposed to be the lover of the Guardian as well as their protector."

"Not in Henry's case, Blue. His bond is unique because the bond between a parent and a child is stronger than the bonds of lovers. But Regina has to earn the right to become Henry's guardian. That's why I let her take him. He is her only anchor to her humanity she has to learn that she can earn his love without using magic and trying to change." He went into the kitchen to brew some tea, Geppetto following him.

"I know what you want to ask me Geppetto and the answer is yes. I will do my best to use my powers to find your son. All I ask is that you be patient."

"I understand. This town line problem...does it affect you?"

"I don't know but I'd better find out. The sooner the better. I have to go to Kansas to find my sister-in-law, free my wife and then we need to find your son. Will you wait here in Storybrooke til I get back?"

"Yes," Blue said and sipped her tea.

"I'll wait," Geppetto replied. Archie went into his bedroom and packed several suitcases. "If this works, I need to get to Kansas right away. I'll call you as soon as I can." He picked up his suitcase and went outside to see many of his neighbors packing their cars too. He didn't blame them for wanting to leave but he was hoping Charming would be able to convince them otherwise. It was what Snow would do.

"How long am I in prison? Till I grow up?" Henry asked his mother coldly, furious that his attempt to escape had been thwarted by her magic.

"Henry, I rescued you because I love you."

"So, I'm a prisoner because you love me. That's not fair."

"You know where I come from. That was really not fair. Of all the places I've seen, this is the fairest of them all."

"You ruined lives. You sent away Mary Margaret and Emma."

"That was an accident."
"The way you treated me wasn't an accident. You made it so no one believed me. You made me feel like I was crazy."

"But that's all going to change, now. Henry, you can know all the secrets. You can live in a house with magic. Look what I could do." She conjured a large cupcake and held it out to him.

'And I can teach you. You can do this and so much more. You can have all the friends you want come over any time, and you can show them everything in your book."

"No one's going to want to come over here. They're scared of you."

"You can make them not be scared. You can make them love you."

"I don't want that. I don't want to be you."

Those words chilled her to the bone. Charming had been right after all. No amount of magic would ever make her son love her again.

In a panic, nearly everyone in town began packing their things and loaded them into their vehicles feeling that living as their cursed selves outside the town would be a far better fate than staying within its boundaries at the mercy of the Evil Queen. Charming slammed on the brakes of his truck and stopped a few feet from the line, blocking the road.

"Get out of the way! We have a right to go!" Archie yelled from his car at the front of the line.

"Listen to me! Listen. If you cross that line, you're gonna be lost. Everyone who loves you will lose you. But there's something worse. You'll lose yourself. Look, I get wanting to leave here. I do. And I get that it's easier to let go of bad memories, but... even bad memories are part of us. David, Storybrooke David was... is ... weak... confused... and he hurt the woman I love. I wouldn't give up being Charming just to be him. But you know what? I wouldn't make the other trade either, because that David reminds me not only of whom I lost... But of who I want to be my weaknesses and my strengths. David and The Prince. I am both... Just like you. You are both. The town is both. We are both. Stay here, and every choice is open to you. Live in the woods if you want. Hell, live in a shoe if you want. Or eat frozen burritos and write software. Let's open Granny's and the school and get back to work. I will protect you. She won't be able to hurt any of us, not as long as I'm alive. Not as long as we all come together... As we did before... As we shall do again!"

Archie smiled as the crowd began to disperse. He waited until everyone was gone before he approached the town line, holding his breath. He took one step forward, his body trembling. "I am Archie Hopper. I am..." His limbs tingled from the assault of dark magic as he continued to cross.

"I am Jiminy Ozopov!" he declared triumphantly.

His memories were intact. He stepped back over the town line.

The Tower

Oz (The Outer Zone)

Twenty-nine days prior to the Double Eclipse

"The barrier will not affect you. The dream realm Archie. It's the only realm the darkness cannot breach. Find me there." Az said softly as she watched him through the mirror. "DG has already made contact with Wyatt through it."
"She has? Then there's hope after all!"

"He won't remember her."

"He will in time. But you and I both know that their pasts as Dorothy and Nick are gonna complicate things. I need to find her Dellia. I need to find her and bring her back to the OZ. I..."

Jiminy, where the hell are you! Talk to me, dammit!

"Archie, what's wrong?" Az asked worriedly, sensing his distress.

"It's Jasper."

"Oh thank the goddess. He has his memories back!"

"Yeah but something's wrong from the sound of it. You'd better listen in." He conjured a mirror, willing it to show him his brother. His twin's image appeared on the mirror, a police badge in a black leather pouch hanging from a chain around his neck.

"Jasper?"

"It's Molk. My cursed name is David Molk."

"You're a cop?"

"Homicide. SFPD. Where the hell have you been Jiminy? I've been trying to contact you since this damn curse broke. We've got a problem down here and I need your help!"

"My cursed name is Archie Hopper. I'm a therapist. What's going on David?"

"Can you come here. It would look and sound too weird if I kept talkin to you like this."

"It's worth a try Archie," Az said.

"I don't know if teleporting in this land will actually work."

"Try. Your brother needs you."

He closed his eyes, reopening his telepathic link with his brother and was given an image of the apartment building David lived in. His brother was pacing nervously in his living room. Archie gestured and vanished in a puff of green smoke.

San Francisco

David Molk's eyes widened when a cloud of green smoke appeared in the living room revealing his brother, a sword in his hand.

"What...how the hell did you do that?"

"Magic."

"You have magic?"

"I do now. I'll tell you how later." He threw his arms around him. "You don't know how glad I am to see you! Once the curse broke I was worried about what happened to you...and Rose."

David grinned.
"What?"

"You wanna come out here, Sleeping Beauty?" he called out.

A door opened and petite brunette in her late thirties came out carrying a baby in her arms. "Jiminy!" she cried.

Archie gaped at her. "R...Rose!?"

"My name is Elizabeth now...Elizabeth Molk."

"What? You mean...you mean...you and David are...?"

"Married," his twin finished. "Yeah, imagine that. The smart mouthed little girl that was in my charge grew into a beautiful young woman that I fell head over heels in love with after she kept showing up at my crime scenes looking for a scoop for the Chronicle."

"I was not a smart mouth, David Andrew Molk!"

Archie burst out laughing. "Looks like we have a lot more in common than just blood and looks David. I fell head over heels in love with the girl I was protecting in the OZ."

"You got sent to Oz? Why?"

"I'll tell you soon. Her parents know about this?"

David frowned. "They're not where you are?"

"No. I've been in Storybrooke ten years and don't remember seeing them."

David snorted. "Maleficent probably kept them in the Enchanted Forest."

"If it still exists. We're still trying to find that out but Regina isn't cooperating."

"You may have an even bigger threat than the Evil Queen coming your way. That's why I kept trying to contact you. Puss and I, well his cursed name is Edgar Navarro, have been investigating two murders that have occurred within the last few weeks. The first victim was dressed like Cinderella and stabbed through the heart with the heel of a glass slipper."

"Cosplaying?"

"That's what we thought. Then we had another victim. This one was dressed like Snow White. Killed by ingesting cyanide through an apple." David handed his brother a stack of photos. "Right after the Cinderella murder I got a call from a man who sounds like us. He said his name was Isaac Wallace and he was from the NSA and he told me my Cinderella and Snow White aren't the only victims. There have been dozens of killings like this across the US and he's claiming they're the work of a cult called the 'Home Office'."

"Isaac told us this cult is killing people from our world and others like it," Beth added. "He's been tracking them for years. David's victims are a Snow White and Cinderella from another Enchanted Forest and Isaac is you from one of them too. That's why you all sound alike. And you look alike. David and I did a little digging and we found out this cult dates back to Victorian England and it's purpose is to destroy magic. Their website boasts that they've killed hundreds of people and destroyed at least fifty magical communities."

"They have a website?"
"Beth hacked into it," David replied. "Oh, it's disguised as a roleplaying site but Beth and Isaac are damn good hackers and got around all the protections on it. Storybrooke is listed as one of their targets along with a list of everyone who lives there."

"Someone inside Storybrooke is working for them!" Archie said angrily. "That's the only way they could've gotten all our cursed names."

"Regina?"

"I hope not because this cult threatens her son."

"What's his name?"

"Henry Mills."

His brother and sister-in-law exchanged worried glances.

"What?"

"That name was on the list and Isaac sent me this." David took a sheet of paper out of a file folder and handed it to Archie. "He took it off one of the cult members."

"This is a sketch of Henry!" he exclaimed, holding it out to them. "Where is this person? I want to question them myself!"

"Dead. Bastard somehow snuck a cyanide pill in and took it after Isaac got the sketch off him but the guy said the Office wanted the boy for something."

"Dammit!" Archie cursed. Throw pillows flew off the sofa and struck the wall and David and Beth's son awoke and started crying. "Ah, David I'm sorry! I didn't mean to scare him. My...my magic responds to my emotions. Do you think this Isaac can tell us anything else?"

"I don't know but it's worth a shot," David said while Beth began to rock their son back to sleep.

Archie took out his phone. "Geppetto...it's me. I've crossed the town line but something's come up and I had to go to San Francisco."

"How did you get there? Did you use magic?"

"Yes. And I've found my brother and Rose!"

"That's wonderful! Are they all right?"

Archie smiled. "They are...and married."

"Married! Congratulations to them."

"To each other. I'm going to try to send one of my constructs to you. I need you and Blue to make everyone think it's still me."

"All right but be careful Archie."

"I will. Now, where do we find this Isaac Wallace?" he demanded of his brother after Geppetto hung up.

"The NSA is in Maryland."
"Then it looks like we're going to Maryland. I need to know more about this 'Home Office' and how to stop them."

"Archie I'm sorry I dragged you into all this...but I don't want these people coming after Beth and Jasper."

"Jasper? You named your son after you?" he chuckled.

"I didn't know it at the time! We were cursed!"

"Still a good name for my little nephew." He picked the baby up, tears brimming in his eyes as he thought of his own daughter, a daughter he'd never gotten the chance to hold. "I'm gonna do everything in my power to make sure nothing happens to you," he murmured. "I'll sit with him while you get packed."

Dellia, forgive me, but I can't go to Kansas yet.

It's all right Archie. Mother must've had a plan for bringing DG to the OZ. Find out what these people are up to and stop them. If they kill Henry...

The circle would be broken and there would be no stopping the prophecy from coming true. He rocked his nephew in his arms and began singing to him.

"When you wish upon a star
Makes no difference who you are
Anything your heart desires will come to you
If your heart is in your dream
No request is too extreme
When you wish upon a star..."

Jasper lay his head on his uncle's chest and drifted off to sleep. Beth and David came out of their bedroom a few minutes later carrying their luggage. Archie handed his sleeping nephew to his father and closed his eyes, chanting in Ozian.

"What are you doing?"

"Shhh...he's concentrating!" Beth cautioned.

Archie opened his eyes a few minutes later.

"I booked us on the first flight out," David informed him. "And called Wallace. He's expecting us."

"Good because I want this Home Office taken down before they reach Storybrooke."

Storybrooke

Blue and Geppetto were still waiting at the apartment when Archie's construct returned, the pair stunned by how lifelike it appeared. "Archie is going to be away for a while," it said. "But he wanted me to tell you everything that happened to him in OZ so you have a better understanding of how he became what he is."
"It's strange...even I would think you were real if I weren't told otherwise."

"But he will come and take my place when he's ready to come back just as he did before."

"What's going on with his brother? Is everything okay?" Geppetto asked worriedly.

"His brother is fine. That's all he wants me to tell you for now."

Watch Regina. Make sure she doesn't hurt Henry or anyone else.

I will.

You know your mission. Prepare her to become Henry's Guardian until I return.

Blue and Geppetto left the office an hour later. The construct brewed himself a cup of tea and sat down on the sofa to read a book. Moments later he heard a knock on the door.

"Mr Gold! Uh...hello. What can I do for you?"

"Can I trust you to be discreet, Doctor?"

"Of course. Come in."

Gold gestured and to the construct's surprise a young woman he recognized from Archie's memories as Belle Lavalliere appeared at his side.

"Her name is Belle and I'd like you to help her with some issues she's had."

"Rumple, I'm fine..." Belle protested.

"No, sweetheart, you're not. You're waking up with the nightmares. I can only do so much but I think Doctor Hopper might be able to help you with the rest. Regina kept her in the asylum and her father..." Rumple's eyes narrowed to slits. "He had her examined by the clerics!"

"I'll be happy to help in any way I can. Belle, would you prefer if we talked in private?"

"No, I want Rumple here." Belle took his hand in hers.

The construct smiled. "Facing this issue you have together is a huge step."

"That's how we want to face all our troubles. Together," Belle said determinedly.

"Nothing can hurt you as long as you're together," Archie murmured, observing the session while he slept during the flight that would take him to Maryland and he hoped to some answers.
Made me promise I'd try
To find my way back in this life
I hope there is a way
To give me a sign you're OK
Reminds me again it's worth it all
So I can go on
All of my memories keep you near
In silent moments imagine you here
All of my memories keep you near
Your silent whispers, silent tears

Within Temptation - Memories
Elysian Fields
Paradise

Centuries earlier
"I want my son! I want to see my baby!" Lilliana sobbed. "Send me back! Lurline, I beseech you, send me back to my baby!"

Ozmalita waved her hand over the tear shaped sapphire she held in her hand, her heart aching for the young mother. Unlike the other souls in Paradise, Lilliana Strogoff's was unable to find peace, aching for the child she could no longer see or hold.

"You're going to send Dorothy back. Send ME back. I want to see my son!" Lilliana pounded on the walls of her room in her rage until her knuckles were sore and bleeding.

The young princess had earned the right to be given a new life and her sister, without knowing it, would give it to her. She'd started the West Guardian down the path to becoming the great man, the great sorcerer he was destined to be. She appeared in the princess's room, healing her wounds with her magic.

Lilliana kneeled before the Keeper of Souls and gazed up at her with pleading eyes. "I will pay any price you require...all I ask is that I see my son again."

Ozmalita reached out and stroked the young girl's cheek tenderly. "You will be reborn...but not as he remembers you. You have already paid a high price to ensure the West Guardian's survival Lilliana and this must be rewarded. It is the will of the goddess." It was small lie but it would do. She would deal with the consequences later.
"The only reward I need is to see my son."

"Oh but there is so much more you need in this new life, Lilliana. You must have the love you were denied by your son's father."

"Why did I ever fall for Malcolm's lies?" she moaned.

"We all make mistakes when we're young and in love," Ozmalita said gently. "I chose to give my heart to the wrong man before I gave it to Nick Chopper."

"But he was Dorothy's bonded!"

"As he will be in my second life but I would not trade the moments I had with him and will have in my new human life for nothing. There is a man somewhere in the realms who will heal your broken heart Lilliana but you must be patient. I cannot promise this new life you will be given will not be as difficult as your first until you find him. Your sister Zorinda plans to be reborn and when she is, you will be as well but you will have no memory of this life until the proper time."

"And when is that?" Lilliana demanded angrily.

"The time when worlds collide," the angel said softly.

"Then I will wait," Lilliana said firmly. "I will be reunited with my son. It doesn't matter whether I find love or not. His love is all I need."

She would wait as many centuries as it took.

Storybrooke, Maine

Twenty-eight days prior to the Double Eclipse

Fifty-eight days prior to the Final Eclipse

It was after noon and Belle had been in Rumple's study all morning going through more of his books to help him find a spell to counter the town line barrier while he worked at the shop but none of his experiements seemed to be producing positive results.

"Belle, sweetheart, at least come out and eat something. You've been in there all morning!" he pleaded when he returned home to find the study door still closed.

"Rumple, I've found something!" she exclaimed, nearly knocking him over when she opened the door.

"What is it?"

She handed the book she'd been reading to him. "If you enchant an object with sentimental value to you and wear it while you cross the line your memories will remain intact!"

"That's perfect, sweetheart! Thank you! Where did you find it?"

"In this book called the Book of the Ancients that you gave me the ability to translate."

"Now will you come out and eat."

"If you make hamburgers." she said with a smirk.
"Hamburgers! But...but they're greasy…"

"I'm sure you can doctor them up not to be."

"Well I'll certainly try."

His cursed self avoided any kind of fast food like the plague and if he had the desire to go out to eat, he chose one of the finer restaurants in town. He had nothing against Granny but fast food was all she served at her diner.

"Sweetheart, let the books wait a moment. You're going to get a headache if you read all day."

"But I want to help you!"

"You are but you can't spend all your days with your nose stuck in a book," he joked.

"Remember when I almost closed your nose in one?"

"Oh, how can I forget! And do you remember when I put you in that dust bunny trap?"

"The what?"

"Those things you had to pick out of your broom. They're called dust bunnies here."

"I'd better not find any when I'm cleaning this house Rumplestiltskin or I'm going to put one in your coffee!"

"You wouldn't dare!"

"Try me!"

"You would too, you minx," he muttered. "Ah, I'd forgotten how much I've missed that sass of yours."

"And I've missed getting under your skin."

Their eyes met.

"Belle, please don't think that I intend for you to be a kept woman."

"I wasn't thinking you did."

"I...ahhh...this is not coming out the way I want it to!" he grumbled, leaning against the counter.

"Take a deep breath and try again," she encouraged.

He walked over to where she was sitting and kneeled, taking her hand in his.

"What...what...what I meant to say is that...that...I would like...I would like to marry you. Properly. Oh, that was a horrible way to propose!"

"It was enough for me! Yes!" she cried and threw her arms around him.

"But not until my curse is broken and we find my son. Does that bother you sweetheart?"

"No! We are not getting married until your son is standing at your side as your best man!"

"But who...who...who will give you away? You don't really know anyone here and your father..."
"After what he did to me? I don't want him anywhere near me! I'll ask Archie. I like him Rumple. He's a good man."

"Indeed he is. But don't tell him just yet."

"I won't. Rumple, marrying you is what I've wanted since before we were cursed and our marriage will be different than the life you had with Milah. I'm not going to be a wife who runs away with a pirate. Speaking of pirates, one attacked me in Regina's castle trying to get information on you. It was him, wasn't it? The pirate Milah ran away with?"

"Let me guess. Leather, hook for a hand and more eyeliner than Maybelline?"

"That's him...and Maybelline?" She burst out laughing.

"What did that son of a bitch do to you?"

"He hit me and knocked me out."

"I get my hands on him I'll do more than just hit him. I'll beat the shit out of him!" Rumple growled. "Your father got a dose of it when he stole your cup at Regina's behest. I know you don't like when I lose my temper..."

"But I understand why you did it. You were hurt and angry over what he did to me."

"He was your father! He should've protected you, instead he had you abused worse than I ever could've done!"

"You didn't abuse me Rumple. You just...heart my heart but being here with you now is healing it."

Her stomach growled.

"Oh dearie, dear! I'd better get you fed or it'll be a beast in your stomach!"

"Why don't you show me how to cook? I know I couldn't do it worth a damn back at the Dark Castle."

"That's an understatement," he laughed. "I seem to recall having to visit the stool closet most of the evening after allowing you to make me porridge."

"You said to make it spicy!"

"Not that spicy, dearie! I'm immortal but even an immortal's bowels cannot handle THAT much spice! I will be the cook in this house."

"Fair enough but I'M doing the cleaning!"

Rumple took a package of ground beef out of the freezer and unthawed it with his magic and summoned the potatoes from their container to cut up for French Fries.

"Rumple, will you teach me magic?"

His hands froze in the mixing bowl.

"You want to learn magic? Am I hearing you correctly?"

"You heard me?"
"Why?"

"Because I'm no longer afraid of it anymore. And I want to be able to protect myself in case I come up against someone like Regina and you're not around. If she can learn it, so can I!"

"Learning magic is not easy nor am I an easy tutor," he cautioned.

"I'd be disappointed if you were. Rumple, I'm serious. I want to learn magic, not to use it against you but to help you. To help us." She walked over to the counter and placed her hand on his arm. As she moved her hand toward his they were stunned when they began to glow.

"What...what...what is that?" Rumple gasped.

"I think I can answer that," they heard Archie say from behind them. Rumple spun around, his arm around Belle protectively.

"Archie! No, it's not him. Regina!" Rumple snarled, conjuring a fireball and throwing it. Archie opened his umbrella and held it out in front of him, the fireball being absorbed into the fabric. He slammed the tip of the umbrella into the ground and a glowing shield formed over him. Rumple threw another fireball that bounced off the shield.

"I'm not Regina dammit, now will you stop throwing fireballs or we'll be having a few sessions on the dangers of pyromania! Good album by the way."

"How did you get past my wards, Regina?" Rumple asked coldly.

"I am not Regina."

"Prove it," Rumple challenged.

"Reach into Alemedia's memories and look for Commander Ozopov," Archie instructed.

"Rumple, what's he talking about?" Belle asked him.

"I have both my memories and hers...I don't reach into her memories often because I'm afraid to see what she's done when she's in control but I'm going to have to."

"Why?"

"Because he's going to find out something about me only the Dark One would've known," Archie explained.

Rumple closed his eyes and concentrated, seeing himself standing in front of the mirror in his living room while Alemedia was in control of his body holding a conference with the dark witch Bastinda in the body of Azkadellia Ozopov and her second in command, a face he immediately recognized though his facial hair had been shaved off.

"You're an Ozian Guardian," he murmured.

"Rumple, is that Archie...or Regina?"

"It's Archie. So...what I Saw came to be. You were sent to Oz. How did you get past my wards, dearie? And why?"

"The Heart of the West Guardian's magic unlocked and it summoned me," he said softly.
"Because you are the Heart of the North."

Archie nodded.

"Rumple, what's going on?" Belle demanded frantically.

"You need to sit down," Archie said and gestured, sending the bowl of ground beef to the refrigerator. "It'll keep until we're done and there's some things you need to know now because there are dangers far worse than your curse coming Rumple and you need to be ready."

Once they were in the living room the Once Upon a Time book appeared on the coffee table in front of them only this time the cover read: ONCE UPON A TIME: VOLUME IV: NONESTICA

"I don't think I need to tell you what this is."

"Of course not. I created it," Rumple said. "As the talisman that would restore Emma's memories and allow her to break the Dark Curse but that is not the title I gave it."

"One of the oldest spells in the Book of the Ancients."

"Archie, how do you know about that book?" Belle asked him.

"He's an Ozian Guardian. He would and be one of the few people in the realms able to translate it because it is written in an old Russian dialect and Ozian, the languages spoken by the descendants of the gods Hades and Persephone and Aramon and Lurline."

"Then he might be able to help you break your curse!"

"So Belle is a Guardian as well...bound to the West?" Rumple asked sadly.

"She is."

"I knew it!" Belle cried. "Archie, Rumple is one of the four Guardians, isn't he?"

"He is. He's the Guardian of the West Gate and the keeper of the blade of fire. You do him proud, Belle. You knew the truth locked in his heart's memories before he did."

"That's impossible! I...I'm not a member of the houses of Strogoff or Ozopov!" Rumple protested. "My mother was some wench my father seduced and abandoned me like he did."

"If you don't believe me, take out your heart and reach into its memories. You know hearts reveal truths the mind conceals or distorts," Archie instructed. "And many of your mother's heart memories are now yours. Her final gift to you."

"You're wrong but if you insist..." Rumple yanked his heart out of his chest and waved his hand over it, projecting the memories within it on the television screen. He could see Lilliana Strogoff holding an infant in her but as she pressed Aramon's Talisman against the baby's chest, he could feel it as if it were happening to him.

"Rumplestiltskin," he heard her say softly and he felt the pain of intense magical drain as the ruby stone removed powers from him.

Then she created a basket, a blanket and a scroll and walked to a small cottage, kneeling down to place the basket on the doorstep.

"Goodbye my Rumple, my precious one. I am hoping one day we will meet again and you will..."
forgive me but I fear it may be too late for me." The last thing he felt was a kiss on his cheek before she vanished. He was then given another vision of his mother dying as her sister crushed her heart into dust.

"S...She didn't abandon me..." he sobbed. "S...She died protecting me! Protecting me from the same damned darkness I cursed myself to!" he cried. "I failed you, Mama..."

"No you didn't, Rumplestiltskin!" Belle said firmly as she turned his head so that his eyes met hers. "Everything happens for a reason, isn't that what you always say? Maybe it was always your destiny to become the Dark One because it was also your destiny to break its evil curse and you will!" she said firmly.

"My aunt couldn't break it," he reminded her.

"You have one advantage Zorinda didn't. Belle," Archie said. "She is one of your anchors to your humanity. You won't be able defeat Alemedia until you find the other two."

"My son Bae is one of them."

"The other is your grandson. He is the last of your bloodline, the East Guardian, and he must be protected at all costs."

"Oh Rumple, how wonderful! You have a grandson!" Belle cried.

"That I'll probably never see along with his father."

"Oh, you've seen him Rumple. He's been here the whole time. He's the reason why I left the OZ. I was sent here to protect him until his Guardian was ready to do so herself and unlock his magic." Archie scowled. "And getting her ready is harder than I thought."

"I'm assuming Emma is the East Guardian's bonded?"

"No. Regina."

"Regina?! Has Lurline lost her mind?" Rumple asked angrily. "I do NOT want my grandson anywhere near that woman!"

"Rumple, he already is. She raised him."

"Are you saying Henry is my grandson?!"

"I am."

"Lurline bound my grandson to the woman he thinks of as a mother? Oh yes, dearie, she HAS lost her mind! My grandson would NEVER think of his mother in a romantic way!" Rumple snorted. "But then again, why am I shocked? My whole bloodline is the result of an incestuous union between an uncle and niece!"

"Regina and Henry's bond is different, Rumple. It's the bond of a parent to a child, the strongest bond there can be. And we can't deny Regina does love Henry."

"Does Henry know he's my grandson?"

Archie sighed. "He can't be told until you find his father."

"And dinna ye think that will be a bit of a shock to him, dearie?"
"I know but even if it wasn't the will of the Oz, it's better to tell him when he and his father are together. It will give them a chance to bond."

"Henry will think Bae gave him up like I gave Bae up."

"He didn't know about him. And I meant what I said to you a while back. You need to tell Bae what really happened that night at the portal."

"Then Emma needs to make that clear that Bae didn't know about him. Quickly! And that is how she is going to repay the debt she owes me. SHE will be the one to tell my son about Henry and she'd better damn well do it right! AFTER she helps me find him!"

"Archie, what did you mean when you said there were worse dangers than Rumple's curse coming?"


"The first eclipse is in twenty-eight days and my wife needs to be freed from Bastinda. Then...

"Then I must break mine."

Do you know now what must be done, what is the will of the OZ, Rumplestiltskin Strogoff? he heard Archie ask in his mind.

Belle cannot be told. I want your word as a Guardian and a Talon that she will not be told.

I give you my word.

"Rumple, what is Aramon's prophecy?"

"One so horrible that the mere mention of it makes those who know of it quake in fear, Belle. If the eight Guardians of the Balance are not united in fifty-eight days, our world will be destroyed and we will be trapped her forever," he replied. "And we will see it happening, feel the fears of those left behind in the destruction as the price of our survival. I do hope the Ozopovs have gained some common sense and hidden Lurline's emerald where no one can find it!"

"They have but Bastinda is attempting to enact the prophecy herself during the first eclipse. She's searching for Dellia's emerald and has a machine powered by mortanium," Archie spoke up.

"She intends to lock Nero and Neru behind the moon and open the gates of Ephesis. What idiot designed a device powered by the very element that can conduct magical energy?"

"Ahhh...the queen's advisor, Ambrose Benu. Bastinda removed his brain and connected it to it. He will need a Viewer to connect him back to it to shut it down."

Belle gasped. "They removed a man's brain?"

"Yes." Rumple groaned. "Freeing Azkadellia will not be easy Archie but it is the will of the OZ that you and Dorothia must be the ones to do it. But...if we cross the town line..."

"The barrier doesn't affect us Rumple."

"It doesn't? Are you certain of that?"

"Find out for yourself."
"All right but if you're wrong I am turning you back into a cricket!"

"I can do that myself anytime I want to," Archie retorted.

Rumple took Belle's hand in his and the couple teleported out, followed by Archie. Rumple and Belle stood a few inches away from the orange line on the road, their clasped hands glowing as they walked toward the line. They stepped over slowly, feeling the sparks of dark magic as they crossed and paused on the other side. Rumple glanced down at their joined hands and saw that they were still glowing.

"Belle?" he asked, his lips trembling.

"Rumple!" she cried and released his hand, throwing her arms around him. "Archie is right! We can cross! We can cross! And now we can find Bae! Thank you Archie! Thank you!"

"Don't thank me. Thank the person who created the curse. The Guardian in you was awake long enough that you made anyone affiliated with the Houses of Strogoff and Ozopov immune to the barrier once your curse was broken, Rumple."

The barrier will be removed once I banish the Dark One.

Yes.

They stepped back over the line.

"Rumple, there's more I need to tell you..."

"Then we'd best get back to the house but Belle needs to eat first." Rumple gestured and sent the trio back to the Victorian. He returned to the kitchen to finish making the hamburgers and french fries. As he was forming the ground beef into patties Archie walked into the kitchen and cast a silencing spell. "You need to ease up on the magic dearie. You'll need it when you go to Oz because sending Bastinda back to Ephesis is going to drain you hard."

"I know. But you need to know what else I found out. Your father is after Henry."

Rumple slammed his fist down on the counter. "Why? Who told you this?"

"It's a long story."

"Then tell it! What does that bastard want with my grandson?"

"Henry has the Heart of the Truest Believer."

"That's what HE calls it but what my father is really after is the powers of an Ozian demigod so that he can live longer," Rumple sneered. "He tried to take Bae from me first but Bae doesn't have magic as far as I know. How did you find this out?"

Archie told him about the murders his brother David had been trying to solve in San Francisco and their follow up journey to Maryland to talk with Archie's counterpart from a parallel Enchanted Forest known as the 'Wish Realm'.

"So you're saying your counterpart found entrances to four other versions of Storybrooke? Where we've all led different lives with different choices? And this 'Home Office' is a group that wants to find and kill us?"

"Yes."
"And they're getting their information from my father because he is monitoring the other worlds?"

"Yes."

Rumple poured olive oil into a pan and turned on one of the burners and brought out a skillet to cook the hamburgers. "If I know Regina, she's warded this town so that no outsiders can get in and we can't get out. At least I hope she was smart enough to do that. But, my father is no fool either. He will find a loophole. He always does."

"I'm sorry I had to dump all of this on you at once. It's a lot to take in."

"It was as difficult for you I'm certain."

"You knew this was my fate, didn't you?"

"I don't have the Eye of Aramon yet but I have enough of his Sight that it gave me a few clues. Didn't you find it odd that I had you steal dragon's blood all those years ago? You used it on Dorothia and Wyatt Cain, didn't you? It was the only way to try to break the spell Wyatt cast severing their bond when Bastinda killed her. Odd that I didn't see that Emma would be the one to carry on my bloodline."

"You weren't meant to. Rumple, there won't be much time after the eclipse before..."

"I know."

"Belle needs to be prepared."

"I will start teaching her magic but I want you to look after her while I'm in Neverland."

"I will."

The burgers and fries done, Rumple put everything on his silver serving cart and wheeled it into the dining room where Belle was already sitting, sipping tea from her chipped cup.

"I'll let you finish your lunch," Archie said.

"Oh, won't you stay?"

"I can't Belle. I have some things I need to do but we can have lunch again some other time."

"Next time I expect to see your wife with you," she said with a smile.

"I'll do my best." He teleported out.

Belle took one of the burgers off the plate and put it on a kaiser roll along with cheese, ketchup and pickles. Rumple's eyes nearly bulged out of his sockets at the amount of pickles she'd managed to fit in the bun.

"How on Earth are you gonna eat that without it falling apart, dearie?"

"I'll manage...mmmm this is delicious! No grease!"

"I cook my hamburgers in water."

"Do I taste beef ramen noodle seasoning?"
"That goes in once they start cooking. Gives them a little extra flavor. I take it ramen noodles were part of your diet at the hospital."

"It's all they gave me when Regina ordered it. I didn't mind what I ate as long as I was given something."

"Did she ever have you starved?"

"No, thank the gods. But I am not going to be able to eat all this Rumplestiltskin so you'd better help me!"

"I dinna want to get gallstones, dearie!" he laughed.

"Oh you're immortal! You won't."

After they finished their lunch Belle helped him clean up the kitchen. Belle noticed that her lover was more quiet than usual and she suspected it had something to do with everything he'd been told in the last few hours. Knowing that his mother had given her life to protect him offered him some comfort but she feared there was other news he'd been given that he'd deemed too painful for her to hear. She didn't expect him to share all his secrets with her but she hoped there would come a time when he would no longer need to keep them. She loved all of him, including the beast and would do everything in her power to show him.

I am the Heart of the West Guardian. I will love him and protect him until my last breath, not because the OZ wills me to, I will do so because I choose to. No one decides my fate but me.
Topeka, Kansas

Seven days prior to the Double Eclipse

Twenty-three days prior to the Final Eclipse

There was nothing DG enjoyed more than hopping on her bike and taking a cruise down the highway with nothing more than the wind on her face and music playing from the stereo she'd paid nearly a fortune to have installed. When she was on the road the only worry she had was Officer Gulch catching her speeding and trying to give her another ticket. She'd gotten good at avoiding his radar over the past few months and knew it annoyed the hell out of him. She knew he was one of the people in the town who thought she belonged in the nuthouse and was just waiting for an opportunity to put her there. She also knew her parents were always afraid she was going to have a relapse any day yet she stayed strong.

She hadn't dared to return to the woods since the search party found her there half mad two years earlier but her therapist suggested that she try to go back one day to face the demons she left there and slam the door on them. Several times she thought she was ready but something always held her back.

She kept herself busy with her night classes at beauty school and her day job as a waitress at the Hilltop Cafe. It wasn't easy work. Sometimes she got orders wrong and dropped things but overall the customers seemed to like her and her co-workers weren't difficult to get along with as long as she did her job right.

Then the dreams began. In the first set she was walking through a cold, dark cave and she could hear someone screaming and another voice pleading with her to turn back yet something led her on. She couldn't see what it was but whatever it was always made her run from the cave in fear.

The second set was even more strange. She was standing on the porch of a small cottage in the woods looking up at the night sky. She could feel another presence with her and although she couldn't see it, it comforted her. It seemed that she always had both dreams at night. The cave dream would occur first, the one about the forest cottage immediately after it.

She was hesitant to tell her parents about the dreams for fear that they'd think she had a relapse and make her go into the hospital for an evaluation. She couldn't stand going to the hospital any more than she could the sessions with the psychiatrist or taking her medications. It wasn't that Dr. Abberline was a bad person, she wasn't but Dr. Abberline never allowed her to hold anything back during their sessions.

She had a more logical explanation for DG's behavior after prom night than the doctors in the hospital did. They'd simply labeled her a schizophrenic and put her on antipsychotics that seemed to be making her worse until her parents had enough of it and sought a second opinion. The antipsychotics were the first to go and Dr. Abberline started to treat her condition for what it actually was; post traumatic stress disorder.

"I'm having dreams again," DG confessed to the doctor during their morning session.

Lisa Abberline looked up from the legal pad she was writing on. "Similar to the ones you had
while you were in the woods or different?"

"I don't remember much of the ones I had out there but the cottage in the woods seems familiar. When I'm there I feel at ease."

"Because it always seems to be your safe haven when you're under emotional distress," Lisa explained.

"Everyone who found me says I created someone who was there with me but I can't remember his name or picture what he looks like. All I see is a sleeping dragon with two crossed swords in front of him."

"The dragon image was most likely spawned from your fascination with the Dark Hunter books, particularly Dragonswan."

"At least when you're not trying to pick apart my head we get to talk about them." DG joked. Lisa laughed.

"And you make fun of me because my favorite one is Valerius. I'll be his Tabitha any day."

"I can't picture you running around in Goth clothes and carrying a stake. And Valerius has a major stick up his ass."

"No, just misunderstood. The cave nightmare, the one you tend to have first, do you see anything or do you just hear the screams?"

"Just the screams but they're not mine. Then I hear another voice telling me we need to leave but I don't listen. I've been scared of caves for as long as I can remember but I don't think I've ever been in one."

"What about confined places?"

"Yes. That's why my bedroom is in the attic. The other rooms were too small for me."

"I'd like you to start keeping a journal of these dreams. Write down as much detail as you can remember. The best time to do it is when you wake up."

"Do you think they might be memories of what happened while I was missing coming back?"

"It's possible, or they may be memories of something that happened in your childhood that you've forgotten. Other than the dreams, how is everything else going?"

"I'm enjoying beauty school. I'll work in a shop until I have enough money saved up to start my own. I've also been learning how to do tattoos so that I can do both in my shop."

"Ambitious but a clever outlet for your creativity," Lisa remarked. The intercom buzzed. "Yes?"

"Dr. Abberline, your next patient is here."

"All right. We'll continue this discussion next week, okay, DG?"

"Thanks Dr. Abberline." she said as she hurried out of the office.

"...Ten minutes late again!" Carter growled as DG walked into the Hilltop Cafe's kitchen while he was putting orders up on the counter.
"My appointment ran late," DG explained. "I told Molly I can't come in until ten on Monday mornings. She must've forgotten."

"Yeah well now that you're here, you mind getting these out before they get cold!" he snapped. DG sighed and grabbed the plates and went out to the dining area to serve the customers. The breakfast crowd was larger than usual and she was running around so much that her feet were throbbing with pain by the time her break came. Yet it was all worth it when her paycheck was deposited in her bank account every two weeks.

She had only three hours before she had to be at her beauty school class. That was just enough time to take a shower, change and eat dinner and then she was back on her bike again riding off to her class. After class she always went to the gym.

Her parents questioned her often about why she incorporated so many activities into her day. The job and the schooling she had answer for...they needed the money and she wanted to learn useful skills. The vigorous workout regimen...that she didn't have an easy answer for. When she told them she was having dreams, they got that look in their eyes.

In the back of her mind she had a nagging fear that something or someone was coming for her and she wanted to be better prepared for it this time. Tanisha, one of her workout buddies had informed her that a new self defense class was starting up in a week. DG, although she already had a full schedule every day signed up for the classes and planned on taking shooting lessons sometime in the future. She was never going to be powerless again if she could help it and whatever it was that was coming for her, it wouldn't take her down without a fight.

"I'm gonna start calling you Beatrix Kiddo," Tanisha joked as they were walking into the gym for their workout.

"I don't have a sword and I don't know martial arts...not yet anyway." DG said.

"You're not serious!" Tanisha cried. "Are you seriously going to have someone teach you how to use a sword?"

"I am."

"Why? When will you ever get the chance to use one?"

"I don't know but I want to learn how if I ever need to use one. Plus shooting lessons."

"Honey..."

"What? Do you think I'm taking my need to learn how to defend myself to extremes?" DG demanded angrily. "You have no idea how it feels to have someone attack you and feel like you haven't done enough to stop them. That prick is walking free. Who says he won't try to come after me again...or any other woman for that matter?"

"I just...I'm just worried."

DG sighed. "Everyone is worried about me but I'm fine now," she insisted. She leaned over the weight bench and started adding weights to it.

"Wow! You had another tattoo done! Did you draw that one too?" Tanisha said as she pointed at the sleeping black dragon tattoo on her friend's right shoulder blade. The other one, of two crossed Katana swords was on her upper right arm.
"Yeah. If it was really like the drawing, the swords would be right underneath the dragon so I made a compromise and put the swords on my arm."

"You should work in Mitch's tattoo shop instead of a beauty salon. You'd make more money."

"I want to try both for a while." DG said and lay back, lifting the heavy bar. Tanisha watched her, still worried that her friend was doing too much and would eventually break down again.

That night the dream came again. She was walking through the cave but this time she could hear a woman singing softly and strange images appeared before her...two dolls spinning on their own in the air...a bear growling...the ropes of a swing.

"Two little princesses dancing in a row
Spinning fast and free on their little toes
Where the light will take you there's only one way to know..."

Suddenly a woman with the brightest lavender eyes she'd ever seen appeared before her. "A storm is coming!" she cried.

DG's eyes snapped open. She glanced over at the clock. She was supposed to be at work already.

Shit! Carter was already pissed at me for being late yesterday. I keep this up I can kiss that job goodbye.

She jumped out of bed and ran downstairs to the bathroom to get dressed. She heard her mother calling from downstairs, asking if she was awake.

"I overslept!" she called as she emerged from the bathroom.

"You better hurry up baby girl or you'll get fired," Hank warned.

"See you tonight!" she called and got on her bike. As she raced down the road at twenty miles over the speed limit she could hear the familiar siren of Officer Gulch's squad car as he started following her.

Can't catch me... she taunted as she pulled into the rear entrance of the Hilltop while Gulch went up the road.

Better luck next time.

"Carter's looking for you. He's mad," one of the bussers said as she was taking off her helmet.

"He's not the only one," she said over her shoulder. She had just gotten changed into her uniform and had her hair tied in bands when she heard Carter shouting for her. "Sorry Carter," she mumbled.

"Bad enough Pheobe's gotta go take care of that potato head son of hers during the lunch rush. Now we have you perfecting the art of being late!" Carter complained.

"Carter, guy on four wants a slice of french apple and a chunk of cheddar," Erika informed him.

"It won't happen again," DG promised.

"A lot of people would fight for a job like this. Your future's in the here and now, kid. Don't throw
And there it is again...a not so vague way of referencing my breakdown two damned years ago!

"Yeah right, I've seen the lines stretching across the prairie for this stepping stone," Erika said sarcastically. "The fellow who wanted pie asked for you special DG. Table four."

"You just gonna stand there? Go, go go!" Carter ordered.

The pie in her hand, DG approached the table where her nemesis waited. She put on her best smile. Couldn't be rude to the customer although she wanted to dump the pie right in his lap.

"This isn't my day..."

"Sure isn't," Elmer affirmed, tearing a filled out speeding ticket from his pad and handing it to her.

"Thank you," she said, still smiling until she read the paper. She was being asked to appear before the judge to question whether she was deemed fit to operate a vehicle.

You dirty little...a traffic summons? Are you serious? You actually want me to go to court!

"It's for your own good," he told her.

Goddammit, I thought I was finally getting away from all this shit! My best friend thinks I'm going to be a sword wielding, gun toting maniac. Officer Gulch thinks I'm gonna start mowing people down with my bike and my parents are waiting for me to start babbling and trying to throw myself out windows! I need to get the FUCK out of here! It's this town that's going to drive me crazy...not me trying to drive me crazy!

When she got home her father was outside working on the windmill finding it odd that he, who actually was a mechanic had such a difficult time with some of the machinery around the farm yet she usually had it fixed in no time. It was the same this time. While they worked he asked her about her dream. She handed him the picture she drew of the woman.

"She said a storm is coming."

"What storm?" Hank asked, now concerned.

"I don't know. I'll ask for clarification next time."

Emily was waiting for her on the porch. She handed her the citation.

"Elmer Gulch is a meance to the community." DG muttered.

"Menace or no, he's an officer of the law. You're gonna have to face the judge. Officer Gulch wants you in jail."

"He doesn't want me in jail. He wouldn't have anybody to chase then," DG laughed as she played with one of the flowers in the pot on the porch table.

"This is not a joke. We'll be lucky if they don't just impound your bike."

"They can't impound my bike if I take off on it."

"I was wondering if you were planning a trip," Emily said as she tossed some travel brochures of Paris, Australia and Florida on the table.
"You went through my stuff!" DG cried, frustrated that she hadn't hidden the evidence in a better place.

"She's been worried. We both have. You've been acting strange...distant." Hank spoke up.

Like I'm going crazy again...

"If you spend your every spare minute drawing your pictures, dreaming of another life, you're gonna wind up not living the one you got." Emily reminded her.

"But this isn't my life. This town, that job taking other people's orders? That's just passing time. There has to be more to life than this."

"And you really think you'll find better out there?"

"Look, I love you guys but I just don't feel at home here. I don't think I ever have," DG sobbed as she ran into the house. Emily went into the kitchen to check on the meatloaf in the oven.

"Our job in this world has been to be the best parents we can be!" she cried.

"And it's one we done proper. But she's a young woman now." Hank held up the sketchbook. "DG's having the dream."

Emily sat down at the table. "The double eclipse is coming then." She looked up at her husband. "Hank...what if...what happened to her two years ago wasn't hallucinations like the doctors say?"

"You think someone from the OZ tried to contact her?"

"It wasn't the queen. She said it was a man but I can't remember his name and we burned everything she drew and wrote about what happened then."

"This still means we have to get her ready to go back."

"I...I'm afraid of how she's going to take it. We've spent all this time convincing her there's no other world out there but this one and if she came in contact with our world, we've made her think it was all in her mind."

"She's getting stronger physically. She may need it. The Mystic Man can help her with her magic and memories and the doctor has been helping her."

"She may not have needed to see her in the first place."

"Yes she did. What that boy did to her was horrible. I'll go talk to her."

DG sat on her bed feeling her world caving in around her. No matter how hard she tried she couldn't get anyone to understand how she was truly feeling. She felt like she was trapped and the only way she could be free was to make her escape.

Oz (The Outer Zone)

Seven days prior to the Double Eclipse

Twenty-three days prior to the Final Eclipse

"General my search teams have returned from the northern guilds empty-handed." Zero informed General Lannot when he returned to the Tower from his own excursions to the southern guilds with
the same results.

"She will be less than happy."

"She always is." Zero muttered.

"You made me a promise." Bastinda said angrily.

"Unfortunately, there were complications with the resistance spies in the north. A slight delay, sorceress. That's all."

"The emerald, Lannot. Where's my emerald?"

"We will double our efforts, close the vice even tighter. All I need is a little more time."

"There is no more time. In seven days, the double eclipse will darken our skies. If I don't have the emerald in my hand by then, everything I have worked so hard for all of this will be lost."

"We will have it? I give you my word."

Commander Ozopov would have done a much better job, Bastinda seethed. She still visited his grave faithfully, wishing she'd been allowed to take him as her lover but her mother would not allow her such a luxury, reminding her of her own doomed love affair with Aramon.

Dorothia is awakening... get rid of her! she heard her mother's voice command.

"Something wrong, sorceress?" Zero inquired.

"I need to see Lylo."

"I'll have the alchemist bring him right away."

The poor, exhausted viewer was dragged into Bastinda's office where one of her viewing tanks was installed, Lylo cringed when he felt the helmet being placed onto his head, the liquid sedative from the tank's hoses flowing into his veins, forcing him to reveal all he saw against his will.

"Peer into the future. Tell me if there's anything that will hinder my plans."

"It hurts Lylo to look." he cried.

"It will hurt more if you don't." the alchemist threatened, holding up the electric prod.

"Those who resist you will continue to be conquered."

"The emerald, Lylo, will I find it in time? Where is it?"

"Lylo knows not, but before the eclipse, in your hand, it will be. It will be!"

"Do you see anything that will stand in my way?"

"Lylo see nothing, but but what? Lylo feels a presence. A glimmer of light in the darkness. Light from the other side."

"The other side? General Lannot awaken a travel storm. Take a small company of men, and just slip through to the other side. Find this light and extinguish it! Then bring me the body!"

At last the bitch that had been her undoing centuries earlier would be back in the grave where she
belonged. And there would be no one to save her this time.

Topeka, Kansas

Seven days prior to the Double Eclipse

Find my prison and release me...

Ever since DG retreated to the sanctuary of her room, that haunting male voice was the only sound that disturbed her comforting silence. She was used to hearing strange things in her dreams but not when she was awake and it was starting to make her question her sanity.

She picked up her sketchbook and began to draw a picture of her sleeping dragon tattoo with the two crossed Katana swords lying in the grass in front of him. Off in the distance she drew the cottage she'd seen in her dreams only it was in a state of neglect. The grass was overgrown, part of the roof was rotting away and the porch was full of holes.

Hearing footsteps, she slammed the sketchbook shut and concealed it under her bed as Hank came up the stairs. She always found it easier to talk to him than her mother and today was no different, however this time his little stories and rhymes offered her little comfort but there was one thing he did say that made sense.

"No matter where we find ourselves, home is where your heart is."

But where is my heart? Where is my home? I feel like part of my heart is missing and I'm going to have to spend the rest of my life trying to find it.

"I can't stay here forever."

"There's a place and a time when we learn where we're supposed to be and you're almost there." Hank hesitated for a moment. "And...don't forget all of life's answers..."

"Can be found along the old road. I remember." DG finished. She'd heard this many times along with the daughter of light story, not understanding what either of them meant. The only old roads she'd ever seen were the ones she sped down on her motorcycle and they were leading her nowhere and the only icy seas she'd ever seen were the ones on television.

Once her father was out of sight, she took out her sketchbook again and continued work on her dragon drawing. She felt her eyelids getting heavy and her pencil slipped out of her hand, the sketchbook falling to the floor.

She was back in her forest sanctuary only now it changed and it was exactly as she'd drawn it, a paradise in ruins. She walked up the rickety steps and sat down on the porch.

Find my prison and release me...

Who are you and why do I keep hearing you in my head?

The cottage vanished and she was once again seeing images of the dark cave and the lavender eyed woman warning her that a storm was coming. She awoke to the sounds of violent storm winds blowing. When she glanced out her bedroom she could see a large twister making its way toward the house. When she ran downstairs she was horrified to see a group of men in leather coats attacking her parents.

"No DG, go back!" her father yelled as one of the men grabbed her. She bit down on his arm,
forcing him to release her while her parents broke away from their own captors. They made their way up to DG's room, her father limping from a bullet wound to his leg.

"Dad, who were those guys?"

"Longcoats."

"This wasn't the way it was planned," Emily said.

"I know but it's our only chance. We have to take her there now!"

"Take me where?"

"There's no time to explain DG," Emily cried as they climbed out to the roof. The twister was now directly in front of the house. DG was terrified.

"Dad, what are you doing?"

"Trust me!" he insisted.

"You have to jump!" Emily cried.

Jump into a twister? Is she crazy? I'll be ripped apart!

"No!" DG yelled over the howling wind.

"You have to jump!" her father insisted.

"No!"

"We need to go DG. The longcoats are after you."

"What? Why?"

I've had the men in white coats after me before but who the hell are these Longcoats?

"Because it's time," Emily said.

"Time for what?"

Her parents started to push her toward the twister. "What...what are you doing?"

"You have to trust us!" Hank pushed her into the funnel cloud. DG screamed in horror and closed her eyes, not wanting to watch as the storm ripped her apart. A few minutes later she fainted.

Oz (The Outer Zone)

General Lannot knew he was living on borrowed time when he returned to the Tower empty handed once again. They paused outside the witch's throne room, overhearing her having another conversation with their Dark Mistress.

"Perhaps we should return."

"I need. She's ready for you," her advisor Vy-Sor informed them. Sorceress."

"Report!"
"The source of the light was a girl of 20 annuals."

"A girl? Bring her to me."

"Unfortunately, there were problems."

More excuses. She'd grown tired of them. It was time to change leadership. Zero was no Commander Ozopov but he would do.

"Last time complications, this time problems?"

"She disappeared into the storm along with her parents."

"Your storm? Are you saying they could be here? Othersiders in the Outer Zone?"

"I am sorry, Sorceress."

"You did your best," Bastinda said sweetly as she approached him then held out her hand. The others watched in horror as their commanding officer's face turned blue and a mist flowed out of his mouth and into hers, her body glowing while she absorbed his life force.

"Zero you've just been promoted," she said breathlessly.

"If this girl is in the OZ, find her."

"Right away Sorceress."

His men were chuckling while they followed him down the hall.

"Can think of a better way to give her an orgasm than sucking the life outta somebody. Probably hasn't gotten laid in ten years and I doubt the Commander was THAT good in bed."

"You wanna join Lannot?" Zero snapped.

"No."

"Then shut up! We have a girl to find."

Ambrose was tied to the ceiling of a wooden cage in a munchkin village in the Eastern Guild. He'd been captured by the suspicious munchkins who thought he was one of Azkadellia's spies. He'd tried to tell them that he escaped the Tower but they didn't believe him. He expected them to flay him alive, instead they kept him hanging around, literally since his cage was hanging in the air.

"Ankle biting assholes," he grumbled. Once he was untied he was going to teach those little paint faced cretins a thing or two. His confinement would've been more pleasant if he had someone to talk to but he hadn't been given a cellmate in the tower either. He saw a group of munchkins returning to the camp with another prisoner trapped in a net only this one was a female dressed in strange clothes. They put her in his cage. He thought about saying hello but when he saw the munchkins on the bridge he decided to keep quiet for now. Maybe the girl would show him a little sympathy and get him down.

"Will Azkadellia attack from the east?"

"Who?"

This girl doesn't know who Azkadellia is? What rock did she crawl out from under?
"The sorceress Azkadellia! The one for whom you spy. From which direction will her men come? Will they walk or will they fly?" Blue hat interrogated.

"Okay, how many times do I have to tell you guys that nothing you've said has made any sense to me?"

"Perhaps she's just a girl," Red Hat said.

"Yes! I am. I'm just a girl!"

And I'm just a guy on the run after having my brains ripped out, Doll. Look where that got me. Have fun trying to convince these guys of anything.

"Azkadellia has raided almost all villages searching for the stone. Are we next on her list?" Red Hat demanded.

"I don't know about any list but if this is how you treat strangers I'm not surprised you have enemies."

Glitch wanted to laugh until he heard that the girl's parents were on the brick route headed for Central City. Not one to miss an opportunity he figured if he made friends with the girl she'd get him out of there. There wasn't much time. The munchkins were getting the flayer ready.

She looked up and saw him tied to the top of the cage. "What are you doing...?"

"Up here? The little...ankle biters thought it would be funny to keep me hanging around. Loosen that rope and I might have the last laugh."

She hesitated.

"C'mon Doll! If Mom and Pop really are on the route to Central City then you are falling further and further behind."

"You know the way?"

"Sure."

Liar. You can't even remember what you did two minutes ago let alone find the brick route.

"It's kind of hard to give directions like this. Unless you have a better offer."

She reached up and untied the rope.

"What the hell?" she asked as she stared at him.

"Hey! You aren't so hot on first glance either honey!" Glitch snapped. "What? Is...is there a problem?"

The girl seemed flustered. "Oh umm..."

"What?"

She was grinning. "Your ahh..." she pointed to her head and whispered. "Your zipper's undone."

"Oh, didn't mean to offend. Gotta be careful not to lose your marbles but since the Sorceress made her medicoats take mine well you flick the abacus."
"Why would they remove your brain?"

"Because of what I know, or used to know whatever it was. Name's Glitch on account of sometimes my synapses don't fire right. Sometimes my synapses don't fire right."

"You just said that."

"Did I?" He laughed. "There you go, glitching again."

"Here I was thinking this nightmare can't get any weirder."

"This isn't a nightmare. This is the OZ. The Outer Zone. It used to be a piece of heaven too until Azkadellia got her claws into it."

"Azkadellia, the Sorceress of Darkness, village raider, brain thief!" the girl exclaimed. Murdering, heartless bitch. You forgot those ones.

"Don't think she's a joke because she's not. She had my brain torn right out of my head and wouldn't have hesitated to rip my heart out along with it."

"Are you okay?" the girl asked softly.

"I'll be all right, Doll." he assured her.

"DG. Name's DG."

"Nice to meet you DG," Glitch said and held out his hand for her to shake.

"Longcoats!" he heard a munchkin call out as a group of soldiers on horseback rode into the village. He looked down. Gregory Zero rode in at the lead.

"What are you doing?" Glitch asked worriedly. The wooden cage shook as DG hung on to the bottom of it and started swinging it toward the bridge. It was a risky move but one that managed to get them both to safety.

The truth that he had absolutely no damned idea where he was going became evident when DG pointed out that they'd managed to walk around in a complete circle for hours. Glitch was introducing himself to her again when she hissed at him to be quiet.

Find my prison and release me...

The words were followed by a series of shouts and cries of pain. In his own head, Glitch heard a different voice.

Seek out the two that must become one

This is your task and you must not fail...

They ran toward the source of the noise, each wondering what was to be found there.
Heart's Got Nothing To Do With It

Chapter by cjmoliere

Oz (The Outer Zone)

Seven days prior to the Double Eclipse

Twenty-three days prior to the Final Eclipse

As DG poked her head around the tree she could see a small cottage in the distance. A man was on his knees with two Longcoats holding his arms stretched out. Another approached him with a silk ribbon around his fingers and punched him in his already bloodied face. Another held a woman who was screaming.

"Those guys are everywhere!" she cried, horrified for the couple who obviously didn't deserve the hell they were going through.

"Yeah, that's life in the OZ these days. Tough and tougher," Glitch muttered.

The man being restrained by the Longcoats gave a howl of animalistic rage as a young boy was dragged out of the house and charged the leader and the woman continued to beg for her man to be left alone. The leader backhanded the child, knocking him to the ground.

"Oh!" Glitch cried. "But I can tell you that even with half a brain that we gotta get out of here!"

This is going to stop now,

DG thought as she picked up a long stick and ran down the hill. She didn't care if there were more of them than her but dammit, the poor guy had suffered enough! It was time to put all the working out she'd done to the test.

"Oh cripes!" Glitch cried. Was she insane? She was grossly outnumbered. "DG this isn't your fight!"

The man had managed to free one of his arms and punched the leader but was quickly restrained again.

"Leave him alone!" she screamed and swung the stick. The scene vanished with only an old, run down cottage remaining. "What just happened?"

Glitch could see a small metal device attached to a stump and switched it off.

"What is it?" DG asked.

"A TDESPHTL," he answered. "A transdimensional energy stored projected holographic time loop. Nifty little thing. Hey...I think I invented it." he said with a smile as a memory came back to him.

"So it was all fake."

"No, it happened. Sometime or another," Glitch said sadly.

"Why would they have it playing over and over again if there was no one here to watch it?"
"Well, I think it..." He paused. DG glanced over by the back porch and saw what looked like an old fashioned diving suit. She ran over to it and knocked softly. They heard three faint taps in response.

"There's someone in there!" DG gasped.

"Or something..." Glitch muttered timidly. He stepped up to the metal suit and gazed into the window, a grey face with blue eyes staring back at him. "Ooh!" he cried and backed away.

Find my prison and release me...

She had no idea where those words had come from or who kept speaking them but she understood now what she needed to do. DG spotted a neglected hammer resting on an anvil and returned to the iron maiden as she now knew it was and started pounding the pins out of the latches. Glitch waved at the man inside assuring him that he would be free shortly. She opened the door and a blast of cold and a horrid smell seeped out. She and Glitch jumped back.

The man inside was as pale as death with long, dirty hair, and wearing a white shirt and pants coated with dirt. As he took his first step out he fell to the ground. Glitch held DG protectively while her heart went out the the man.

"Are you okay?" she asked worriedly.

Stupid question Deege, she scolded herself.

This guy's been trapped in there for God knows how long. Do you really think he's okay?

"W...Where are they?" he asked hoarsely.

"I...I don't know," she answered, wishing that she did. This poor man had been forced to watch over and over again while he and his family were being beaten by the Longcoats.

The man rose to his full height and started toward her. A image of a black dragon breathing fire popped into her mind. Glitch pulled her behind him."What do you mean you don't know? Who are you! Are you one of them?" he demanded.

"No, no! We just found you here but we saw what happened through that." DG pointed at the time loop. The man walked over to it and stared at it for a few minutes, his body shaking. He grasped it in his hands and yanked it out of the pole, tossing it onto the ground.

"I'm gonna kill him," he growled. He started toward the house.

"Sir..." DG began.

"The name's Cain. Wyatt Cain," he muttered as he slammed the door behind him.

"Grouchy isn't he?" Glitch asked.

"You would be too if you were locked inside that thing," DG reminded him. She ran up to the porch and knocked softly on the door.

"Oh...right. Sorry, glitching again." Glitch muttered

"What do you want now?" she heard the man ask from the other side.

"Ummm...I was just seeing if you were okay."
"I'm fine," she heard him say faintly.

"Is there anything I can do to help?"

"I want to be alone for a few minutes!" he cried.

"DG, maybe we should just leave him alone," Glitch suggested. "All we seem to be doing is making him angry and I don't know about you but I think he'd rip us apart with his bare hands."

When the dragon's mate calls to him, he will always answer.

"I'm not going anywhere until I'm sure he's okay," DG said firmly as she entered the house wondering why she was hearing these strange voices in her head...again. "Mr. Cain," she called softly, not seeing him in the kitchen. She noticed that the bedroom door was slightly ajar. As if he sensed she was about go in, he pushed the door shut.

Normally her patience would have run its course but something was telling her that she needed to stay. She could hear water splashing.

"Mr. Cain?"

The door opened again Wyatt emerged fully clean wearing a wrinkled blue and white striped shirt, a brown leather vest and tan pants. His long blond hair was still wet. For a moment DG thought he looked like the OZ's version of Sammy Hagar, one of the rock group Van Halen's singers.

"You still here?" he asked her.

"Yes...umm...is there anything you need." Those voices in her head had to stop since she had no idea what they were trying to tell her.

"To get rid of this," he said, indicating his long hair. "And a shave."

"I can cut your hair for you."

"I can do it myself," he said and sliced off a chunk of it with his razor.

"Mr. Cain, you won't be able to cut it right with just a razor. Come on," she said as she took his arm and led him into the kitchen and made him sit down.

"Kid..." he protested.

"Mr. Cain, please just let me do this. It'll look better."

He sighed. "All right."

"I'm going to need some scissors, combs and a brush."

"In the bedroom."

"I'll be right back. Now, don't you move," she ordered and returned to the bedroom to retrieve the items she needed.

He may not want me to help him but I'm going to do it anyhow. He hasn't had any contact with the outside world in years.

He was still sitting in the chair when she returned. She picked up the comb first and started
working on untangling the knots in his hair.

"Ow!" he yelled as her comb caught on a thick knot.

"I have to get the knots out," she said softly.

"Can you do it without trying to rip my scalp off?" he demanded, wincing while she worked the comb through another knot. It was a difficult process but she eventually had the hair straight enough to cut it.

"Need any help DG?" Glitch asked as he walked into the house.

"No, I'm fine." she murmured as she worked. Up until that point she hadn't worked on actual customer yet had an image in her mind of what he would want his hair to look like.

Fine? Wyatt thought. Fine! What the hell is she doing travelling with a convict anyway?

Another tug on his hair interrupted his thoughts.

"Almost done," she said. "There! Now for your shave."

Wyatt reached up and touched the top of his head. He had to admit the kid had done a good job cutting his hair. She was about to pick up the razor when he shook his head and took it from her. "I can do that myself," he said as he stood up and went outside. He held his razor in his hand and walked down to the lake to begin shaving the beard and mustache from his face.

"I didn't know you can do that." Glitch said.

"I was training for it," she explained.

"How is he?"

"Not as snappy but still distant."

"The suit...he's the only person I know of who has survived in it a long time. And the time loop..."

"So he just had to stand there and watch while his family got tortured over and over again?" DG asked Glitch.

"The most imaginative tortures are saved for those who resist Azkadellia," Glitch answered in a monotone as if it had been drilled into him.

"How long were you trapped in there?" DG asked Wyatt as he passed them.

"Since that was a sapling," he said, indicating a tall tree that grew in his yard.

Oh God, that is a long time, she thought as she glanced up at the tree. She heard him expel a long sigh.

"Much obliged for the help," he finally said after a long silence.

"You're welcome Mr. Cain. Umm...I'm DG by the way and this is.." DG said she followed him to the rear of the house. Wyatt kneeled down and started digging in the grass.

"I know...a headcase."
Glitch laughed nervously. "I have a proper name, you know! And when I remember it I will tell you."

Wyatt pulled out a small metal box containing a leather holster with pistol. He slung the holster over his shoulder.

"What's a headcase?" DG inquired.

"It's what the state does to reeducate criminals. They rip out their brains and make them prisoners of their own minds."

DG turned to stare at Glitch. He didn't look like a criminal, or at least she hoped so. Glitch was offended.

Wyatt reached into the box again and pulled out a small toy horse with faded paint and a shining silver badge with a star in its center that looked like an old west Sheriff's star. On it were the words CENTRAL CITY. He tucked the toy horse into his breast pocket and the star badge in his pant pocket. "Ain't that right, convict?" he asked Glitch.

"Hey! Whoa! I ain't no convict and just in case I am it was a bogus charge, a frame job, I'm sure of it!" Glitch exclaimed to him as he disappeared around the corner.

Wyatt reappeared now carrying a grey fedora hat and wearing a long grey duster jacket. "Yeah, well...I'll see you down the road," he said gruffly as he donned his hat.

"Oh...actually a road is what we're looking for," DG said as she ran over to them. "We're looking for the brick route that leads to a place Central City," she and Glitch said in unison. "Do you know of it?" she asked Wyatt.

Wyatt was loading his pistol. "Yeah. It's where Zero was headed after...It's where I'm headed now." he added, tucking the gun back in its holster.

"Great! We'll go with you." DG said excitedly.

"I got business. Besides I don't travel with kids or convicts."

"Um, I'm not a kid and the people who came to your home came to mine and I'm just looking for my parents."

"And I'm looking for my brain," Glitch piped up.

"And maybe we can help each other and..."

Wyatt spun around, his blue eyes blazing with bitterness and anger. "And maybe we can do what? And find what? My wife? My boy? They're gone! Probably just like your folks are." He started walking a few steps and sighed again when he realized she was still following him. "Look, nothing personal kid, but look at ya. First sign of trouble you're just gonna cut and run."

She glared at him. "Nothing personal but when we found you you were in a tin box! You don't know me! C'mon Glitch, we'll find the way ourselves."

The kid had spirit, he had to give her that but she had no idea what she was getting herself into. "The way? The way leads through the Fields of the Papay." If that didn't scare her, nothing would. He knew the Western guild like the back of his hand and it was no place for a kid and headcase to go trapising through on a whim.
"Papay..." Ambrose whispered in fear.

At least the convict is using his brain. What little he has left of it anyway, Wyatt thought.

Glitch shook his head in warning. DG threw up her hands in disgust. "What! I've been tossed into a storm, trussed up by lawn gnomes, chased by madmen on horseback. How bad can Papays be?"

What the hell were lawn gnomes? You asked for this.

"I've seen 'em gnaw people in half inside thirty seconds," Wyatt answered. He rolled his eyes and expelled a frustrated sigh. Neither one of them would make it out there without his help. He could almost hear Adora scolding him to the netherworld and back if he left them to their own devices. "Zipperhead, keep your mouth shut. Kid, you stay behind me," he ordered.

"Why the sudden change of heart?" she asked softly.

"Believe me, heart's got nothing to do with it," he mumbled. DG stared after him as he walked away. What had made him want to go with them then?

He probably feels obligated since you let him out.

Let him. He could grump and grouse the whole way to Central City but she didn't care as long as they found her parents.

"Psst!"

Glitch was motioning for her to follow. She hurried after them. What an odd group they made: a waitress from Kansas, a man with a zipper on his head and half his brain missing and a grouchy extin box resident who looked more like an old west gunslinger. One thing was sure, she'd sure have some interesting stories to tell once she got back home...if she ever got back home.

There was something oddly familiar about the kid but Wyatt couldn't place it...even if he wanted to. She didn't dress like anyone from the OZ and would have known to avoid the Zipperhead if she was.

Now if I can just avoid her...

He could feel her trying to reach out to him but he couldn't let her in. He couldn't let anyone in anymore. Everyone he ever cared about was taken away from him and died a violent death. No, as soon as they got to Central City he was getting the hell away from her and not looking back!

As they were walking through the field Wyatt suddenly stopped and kneeled down tracing a patch of dirt with a stick, a memory coming back to him.

You have now accquired the dragon's tracking skills. Your eyes will see beyond what is visible, hear beyond silence and smell from a distance. Look and tell me what occured here.

He and the Mystic Man were standing in a field, Wyatt kneeling on the ground, his hands touching a spot of dirt.

"You came through here about two hours ago...but started dragging your left leg when your gout kicked in."

"Very good. What else?"

He caught the faint scent of jasmine perfume and something else that made him scowl at his tutor.
"You and Marie were heading southeast to The Raven's Nest. What did I tell you about using booze as a painkiller?"

"I only had a small nip."

"More than one and your chewing on mint leaves isn't hiding it from me. When we get back to the manor I'm going to tear your room apart until I find all the bottles you've been hiding..."

Wyatt smiled as the memory once again helped him connect with his inner dragon for the first time in years. "Footprints. Only a few hours old." He caught the faint scent of drying blood. "One of them's hurt. Right leg's dragging."

DG was astounded. She hadn't seen a damned thing yet he was able to pick up all that just by looking at a patch of dirt. "That's my dad! One of those guys shot him," she exclaimed.

"Hey, kiddo!" Wyatt called as he leapt to his feet and tossed the stick away. "A little heads up before you lose yours: runners hate water. Probably why they smell so bad." He looked over at Glitch too. "So keep your noses peeled. When it's time to run, you'll know."

"My sinuses are flaring..." Glitch whispered in fear.

Although Wyatt couldn't see any runners in sight he still kept his hand on his holster, ready to fire. DG spotted something blue and slimy on a nearby tree. "What is that?"

"What's what...ahh don't touch that! Its a predigestive enzyme Papay runners use to tenderize their meat. C'mon, let's go."

DG could see what looked like a gigantic cocoon with an animal trapped inside on one of the other trees. She and Glitch walked over to it. Wyatt was frustrated. The Fields of the Papay were not a place to go exploring unless you were looking to explore options on how to become the main course of a Papay banquet.

Damn kid. Can't leave well enough alone.

"There's someone in there!" DG cried as she leaned down, hearing a male voice groaning as he thrashed about.

"An advance hunter party must've snared it. We better get out of here before their friends get back."

"We can't just leave him here!" DG protested.

How can you be so cold? You who spent so many years trapped, left alone to die! Are you honestly willing to do that to someone else?

"You snatch a dinner from a runner, you best be prepared to become its replacement. Let it be," Wyatt cautioned.

I'm not leaving him here.

"But the poor thing must be scared to death..." she said softly.

"All right. Come on. Let's go." Wyatt said firmly.

Not without him. I don't care what you say, we're not leaving here until we get him out.
"Hey, can I borrow your razor?" she asked and held out her hand with a sly grin on her face. Their eyes met in a silent clash of wills.

Hand it over.

You're not backing down from this are you?

No, I'm not now give me the damned razor!

Stubborn brat!

Cold hearted bastard!

She was still smiling when against his better judgment he reached into his pocket and took out the razor. Instead of giving it to DG, he opened the blade and made a long slash in the Papay runner's trap, freeing the creature inside. The creature jumped to his feet and roared at them. Wyatt wasn't in the least bit afraid of a Viewer trying to act tough but seeing the kid back away from it, sheer terror in her eyes, was pissing him off. He pulled his gun out and pointed it at the viewer.

"You want that bad attitude dripping out of your ears?" he threatened. The viewer instantly cowered.

Ooooh, why am I suddenly having an image of Clint Eastwood's Dirty Harry in my head? I'm half expecting him to say: "Do ya feel lucky?" or "Go ahead make my day, punk."

Unfortunately at that moment the Papay runners decided to make their presence known and for a greeting one of them bit Wyatt on the back of his leg. He howled in pain and fired a single shot to the beast's head, killing it instantly. Shouting at the others to run he tried to hold them off with his pistol but he was running out of bullets, having to stop and reload. He may not have wanted the company on his own trip to Central City but he wasn't about to let the kid get eaten either.

DG, Glitch and Raw found themselves at the edge of cliff with the river below them. "Wrong turn!" Glitch exclaimed.

"Go!" Wyatt shouted.

"But the fall might kill us!" Glitch protested.

"Well they definitely will!" Wyatt hollered back as he kept firing.

You got any better ideas, Zipperhead or should I just wait around to collect the body parts?

The viewer took one look back and made his decision. He leaped off the cliff while a terrified Glitch and DG watched. Wyatt took off his hat and grabbed Glitch and DG. They jumped together, Glitch and DG screaming all the way.

This hurts worse than going off the high dive at the pool!

DG cried as her body hit the water.

"...She searches through the east." Lylo was saying after he was once again connected to the viewing tank, the locket Zero had discovered in his hands.

"Looking for what?"

"Love. For those she loves."
"We need to go DG! The Longcoats are after you." Bastinda heard the cyborg Hank saying to the young girl before they jumped into the storm.

"DG! Get a shovel." Bastinda and Zero went out to the family plot and Zero began digging into the grave that was supposed to be the final resting place of the child she'd murdered years ago and opened the coffin to find it empty, playing her part as Azkadellia perfectly. She clapped her hands together and appeared inside Lavinia's prison.

"You lied to me. She's alive. How could you do such a terrible thing? Well, it won't work, you know. She's still a child." Bastinda raged.

"She's here, isn't she? In the OZ?"

"Tripping over her pigtails as she wanders in circles."

"Oh, thank the stars!"

"What else do you have planned? Hmm?"

"Nothing, I there is no plan."

"My prison is obviously a little too comfortable for you." Bastinda snapped her fingers, making it rain. Lavinia hugged herself in a vain attempt to keep warm.

"I'll send out my best spies," Zero said once she reappeared in her throne room.

"No." I'll send out mine.

DG felt someone reaching out for her and found herself in Wyatt Cain's arms, her hands clutching his shoulders, Glitch behind him.

"You okay kiddo?" he asked.

"Y...Yeah," she gasped. "Those guys were even uglier than Xenomorphs!"

"What?"

"Nothing," she mumbled and broke away from him when she felt him tense. The Alien movie reference would have sounded like a foreign language to him. Judging by the scenery so far, she doubted they had movies in the OZ, or anything else modern. They swam to shore and found the viewer sitting on a log, barely moving.

Wyatt led a shivering DG over to a small rock and sat her down while he gathered up some wood and started a small fire with the flint and steel kit he carried in his duster.

"You sit here and warm up. I'll be right back."

She stood up. "Where are you going?"

"We'll need more wood if we'll be here a while," he said.

"I can't believe we survived...that!" she cried as she walked toward the lake, her eyes wide with fear.

"Those runners would've done worse, kiddo. Go on. Last thing we need is for you to get sick." He started up the hill.
"I don't ever want to do that again!" Glitch cried as he covered himself with his torn overcoat.

"Me neither. Hey, you want to come closer to the fire? Warm up?" she asked the viewer when she was sitting in front of the fire again.

"Should've left me to die..." he mumbled.


No, just lonely and afraid, DG thought as she approached him. She reached out and touched him. He tried to back away, growling softly. Suddenly he took hold of her arm. Glitch jumped up with Wyatt coming up behind him, both of them ready to do what it took to protect her. Wyatt drew his pistol.

"Stay right there!" he warned.

DG held up a reassuring hand. "It's okay...we're all friends here."

The viewer took her hand in his, her memories flowing through him. He could see her parents, feel how much she missed them. In her heart he saw something else, something that she didn't know but only he would see.

Once he loved me with all of his heart
But a dark curse has taken hold of us and torn our love apart

Destined mates are we
With your help we must unlock that memory
For the only way for this curse to be undone
Is for our two hearts to become one

The viewer was taken further into the depths of DG's heart memories and saw her, two years younger with the man who now held a pistol on him, both of them in agony as they were being separated. He heard another voice speak to him.

In seven days the double eclipse will darken the sky
Do not let this chance of salvation pass us by
Awaken for now the time has come
For you to leave this place and seek out the two that must become one

This is your task and you must not fail
For the OZ can only be saved by the light and love born in the union of Cain and Gale

"You are sad. Miss mother, father. They miss you." he said softly. The other information he'd gleaned from her heart he was forbidden to tell her.

"My name's DG, what's yours?"

He picked up a stick and wrote his name in the dirt.
"Raw. Well, it's certainly to the point." Glitch said. The viewer glared at him.

DG noticed a bruise on the back of his head. "You're injured."

A memory flashed through Wyatt's mind. He saw himself strapped onto a table with probes running from his brain and heart to a device where this very viewer was connected, trying to uncover secrets he was willing to die to protect.

"He's a viewer," he explained.

"Viewers are like psychics. Instead of seeing with their minds, they see with their hearts," Glitch added while Wyatt walked away. The last thing he wanted was a viewer tagging along with them, especially one that had been used to try to get him to tell the witch what he knew. "Azkadellia abducts his kind. Gets her alchemists to suck the second sight right out of their heads." He touched the bruise on Raw's head.

"He could be a big help," DG suggested.

Out of the question! You do not want these things poking around in your head!

"Look, I don't know where you came from but if you have any interest in staying alive in the OZ you better get one fact straight real fast. Trust no one!" Wyatt advised and groaned with pain as he fell over. Glitch rushed over to his side and pulled back his duster to reveal the bite marks from the Papay runner.

"Let's hope those runners don't have fang pox!" Glitch panicked.

DG gazed at the bite marks, terrified. All this time he'd been injured too and kept quiet about it? Stubborn man! What if those runners did carry some sort of disease? They had nothing to treat it.


Wyatt began to protest knowing well what would happen the moment the viewer touched him but when he saw the girl pleading silently with her eyes to let him help, Wyatt gritted his teeth and muffled the sounds of pain that threatened to escape.

Raw could see images of him fighting off armies of Longcoats, a loving father to his son, a devoted husband to his wife, a loyal bodyguard to his employer and a dedicated policeman. His heart, protected by a strong lock forged by magic opened slowly revealing a secret only he was permitted to see. It was the same image he'd seen in the girl's heart...lovers torn apart.

Through my mistake was our bond undone

Now we are two when we should be one

Her forgiveness I must now earn

To make a single flame between us burn

I am the lock, she is the key

Uncovering lost memories is the only way to set us free

"Brave man...good man...Tin Man." Raw murmured.

"Oh, I might've known you were a Tin Man. well, with that attitude!" Glitch scoffed.
"What's a Tin Man?" DG inquired.

"It's what they call policemen in Central City. At least I think it is."

"You're a cop?"

Why am I not shocked that my travelling guide happens to be this place's version of Elmer Gulch?

"I was. Until Zero found out I was part of the resistance. You saw the rest," Wyatt panted. He looked down at his leg. It was actually starting to feel better. "Thanks," he said to Raw while DG helped him stand up. "I picked up your parents' trail to the west."

Perched in a nearby tree was the mobat demon Zora, her orders clear, track DG and Wyatt Cain. Now that the witch knew DG was alive and that Cain was with her it was time for her destroyer to act. The demon flew back to the castle and handed the witch a branch from a tree.

"She's near the Fields of the Papay." She didn't tell him about Cain yet. He would find out soon enough. The man was itching to put an end to his nemesis. Once Zero was out of sight, the witch gazed out at the sky, her lips curling into a sneer.

"Enjoy the presence of your precious heart while you can. My destroyer will crush him until he is nothing but dust under his toes."

They'd been walking for a while. The others were exhausted but now that he was feeling better, Wyatt wanted to keep moving.

"How about a pit stop Cain," Glitch asked.

"No time."

"Oh, come on Tin Man! Have a heart! I'm a thinker not a hiker."

Not much of anything except a complainer right now, are ya?

"Yeah, we could all use a rest," DG spoke up.

No matter how hard he tried, every damned time that kid turned her pleading blue eyes on him he couldn't resist giving in. And he hated it. Hated her for making him too weak to stand up to her.

What the hell is it about her that she makes me obey her like a damned dog to its master?

DG suddenly seemed interested in a small statue Glitch was resting on. She closed her eyes and saw herself drawing it and even adding the words Central City underneath it and her father's words just before she was tossed into the storm.

"All of life's answers are found along the old road..." she murmured.

Wyatt turned around. "Did you just say 'old road'? That's what the locals call the brick road. I thought you said you'd never been here before?" he asked, eyeing her suspiciously.

"I haven't been here before...but I know this place," she said as she started running down the road.

Haven't been here my ass. What else are you hiding?

His Tin Man instincts now at work, he chased after her bound and determined to get answers whether she wanted to give them to him or not.
DG ran down the hill, shocked when she saw another image from her drawings...a sign for Milltown, her parents' home. "All my dad's stories. My parents were from here!"

"What happened here?" Glitch asked softly as they surveyed a once beautiful town now in disrepair.

"Milltown's been erased. Azkadellia's term for cleansing history," Wyatt replied, worried when he noticed a sign with a skull on it crossed out with a red x and the letters NHA under it. "Uh oh...we shouldn't be here. No humans allowed. DG!" he cried.

"What?" she asked, holding up her hands in surrender.

Doors opened and people who looked more like they belonged on the set of Terminator than a town started coming out. Although they had human skin, various robotic parts poked out through the flesh.

"Hey guys...we were just passing through!" Glitch exclaimed nervously and kept repeating himself until Wyatt smacked him in the chest.

"Shut the hell up," he muttered under his breath.

Another door opened a man who looked like a giant floating kettle came out. The only thing human about him was his head and shoulders.

"Stoke the pyre!" he commanded.

"Pyre...can we talk about this?" Glitch pleaded.

"Azkadellia's invaders must be made an example of," the kettlebot declared.

"What? This is ridiculous I don't even know this Azkadellia!" DG protested. The bot looked at her.

"You who spoke, what is your name?"

"DG."

"Your voice patterns are familiar."

"I've never been here before."

"Hey don't let him confuse you baby girl, he's just a crazy old cyborg!" Hank called out as he and Emily emerged from a house nearby.

"Dad!" DG screamed and rushed into their outstretched arms.

What the hell?

Wyatt glanced at Glitch and Raw. How did two cyborgs have a human child...or was she one of them? Still he wasn't about to interrupt their reunion.
DG felt as if her whole world was crashing down around her. Her parents were not her real parents at all but robots and she was actually from this odd looking world. Hank and Emily explained that the dreams she'd been having were signs that she had to return and find her real mother.

"What about the rest of it?" she demanded.

"What do you mean?" Emily asked.

"You know damned well what I mean! What really happened to me after prom night, Mom? All everyone ever told me was that I was having hallucinations but they weren't...were they? I saw something from here and instead of telling me the truth, you made it look like I was crazy!"

"We were just trying to protect you..." Emily protested.

"Just tell me the truth now, Mom. Please," DG begged. "Does what happened to me on prom night have anything to do with this?"

"We're not sure," Hank spoke up. "It's possible someone else other than your mother tried to contact you."

"Who was it?"

"It was a man. That's all we know. You kept saying that you would find him." They decided it was best not to mention the rest of what she said.

Find my prison and release me.

DG suddenly felt the ground spinning as she recalled the male voice she'd been hearing recently. She hadn't heard that strange voice since she'd released Mr. Cain from the suit. Was it possible?

"It was him..." she gasped.

"Who, honey?"

"T...The man I'm travelling with, the one with the hat. I found him trapped in a tin suit. I was having dreams where I heard a man calling to me, telling me to find his prison and let him out. I always ended up at a cottage...a cottage that looks exactly like the one he lived in before he was locked up!"

Emily and Hank looked at each other. The man in question was at least twice DG's age yet the things she was saying while she was in a delirium suggested they were lovers.

"Why is he with you?"

"I asked him to take us to Central City to find you. He's an ex-Tin Man."

"Then he's protecting you?" Hank asked.

"Not happy about it, but yes."

They took her to see the kettlebot whom they called Father Vue. As he played a video of his meeting with her mother she was shocked when she recognized the woman from her dream.
"Upon your return, your mother tasked me to give you something." Father Vue imprinted the House of Gale symbol back on her hand. "She wants it to guide you on your journey. Let it connect you to the light. Connect you to her.

Wyatt burst through the door. "Longcoats are coming! We're running out of time." He looked out the window to see Zero riding up with a group of men.

"Where can I find my mother?"

"I know not," Father Vue answered. "But there is a man in the Central City who has all the answers. He's smart, magical, powerful. Some even say he's a wizard."

"The Mystic Man!" Wyatt declared.

"Yes!"

"You know him?" DG inquired.

"I worked his protection detail for a time. He's a good man. C'mon!" Wyatt said urgently. He felt guilty when he had to make her goodbyes to the nurture units a quick one but if Zero caught her, there was no telling what he'd do. They ran out of the house and took refuge in the woods.
Warrior Princesses

Chapter by cjmoliere

Author's Notes: You will notice in this chapter that dialogue I used from The Crocodile and The Doctor episodes seems to in the wrong order. I've moved things around to work better with the new scenes I've added in.

The Enchanted Forest

Seven days prior to the Double Eclipse

Twenty-three days prior to the Final Eclipse

The safe haven that was now Aurora and Mulan's home was little more than a refugee camp but it was all they and anyone else had once Regina's curse ripped through the land but Emma and Snow learned quickly that it faced even greater threats, the Ogres had returned and so had Cora. Stuck in what seemed to be the medieval period, Emma was out of her element. Sure, she'd been able to slay a dragon with her father's sword but dodging Ogres and a witch posing as one of her mother's old friends was beyond her talents as she was quick to find out. This was her mother's domain and this Snow White was no damsel in distress laying around waiting for her prince to come. She'd picked off an Ogre with a shot to the eye with an arrow and defended herself numerous times against an angry Aurora and Mulan's attacks. The pair still blamed them for Phillip's death yet they still travelled with them and now Snow was convinced their only route home was back at her castle.

"Will you take me with you?" Aurora pleaded.

"Aurora..." Mulan protested.

"I have to find Rose, Mulan. She needs to know."

"Rose?" Emma inquired.

"Our daughter." Aurora sniffled. "She would be ten years older than you if she has aged in the land you came from. If not...she will still be a child."

"I'm a schoolteacher in the new land but I don't remember having a student named Rose," Snow said. "But she may have a cursed name similar to her real one. Aurora, I am so sorry. I no idea you had a child."

"It was agreed that I would send her to the new land for her protection. She would have been raised by Sir Jasper who would've returned to his human form in the new land. Back in ours he was a cricket because his twin was also one."

"Of course! Now I remember. Jasper was Archie's twin!" Snow exclaimed.

"Whoa...wait a minute...Archie has a twin?" Emma asked.

"Yes. Archie and Jasper would carry messages back and forth between our kingdoms," Snow said. "We were hoping to unite them one day either by marriage or a treaty."

In the distance Snow could see the remains of the palace, her heart aching. Oh, she'd had so many fond memories there...and some painful ones. She could hear herself sobbing in agony over her
husband's unconscious form in Emma's nursery and Regina's evil laughter as the curse clouds swept them away. They entered the palace and made their way to the east wing and Emma's nursery.

"Oh my god… I recognize this from Henry's book."

"Come – we'll stand watch at the gate." Mulan said to Aurora. She nodded and followed her outside.

"I never thought I'd see this place again. This room… It was your nursery."

"I lived here?"

"You never even got to spend a night. This is the life I wanted you to have. I was going to teach you how to walk in here. How to talk, how to dress for your first ball… You never got to do any of it. We never got to be a family."

"We have a family – in Storybrooke. And, right now, they need us to get back there. So, how do we get this to work? Where's the 'on' switch?"

"It's more complicated than that. We'll have to get it back to the island. Hopefully, someone there has access to enough magic to make it work again."

"How are we going to carry this thing?"

"With the help of an old friend," they heard Snow's friend Lancelot say.

"Lancelot. What are you doing here?"

"We heard about the ogre attack, and I had to make sure you were alright."

"Where are Mulan and Aurora?" Snow asked.

"I sent them to find food. Tonight we'll make camp and then, in the morning, we'll head back. So, this is it – the portal you were after."

"The same one Emma went through. That's how she skipped the curse."

"Remarkable…"

"Geppetto carved it from an enchanted tree, but there's no magic left."

"Well, a portal this powerful… There must be another way to recharge it."

"Why are you so interested in the wardrobe?"

"Well, I just want you to get home to your husband… And son. Henry. They must miss you."

Snow drew her sword and pointed it at the man. Lancelot didn't know Henry's name but Cora certainly did and glamoring herself to look like others was one of her oldest tricks.

"Stay away from him, Emma. He is not who he says he is."

"What are you talking about? Who the hell is he?"

"There's only one person you told Henry's name."

"Cora."
"Clever girl," Cora said sweetly, reverting to her true form

"Where's Lancelot?"

"He's dead. I killed him a long time ago."

"And you've been posing as him ever since?"

"Well, they'd never listen to me. And besides… Every kingdom needs a hero, don't you think?"

"Just not one in you!" Snow growled and lunged toward Cora. Cora gestured and threw the former princess against the wall and pinned her there with her magic and blasted back Emma as she rushed to her mother's defense.

"Thank you, Snow. I've been looking for a way over for so long. I never thought the person to help me find it would be you." She wrapped a rug around Emma's legs.

"Why? Why are you doing this?" Snow panted.

"I want to see my daughter. It's been too long. And you know, I would love to meet my grandson, Henry."

"No, you won't," Emma said fiercely,

Emma took out one of her bullets and grabbed a piece of wood and threw it at the wardrobe when it began to spark, the wardrobe bursting into flames.

"No!" Cora cried and pulled the fire away from the wardrobe and transformed it into a fireball that she threw at Emma only to be blocked by Mulan's sword.

"Mulan!"

"We're not done." Cora said angrily and teleported out. There were other methods. She would simply bide her time.

"Are you okay?" Emma asked her mother.

"You saved me."

"Yeah, well… Where is she?"

"Gone."

"So's our ride home."

"Lancelot was one of the most noble knights I ever knew," Snow said sadly.

"How could I be so blind? How could I not see that it was Cora?" Mulan lamented.

"Let's be fair – the whole shape shifting thing threw me, too." Emma muttered.

"What are we going to tell the people on the island?"

"The truth. That Lancelot was cut down by a terrible villain. He died an honourable death," Snow advised.

"Cora's still out there. We need to find her. We need to defend what's left of the kingdom."
"Who's going to lead us? You?" Aurora asked.

"No. Her."

"I'm honored. But Emma and I still have to find a way back to Storybrooke."

"We'll help you. We'll find a way, won't we?"

"Yes. I need to find my Rose...and channel my anger."

"I'm, uh, sorry I torched our ride home. I couldn't let her get to Henry. I just..." Emma stammered.

"You had to put Henry first, Emma."

"I was angry at you for so long... Wondering how you could choose to let me grow up without you. But then I just... Seeing all this... You gave up everything for me. And you're still doing that. I'm sorry, I'm not good at this. I... I guess I just... I'm not... I'm not used to someone putting me first."

"Well, get used to it. I'm your mother and it's my job, just as it's your job to put Henry first."

Snow took one last long look at the castle that had once been her home, wishing that she could've given Emma the kind of life she had but it was not meant to be. Once they were out of sight Cora teleported in from her hiding place and swept some of the ashes from the wardrobe into a vial. The waters of Lake Nostos would restore its magic and she would finally be reunited with her daughter.

Storybrooke

Seven days prior to the Double Eclipse

Twenty-three days prior to the Final Eclipse

They were in the fields of the abandoned Old MacDonald's farm, Archie dressed in his green satin robes while Rumple wore robes of black with the image of a spinning wheel in flames embroidered on the back in gold threads and Belle wore robes of blue with image of a chipped cup on the back of hers.

"A bondmate is both protector and lover of their chosen Guardian if that is the will of the OZ so he or she must learn to fight both with magic and without. You are bound to Rumplestiltskin and your duty is protect and love him until your last breath," Archie explained to Belle. "I will be teaching your non magical fighting skills but we'll both will teach you how to defend yourself against magical attacks."

"Most mages you face will only use magical attacks, sweetheart. Not very good at any others," Rumple quipped. "But Archie is capable of using both so you need to be prepared to fight both in battle."

Rumple conjured a sword and approached Archie. They faced each other and kneeled, thrusting the tips of their swords into the ground.

"It's like you're...samurais..." Belle murmured.

"The fighting skills we're taught are similar to those of Japanese samurais Belle," Archie confirmed, rising to his feet and holding out his sword.

The young librarian watched in fascination as they sparred on the field though Archie was the more
skilled of the two forcing Rumple to teleport several times as a defense until he tired. He kneeled on the grass, Archie pointing the tip of his sword against his shoulder.

A katana sword appeared in Belle's hands, a chipped cup engraved into it.

"Rumple, you rest a bit while I work with Belle," Archie advised.

"Dinna go easy on her."

"I have no intentions of it. We're running out of time."

Archie was surprised that his new apprentice had some familiarity with sword fighting.

"I once traveled with a woman named Mulan. She taught me some of her fighting skills," Belle confessed.

"She taught you well," Archie praised as she sparred with the him, Belle blocking several of his most difficult blows. "This part of your training is going to be easier than I thought."

Belle was pleased to be doing more than just sitting at home worrying about Rumple, recalling the promise she'd made years ago that she would never stop fighting for him. Now she had the chance to fulfill that promise. She would help him free himself from his curse...or die trying.

"Now you need to rest and we'll talk more about your magic training. Very good, sweetheart, very good!" Rumple embraced her.

"I'm hungry too," she laughed. "Could we have hamburgers again?"

"Why don't we get some at Granny's?" Archie suggested. Rumple frowned at him. "Oh, they're not as bad as you think Rumple!"

"Aye, they're worse. All that grease! How can YOU stand it? I'd get gallstones for certain."

"You only live once Rumplestiltskin and I like to indulge myself sometimes. Eating at Granny's listening to Michael Bolton, and my enviornmental work are my vices in this land."

"Oh, so you're the one who hangs up all those fliers every time Regina and I have a new building project going in the woods?"

"Yes. You're destroying forest land and driving the animals out of their homes. We don't need more shops."

"But we will need housing if the prophecy comes to pass," Rumple argued.

"Let's hope it doesn't come to that."

"I'd like to try a Granny's hamburger Rumple."

"But that would mean we'd have to go into town. Sweetheart, I'd rather not risk Regina finding you."

"I'm not afraid of her. And I do want to get to know people and let them get to know me if I'm going to be a part of this community."

"And your...father?"
"I'll deal with him if I see him."

Rumple waved his hand and they were dressed in their street clothes. "Then we'll go to town. But when we return I will start teaching you the basics of casting wards and protection spells. I know the will of the OZ but I dinna trust Regina until she earns the right to be the Heart of the East."

"There's something else I would advise you to teach her Rumple. She needs to know how to tell when Alemedia is in control and when she's not. Bastinda usually took control of Dellia when she was depressed or felt strong anger."

"Aye and the Dark One does the same. Belle being back in my life has silenced her for the most part but she's still there as I'm certain she is with our cousin now that she no longer has you there to anchor her. Have you been able to mindspeak with her since the curse has been broken?"

"Yes. She wanted me to concentrate on getting this situation with the Home Office settled first but David's no longer convinced it was them responsible for all those murder. They think it was Beth's ex-husband, Jamie McDermott."

"The actor?" Belle asked. "I've heard of him. A few of the nurses at the hospital liked him but he liked to take his clothes off more than anything. I didn't even know he had a wife."

"Oh he did. Beth was married to him before she was reunited with David and since Beth was under the sleeping curse...she didn't really know what he was up to most of the time. He was a drug addict, a sex addict and abusive to Beth. And Jamie was seen with both of the victims before they died."

"McDermott," Rumple mused aloud. "Access your brother's memories. I need to see what this man looks like."

"Why? Are you thinking...?"

"The name cannae be a coincidence Archie. McDermott is Pan's surname. And you know a soul possession is stronger when the vessel has a blood link to you. We are cousins to both Alemedia and Bastinda. That is why banishing them is more difficult."

Archie summoned a Seeing Globe and waved his hand over it, displaying his brother's memories in it for the elder sorcerer to view. One he finished Rumple handed it back to him.

"Jamie McDermott is a distant cousin Archie and was under a soul possession, however, he dabbled in dark magic prior to that. It was how he kept Beth with him for so long. He was using compulsion spells on her. Being reunited with your brother weakened his hold on her."

"Rumple, that's horrible! That poor woman."

"She's alright now, Belle," Archie reassured her.

"I'd like to meet her...Rumple, maybe we should try to find any family you might have here too," Belle suggested. "If they have magic, they'll need a tutor and I can't think of any better than you."

"We will find them Belle but finding my son comes first. And teaching you how to use your gift now that we know you have it." He conjured a candle. "Let's start with working with the elements. Picture a small flame in your mind and hold your hand over the wick of the candle."

Belle did as she was instructed.
"Feel the warmth from the flame, Belle, picture it," he went on. "Just a wee spark at first but let it grow."

"I can't feel anything," she said sadly and opened her eyes.

"Try again. Focus. Block out everything else but the wick, the candle and the flame."

As she held her hand over the wick a second time she could feel the warmth from a small flame beneath it and opened her eyes to see the candle lit.

"I did it! I did it!" she exclaimed.

"Well done, dearie! Well done!" Rumple praised. "Magic requires a strong mind and you, sweetheart have one of the strongest minds I know. Now let's try conjuration. You've seen me do it plenty of times. One minute there's nothing in my hand and the next I have something. Now, do you remember where I keep your cup?"

"Yes."

"Picture the cup."

"I am."

"Now, hold out your hand and picture it in your hand."

"I see it," she murmured.

Seconds later there was a puff of blue smoke and she was holding her chipped cup in her hand. "I did it!"

"The only other person I've seen be that good on their first tries is Dellia," Archie murmured. "If I may, I'd like to challenge her a bit."

"By all means."

"Belle, this next spell I'd like you to do is a little bit more challenging but if you can do a conjuring spell right on the first try I have all confidence you can do this. Look at your cup."

"Okay."

"Now, I want you to make it smaller, as small as this," Archie reached under his shirt and took out his tear shaped amber pendant. "Do you see how small this pendant is?"

"Yes."

"Try to make your cup this size."

"Focus on the cup...light your light flow through you until you see it getting smaller then pull it back. Good!" he praised as the cup began to shrink in her palm. "Keep going...okay now pull it back."

"Oh my goodness! I did it! I...oh..." she moaned, Rumple catching her in his arms as she began to sway.

"You're gonna tire easily when you first start performing magic," Rumple said and helped her sit down, taking the chipped cup from her hands. As he was about to resize it he had sudden
inspiration. He waved his hand over it and turned the cup gold, attaching one his spun gold chains to it and handed it to her. "I've woven some protection spells into this for you Belle so that you can walk around Storybrooke safely when I'm not with you and if anyone attempts to harm you it will summon me to your side no matter where I am."

"You have another line of defense you just haven't noticed yet. Join hands," Archie instructed. Once they did so their hands began to glow. "And I apologize in advance for this but trust me...you'll understand once you see it." He conjured a fireball and threw it at the couple only to have it bounce back and burn a small patch in the grass in front of him. "Look up."

"Rumple...it's a shield!" Belle cried, pointing to the glowing dome above their heads.

"Nothing can hurt you as long as you're together," Archie said. "What you're seeing is one of the oldest forms of Ozian magic. "Your shield will hold as long as you stay together. Never, under any circumstances, do you let go when you have that shield up in the face of an enemy. I know too well what happens when you do," he added sadly.

"What?" Belle queried.

Archie summoned the Seeing Globe again, this time using it to show them Azkadellia's memory of that horrible day in the cave. "The older girl is my wife, Azkadellia. The younger one is her sister, Dorothia. This is how my wife became possessed. Bastinda frightened DG into letting go."

"I'll never let go!" Belle cried passionately.

"You can now dearie," Rumple quipped. "You're squeezing my hand."

"Oh! Oh, I'm sorry Rumple! I guess I don't know my own strength."

"Maybe that's a good thing Belle because after we eat I'm going to start teaching more physical combat skills unless Rumple wants to continue your magic lessons."

"No, we'll go with that first."

"And eventually, you both need to learn how to defend yourselves against psychological warfare." Archie eyed Rumple pointedly. He nodded. "It will help you be able to determine who is in control: Rumple or Alemedia, Belle."

"She won't be in control of him long. I'll see to it."

"Archie, I want your word as a Guardian and as a Talon that when Alemedia is in control you will take Belle somewhere safe and keep her there until I regain control."

"I give you my word for my word as a Talon is my bond," Archie recited.

"Do you think she will?" Belle asked worriedly.

"She will try, sweetheart now that the eclipse is coming."

"Then we'll just have to do our best to keep her away," Belle said firmly.

Archie smiled while they walked back to where Rumple's Caddy was parked. They drove back into town unaware that they were being followed once they passed Game of Thorns. Moe French had been desperate to find his daughter the moment the curse was broken but everyone he asked admitted they hadn't seen her. Once Rumple's car pulled into the parking lot of Granny's Diner he
was furious to discover that Doctor Hopper DID know where she was and had kept this information from him...or was being compelled to by that beast his daughter had been enslaved by. He didn't dare risk trying to take her with the beast around. Now that he had his magic back, he would do far worse than give him a beating that put him in the hospital.

All heads turned and there was an eerie silence when Rumple walked into the diner with Belle on his arm, Archie behind them. Archie took his usual seat at the bar while Rumple and Belle sat down in one of the booths.

"Hey Archie," Ruby greeted. "Gonna have your usual?"

"Oh yes."

"Hey...uhhh...that's Moe French's daughter. He's been looking for her since the curse broke!"

"She doesn't want to see him and that's all you need to know," Archie said firmly.

"But..."

"Leave it, Ruby."

"Okay." She picked up her order pad and walked over to the booth where Rumple and Belle were sitting. "Hello Mr. Gold. And ahhh...I don't believe we've met..."

"Belle," Belle said softly.

"Hi Belle. I'm Ruby! What can I get ya?"

"Oh I'd like a cheeseburger with ketchup, extra pickles, American cheese, french fries and an iced tea with lemon please."

"I'll have the same," Rumple said.

"So Belle, where have you been hiding...?" Ruby inquired.

"With my fiance," Belle said proudly and reached for Rumple's hand.

Ruby's eyes widened. "Fiance? But...but how did you meet?"

"I was his housekeeper," Belle said with a smile."But we got separated during the curse and I've only recently found my way back to him."

"But...your father...he's been looking for you and..."

"There are some things that cannot be forgiven," Belle said angrily. "I don't want to see him."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry. I'll just...go put your order in and congratulations!" Ruby said and hurried back into the kitchen.

While they waited Rumple took a small box wrapped in satin foil with a bow made from his spun gold out of his pocket and set it on the table. "She unwrapped it and a key fell into her hand with a tag that had LIBRARY written on it."

"We may sit in our library, and yet, be in all corners of the earth," he quoted softly.

"John Lubbock," Belle added with a smile, recalling reading a variation of the quote in his work
The Pleasures of Life from Rumple's vast collection of this new land's literature.

"There's no one else who belongs behind that circulation desk more than you, sweetheart. Regina may have closed the library but I own it and I am reopening it. Perhaps you can inspire people to read again rather than burn their eyes watching television. We can go there after lunch."

"Thank you! Thank you so much, Rumple!"

But your training must come first, he sent to her.

She blinked.

"Did I just hear your voice in my head?"

"You did. Mindspeak is an ability all Ozian Guardians have. You will be able to do it with Archie too."

"BEAST!" they heard Moe roar from the doorway. "Release my daughter!"

Rumple rose to his feet and glared at the former lord. "Belle is free to come and go as she pleases, Mr French."

"Liar. You have some kind of spell on her!"

"No one decides my fate but me, Papa and I CHOOSE to be with Rumple!" Belle cried and stood up, taking Rumple's hand in hers.

"To be his 'kept woman'?" Moe sneered. "Only a whore would make such a choice."

"Hey, you DO NOT call a woman a whore in MY diner!" Granny yelled, coming out of the kitchen holding her crossbow.

"No, not my kept woman but my wife!" Rumple announced. "I plan to marry your daughter Mr. French. With your blessing or without it."

"And after what you did to me, I never want to see you again!"

"It was for your own good!"

"Having me tortured by the clerics was 'for my own good'?" Several other patrons in the diner gasped, all of them familiar with the methods the clerics of the Enchanted Forest would use to try to drive evil spirits out of those that had been accused of harboring them.

Granny's eyes were narrowed to slits as she approached the florist, raising the crossbow. "Any father who would subject his child to the madness of the clerics does not deserve to have one!" She held up her arm to show the scar that still pained her every full moon. "THIS is what my father had the clerics do to ME because I chose the love of a werewolf over the wastrel he picked out for me! Now get your ass out of my diner before I put an arrow through it!"

"I'm not finished with you yet!"

"Oh yes you are, dearie!" Rumple growled, summoning his cane. "Or would you like another extended hospital stay?"

Rumple, calm down. If you let your anger get the best of you, she will regain control! he heard Archie's voice plead.
Moe glared at him and stormed out of the diner, slamming the door behind him.

They went over to the library after lunch as promised and Belle felt like she was in Heaven as she explored the shelves full of more books than she could ever read in a lifetime, many of them copies of books on Rumple's shelves back at the mansion. Belle grabbed a stack of Agatha Christie books off one of the shelves and began to read one at the top of the pile. Rumple selected a Stephen King thriller and sat on the sofa beside her while they sipped from the cups of iced tea they'd ordered to go.

In the mines Charming and the dwarves were working diligently in hopes that they would find fairy dust within their walls. If Jefferson's hat wouldn't work, they would find another way to try to bring Snow and Emma home.

"Keep swinging, dwarves." Leroy ordered.

Ruby came into the mines with a basket with some bagels and muffins they could munch on for their breakfast.

"They find any fairy dust yet?" she asked Henry.

"No, not yet. But they will. When… When they do, we'll figure out a way to get Mary Margaret and my mom back."

"I'll be back later with lunch."

Charming put down his pickaxe and put on his shirt. "I hate mine dust. Leroy! If you find anything, I'll be at the Sheriff's station."

"You're taking over as Sheriff?"

"Stepping in. Until Emma gets back."

"Good. We need some law and order here," Leroy said and got back to work.

The Enchanted Forest

Hook stood on a hill spying the haven through the lens of his telescope when he heard footsteps behind him.

"Hello, Hook."

"Hello, Cora. You told me you had something important you needed to show me."

Cora held up the vial of wardrobe dust she'd collected.


"Just the remains of a magical wardrobe that can travel between worlds."

"Is there enough to get us to where we need to go?"

"Not quite. But it's a start."

"We're almost ready to set sail. What's our port of destination?"

"Storybrooke."
"Hmm, curious name. Is that where…"

"She is. And so is he."

"Excellent. You'll be able to see your daughter, and I can skin myself a crocodile."

"Twenty-eight years. We've waited long enough."

"I've waited longer love, but it will be worth it. Well worth it." He made a face. "Perhaps we should have tried to make one last excursion to Oz. That talisman would've come in handy."

"The Sorceress has closed off the portals. The double eclipse is coming and she doesn't want any more outsiders sneaking in. Besides, we don't need the talisman. We can defeat Rumplestiltskin without it."

And I will have all the powers of the Dark One, she thought gleefully.

"...I don't know if I can do this. I'm not a very good liar." Aurora was saying to Snow as they were walking back to the haven. "Neither was Rose. She was always trying to sneak off somewhere but not far enough that Jasper couldn't catch her.

"Oh, it's not really a lie, Aurora. Lancelot did die an honorable death, and Cora did escape. All true."

"Just leave the particulars to us. There's no reason to cause unnecessary panic amongst your people." Emma advised.

"I'm not so sure it's unnecessary..."

"Wait. The tower – we always have sentries guarding the entrance. Stay close!" Mulan warned when she noticed that the guard tower was empty.

"Oh my God..." Emma gasped. The safe haven had somehow become a battlefield with corpses scattered all over the grounds.

"This can't be... Our land... We were protected here – hidden. How did the ogres find us?"

Snow kneeled down and gazed at one of the victim's chests. It was covered in blood. "Ogres didn't do this," she declared.

"What?"

"Cora did. Their hearts... They were ripped out. This is her magic, twisted and evil. We have to stop her."

"Too late. She killed them. She killed them all."

"Well, we have to stop her before she hurts anyone else!"

"Hey! Hey! Look!" Emma cried, running toward a pile of bodies and debris. She could see a hand waving from beneath the rubble. "There's someone under there." She and Aurora began to dig through the rubble, finding Hook underneath, exactly as planned.

"He's alive," Aurora said.

"Please," Hook pleaded weakly, as weakly as he could bring himself to.
"It's okay."

"Please, help me."

"It's okay. You're safe now. We won't hurt you."

"Thank you. Thank you..." Hook said.

"Have you seen him before?" Emma inquired of Mulan.

"Yes, I've seen him around. He's a blacksmith. Came to our camp a couple months ago. Said he lost his hand in an ogre attack. Why would Cora leave a survivor?"

"It's messy. Doesn't make sense"

"You think he's lying?"

"I think Cora's tricked us before. I don't want that to happen again. Here you go." Emma handed him the cup of water Aurora had taken from what was left of one of the huts.

"I can't thank you enough for your kindness. Fortune, it seems, has seen fit to show me favor."

"An island full of corpses. You're the only one to escape. How exactly did that happen?"

"She attacked at night – slaughtered everyone in one fell swoop. When she started ripping out people's hearts, I hid under the bodies of those who had already been killed. Pretended to be dead myself. Mercifully, the ruse worked."

"So much for fortune favoring the brave," Emma said bitterly.

"It was all I could do to survive."

"I'm going to let you in on a little secret. I'm pretty good at knowing when someone is lying to me. And you are full of shit!"

"I'm telling you the truth," he said. The wench even curses like a pirate, he thought.

"Are you? I doubt that."

Damn. The pretty blonde was going to be a problem.

"We should leave here in case Cora decides to come back."

"We should start searching for a new portal back to Storybrooke. I only got about five minutes with my husband, not to mention my grandson," Snow said impatiently.

"You have a grandson?" Hook asked, staring at Snow.

"Long story."

"Well, I know this land well. I can guide you."

Emma pulled out her dagger and pressed it against Hook's throat.

"You're not going to guide us anywhere, until you tell us who you really are!"

"And you are going to tell us," Mulan added, brandishing her sword. "In the woods. Move!"
Hook walked ahead, grinning. It wasn't every day that a pirate found himself the captive of four beautiful women. He was eager to get to Storybrooke to have his revenge against the crocodile but who said he couldn't have a little fun first and these women were his idea of a good time, especially the hard headed blonde one. She had the mouth of a pirate and the body of a goddess in those odd looking clothes she was wearing but she'd come around after a few pokes with his sword...the flesh one. Seducing her would be his greatest challenge and Killian Jones was a man who loved a challenge.
Now that she knew a few truths DG was still grappling with what they meant. Her real mother abandoned her to be raised by robots, the man who had been calling to her for at least two years seemed not to want her around yet he was very protective of her. That made the least sense.

Who was my mother and why was it so important to hide me?

"I wonder why my mother abandoned me," she mused aloud.

"Maybe not her fault. She was weak...maybe sick," Raw suggested.

Glitch swatted him in the chest. "No, I'm sure she's fine. Probably waiting somewhere for DG with a cold cup of mugrug. It's a soup. Something wonderful from my world."

"All right, let's pick up the pace," Wyatt ordered. "I want some space between us and the Longcoats before sundown."

Bossy Tin Man!

"You know Cain I understand why you're afraid of the dark. What with being locked up for all those years. But come on, relax it's a beautiful day, a rainbow in the sky...and we're nearly at the pot of gold." Glitch rambled. He turned around and saw that they were way ahead of him. "Wait for me."

"We're not in Central City yet," Wyatt reminded him.

"You know what your problem is Cain?"

Yeah and its name is Glitch.

"You're always fighting the tide. Always making yes a no and good a bad. "I've been thinking: if Mystic Man really does have all the answers then maybe after he's helped DG find her mom, he could help me rebuild my noggin. Give Raw here some spine and maybe do something for you about your lousy attitude!"

"Or maybe he can put a zipper where it'll do some good," Wyatt retorted.

"Down boys!" DG giggled.

"You find something amusing, kiddo?" Wyatt demanded.

"Travelling with you two hasn't been boring."

"DG be honest...he really does need something done about his attitude."

"Oh no. You are not dragging me into this!" she cried, still laughing.

"Well when you're finished having a good laugh at my expense, you think maybe we can get a move on?" Wyatt barked.

"Cain, I...oh you grouch! Learn to take a joke once in a while!" DG snapped back.
You learn to leave me the hell alone!

The only upside to all this insanity was that they were almost to Central City and he would be rid of her, the annoying Zipperhead and the nosy viewer once and for all. They were finally outside the gates of Central City. It had changed a lot since he, Jeb and Adora escaped in the middle of the night years ago.

"The shining city on the hill's starting to tarnish," he observed.

"This isn't going nearly as well as I thought it would," Glitch said as they watched a group of Longcoats inspecting a car outside the gates.

Raw pointed toward a bulletin board where a wanted poster hung. DG gasped in fear. It was the photograph from her locket. "Looking for resistors," he mumbled.

"This is a nightmare," DG whispered.

Wyatt tore the poster down. "We're gonna need some help." He crumbled the poster into a ball and tossed it into the grass. They heard music playing in the distance and a colorful truck driving slowly up the path.

"Central City People gather round. Antoine Demilo is back in town!" a voice called over a loudspeaker.

"I don't believe it," Wyatt muttered. He stepped forward and slammed his hand down on the truck's hood. The female driver, Antoine's mother stopped and honked the horn. A door opened on the side of the truck and Antoine himself poked his head out.

"Hey! You with the stupid hat. Move it will ya. I got commerce to commence here."

Wyatt raised his head and grinned. Intimidating Demillo had been one of his favorite past times as a Tin Man. For a moment he was able to forget he'd been locked in that damned suit for so long.

"Wyatt freakin Cain!" the man exclaimed. "I thought they were pissin on your grave."

Sorry to disappoint you there, Demillo. "I see you're moving up in the world. How's your sleaze business Demillo?" he asked.

DG stared at the truck, trying to suppress her laughter. This was the most unusual looking pimp mobile she'd ever seen. Back in Kansas the pimps drove caddies that were painted a single color. This truck looked more like a pimp mobile of the hippie generation. The story she would have to tell when she got home was getting better and better.

"Since you've been gone biz is booming so if you don't mind I'm working here. A'ight!"

Wyatt grabbed Antoine Demillo by his shirt front and slammed him against the side door of the truck. "So am I," he growled.

Remind me never to piss him off again, DG thought. For a moment she thought she was watching an episode of Law and Order SVU where Detective Elliot Stabler was conducting another one of his hardball interrogations.

"Hey, you're not sportin tin no more. So leave go me before I call the nice longcoats over there and request that they bloody your persons!" Demillo threatened, trying to shove Wyatt away from him.
Wyatt grabbed him by the neck and pushed him back against the truck again. "Who needs tin when you have a picture of a certain little man playing bed sheet bingo with Zero's first wife?"

A flap on the side of the truck flew open and two identical women looked out, glaring hatefully at Demillo. Apparently he'd left that part of his life out during their conversations...if they even had any.

"W...What? C'mon Cain that that...me and Mrs Z we...we was just joking around and..."

Wyatt squeezed his neck tighter. "Really? Why don't I go ask Zero. See if he thinks it's funny."

"Whoa...please have a heart! That guy'll flay me like a munchkin!" Demillo cried.

After he castrates you first, Wyatt thought. It was the threat he remembered Zero making when rumors that his wife was cheating on him started floating around Central City. Of course now that he was cozy with the Sorceress, the expert on torture, Demillo would probably pray just to be castrated. It would be mild compared to the horrors that bitch could come up with.

"He won't have to unless you get us inside and tell me where I can find Zero."

"What're you gunning for Zero for? That's a short hop to a deep grave."

"You don't know the half of it. Are you gonna help us?"

"No."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"Ok." Wyatt yanked hard on the gold hoop earrings in Demillo's ears. What he really wanted to do was string him up by them but the kid didn't need to see that.

"Oooo! Okay, tonight's his weekly shackup!" Demillo cried. DG snorted. Not only was Demillo a sleaze merchant, he was also the biggest wimp she'd ever seen. Then again, a furious Tin Man was enough to scare her.

"That was easy, wasn't it?" Wyatt asked with a smirk and slapped his cheeks.

"Oh, God I hate Tin Men!" Demillo moaned. "Especially ex-Tin Men! Get your mutts in the wagon!" Wyatt shoved him out of the way and opened the side door. They hid themselves under anything they could find, entering the gates without an inspection.

Demillo probably keeps 'em well supplied with whores. Wouldn't be happening if I was still working here, that's for sure.

"Okay, we're in!" Demillo called out to his contraband passengers.

"Okay, where can we find the Mystic Man?" DG asked.

"Excuse me, is there a sign on my back saying Central City taxi and tourist information?" Demillo asked sarcastically.

Smartass!

Wyatt thought angrily as he hauled him up again and gave him a look that was as deadly as falling
into a nest of poisonous snakes.

"So the Mystic Man, that's who you come here for?"

"Is he still in Central City?" Wyatt asked him.

"Oh, he's here all right. He's just not holdin court where he used to."

Wyatt slammed Demillio's head against the ceiling of the truck and dropped him. Demillo pulled some tickets out of his pocket. "These'll get you front row seats." As DG tried to take them, Demillo pulled them back. "Can't go dressed like that, cupcake. Maybe my girls can find ya something," he added as he leered at her.

Sick son of a bitch! "Then find her something," Wyatt growled and pulled Demillo back, knowing full well he would have tried something on the girl. "Now look," he said as he loaded his pistol. The Mystic Man will have all your answers. You don't need me anymore."

"Don't go after Zero. You're not a killer, you're a Tin Man," DG pleaded softly, gazing at him intently.

Not this time kid. You're not my master. He tried to avoid looking at her. "I told you I'd get you here and I did. You take care of yourself kid." He turned around and before she could say anything more he was gone.

You bastard! You cold hearted, ruthless bastard! Go on then! Get yourself killed, see if I care!

But she did and it started the moment he fell out of that suit. He could put a million bullets into Zero but it wouldn't make the pain go away any easier if it ever did.

"You okay, Doll?" Glitch asked her.

"Y...Yeah," she croaked. "No," she sobbed. "Why is he doing it? It's not going to make it any better!" Glitch embraced her while Raw put his hand on her shoulder.

"That's Cain for ya," Demillo said. "Those two go way back."

"What do you mean?" DG asked through her tears.

"They've always had this rivalry going," Demillo explained. "Cain was always the good cop, ya know, the one people around here really liked. Zero, well, nobody liked him. Thought he was too full of himself. Zero was really pissed when Cain ended up on the Mystic Man's protection detail and he didn't. There were six guys the Mystic Man wanted and the last spot was down to those two."

"So Zero destroyed his life out of petty jealousy!" DG exclaimed.

"You'd be surprised what he destroys peoples' lives over."

DG glared at him. "Yet you let women alone with him."

"I got a business to run." He looked at his twin mistresses. "Go ahead and get her something to wear. I'll be back in a few hours."

Now DG, Glitch and Raw were alone in the truck. The twins dressed DG in a maroon satin dress with thin straps and a rose in her hair. Glitch was stunned to see two familiar tattoos, one of crossed swords on her arm and a sleeping dragon on her back, awakening memories.
He had the crossed swords tattoo on his shoulder, made when he began his own training in the Talon Order by General Lannot, now the leader of Azkadellia's army.

"Why don't I have the dragon one too?" he'd asked.

"You're not a master, nor will you ever be. Look at you. What warrior in his right mind incorporates silly dance moves into his line of defense? You'll lose your head one of these days."

Glitch tried very hard to convince his master that he was worthy to face the trial and become his own master yet Lannot always held him back. Once the war began, Glitch lost any hope of completing his training yet he still tried to practice what skills he did know without his sword.

How can DG be a Talon Master? She's too young.

Suddenly the markings vanished and Glitch rubbed his eyes, thinking it was just his misfiring synapses playing tricks on him again. Then the markings reappeared and a voice spoke in his head.

These markings only those of our brethren will see

The mate of the Dragon one day will I be

You will know to whom I must stake my claim

For our dragon markings shall be exactly the same

The tattoos vanished again. If he didn't know better he would think DG was a sorceress for only a being who possessed strong magic would be able to hide markings like that.

When Demillo informed them that the Mystic Man wasn't holding court where he used to, it was no joke. The once powerful wizard of Central City had been reduced to night club act who could barely put a sentence together. DG felt her heart sink.

"This is the man with all the answers? What's wrong with him? He's out of his mind...literally." Glitch cried.

No, just higher than a damned kite, DG thought bitterly. The Mystic Man seemed to be trying to inhale something from a green bottle. "Inhale the magic?"

"Azkadellia's vapors. A magical mist that contains a spell of bliss. He doesn't know if he's up or down." Glitch explained sadly.

Wonderful. I've been sent to get answers about my mother from a drug addict. Good one, Father Vue.

It had been years since Wyatt had to walk down the back alleys of Central City but nothing had changed. The whores were still picking up clients out in the streets before they took them to a motel room. One of them even tried picking him up but he wasn't interested. He had vermin to kill and its name was Zero.

He burst in on the woman Zero was supposed to be keeping company with only to find her talking dirty to a client on the phone.

"Where's Zero?"

"You just missed him. He busted out of here pronto. Something about some girl being smuggled into the city."
DG!

He raced over to the Mystic Man's club to see a troop of Longcoats marching in, Zero at the lead.

You should never have left her alone.

She wasn't alone.

You call a guy with half a brain and a scared shitless viewer capable protectors? Where is your brain, Cain! Now get your ass in there and do something!

"Hey, there's that guy who locked up Cain!" Glitch said, pointing at Zero. DG put her head down. They had to get the hell out of there but she needed to see the Mystic Man first. Unfortunately he was still stoned and two Longcoats burst into the room.

"Find Zero!" one commanded. As he stepped out of the room, a hard punch sent him flying and the other found the barrel of a pistol pointed right between his eyes.

"Drop it or I'll blow you into next week!" Wyatt growled.

Glitch smashed a bottle on the Longcoat's head.

As Wyatt came around the doorway, DG was unable to disguise the relief in her voice. "I thought you weren't a Tin Man anymore?"

He spun his gun around his finger and put it back in the holster. "We gotta go."

"We can't. he's not...well..."

"Who's not well?"

DG moved aside. Wyatt was horrified by the condition he found his mentor in. Shaking, crying, he looked worse than the times Wyatt caught him after he'd been sneaking a few drinks.

"Oh my. That's not the Mystic Man I remember. Azkadellia's really messed him up. She's got him on vapors."

What the hell am I gonna do with you, old man? You just go from one extreme to the other.

Wyatt kneeled in front of his mentor. "Hey.." he said softly. "Look, until this wears off you're gonna have to hurt for a while..okay?"

"I need answers now," DG insisted.

Kid, you won't get anything out of him but nonsense when he's like this, trust me. The things he'd say when he got drunk...

"It'll be the vapors talking, not him."

If you really want answers out of him, you have to do it when he's sober.

"Do you think Zero's gonna wait?"

Well I don't have a version of Pa's hangover cure all right now and it wouldn't work against a vapor high anyway.
She was looking at him with those eyes again.

Oh damn...

With a frustrated sigh he stood up and DG took his place, trying desperately to question the man, only getting mad ravings in response until she slapped him and her palm began to glow, sending a powerful spell throughout the room. As it touched Wyatt, it forced him to turn around and stare at the girl's back where the sleeping dragon tattoo had reappeared.

Impossible! She can't be a Talon Master! She's too young...and no two dragon markings are ever the same!

Jeb Mysticos gripped the girl's hand in his as his memories flowed back to him and he explained to her how he remembered her mother by the color of her eyes.

Dorothia... she did survive! Oh, sweet Ozma's ghost what have I done!

"Okay kiddo, we gotta get out of here right now," he heard a male say from behind her.

"Not now Mr. Cain. He hasn't told us where to find my mother."

"Cain!" Jeb grabbed his former apprentice's coat tightly. "Cain you were one of mine. Weren't you? A Tin Man?"

"A long time ago," Wyatt confirmed.

Feeling the vapors wearing off, Jeb tried to open a mental connection to his former student only to find it blocked by the breaking of his bond with the girl. He saw the former royal advisor trying to get Wyatt's attention and turned back to the girl.

"The Northern Island. Your journey for her to find who you are starts there." He clasped her marked hand in his. "Let this guide you."

Wyatt opened the window. "All right...you two...get those two out of here. Let's go!"

"No, no...you stay with her at all costs!" Jeb ordered his former apprentice.

"I have to take care of Zero."

Jeb pushed harder at the block on Wyatt's mind with his magic as he spoke. "You know who she is now. She's the key. Promise me! I want your word as a Tin Man: you will not leave her side at any cost!" he hissed.

In his mind Wyatt heard him say something different.

I want your word as a Talon Master. You will defend your charge until your last breath.

"You have my word," he spoke aloud. In his mind he gave the Talon apprentice's response to an oath sworn to his master.

For my word as a Talon is my bond. Jeb smiled and patted his apprentice on the back, going out to the hallway to fulfill his own duty as a Talon, to ensure the safety of two of the Guardians of the Balance.

Wyatt closed his eyes. There was no running away now. A Talon did not break his word to his master. Should he do so, his soul was damned for all eternity.
They returned to Demillo's truck. He and his girls were asleep. "Wakey, wakey sunshine," Wyatt muttered, kicking at his boot.

"Go away, we're closed!"

Wyatt kicked him again.

"I said back off moron!"

"Class act Demillo."

The girls shook Demillo awake. "Cain, whadda ya want?"

"Your truck."

"You're shittin me, right?"

"Do I look like I am? Out!"

"Piss off!"

"Okay." Wyatt hauled him up by his suspenders and tossed him out of the truck followed by his clothes. His girls decided to just get out rather than be thrown out.

"Thanks for the ride," Wyatt called out as he climbed into the driver's side. He hadn't driven in a while and couldn't remember how to start the truck. It didn't look like any he'd ever seen. DG climbed into the passenger side and to his surprise she turned the truck on, clearly understanding the directions Demillo had given while they sounded like gibberish to him. They drove off with Demillo screaming at them.

Jeb Cain stood in front of the ruined cabin that had been the scene of the final battle his family fought together, tears in his eyes. So many times since that day he wished he'd been older and a fully trained Talon so that he could protect his parents.

"Adora take Jeb and run!"

"Wyatt, I..."

"Go! Your duty is to your apprentice now, Talon Master!"

But Jeb wasn't going to let his father try to fight off the Longcoats empty handed. He'd gotten past them and went into the house to find his father's sword. His last image of his father was seeing him call on his dragon's spirit and raise his blade to meet Zero's.

He had been off fighting a battle in the southern guild the day his mother was captured. Like her husband, she had been bound and determined not to be taken easily. The Longcoats had been instructed to take her alive so that she would face a public execution and like her husband before her, she had given her second in command the order to retreat and protect her successor, tossing Wyatt Cain's prized sword into the air so that Dagon could catch it. Her own sword was now in Gregory Zero's possession. He'd taken it the day he captured Wyatt Cain, another trophy for him.

He felt a gentle touch on his shoulder and turned to face Xenia. She had also lost someone close to her in this long war. Her brother Ambrose, once the royal advisor to the queen had vanished, the only trace of him known to exist was his brain, locked inside the witch's tower. Her family held on to the hope that he'd somehow survived but without his brain he was only half a man.
Ambrose had been placed in the royal household for one purpose only: to ensure that Queen Lavinia maintained peace in the OZ but she like her predecessors was not able to bridge the social and economic differences between the guilds. The Northern and Eastern guilds were the upper class industrialists while the Southern and Western guilds were the lower classes, farmers and laborers. When Azkadellia finally seized power, her strongest supporters were from the Northern and Eastern guilds while the Southern guild allied itself with Wyatt Cain's resistance force in the west.

The few times Ambrose returned to visit his family he expressed his frustration with his lack of progress. He held a strong affection for Lavinia and her two daughters but he felt her Slipper consort was her weakness. When she was in his presence, he was easily distracted. His parents were becoming increasing concerned especially after the death of the princess Dorothea that Ambrose's affections for his queen were becoming more personal. He denied it but they still had their doubts.

Xenia, closer to her elder brother than anyone else in their clan, began to harbor suspicions that her brother wasn't being totally honest with her regarding Lavinia. She finally confronted him during one of his visits.

"When did it start Ambrose?" Xenia demanded.

"Before DG..." Ambrose confessed. "Commander Ozopov was the only other person who knew."

"And you had the nerve to lie to Mama and Papa when they questioned you about it?"

"I felt horrible about it!"

"Yet you went on with it knowing full well what could happen if you were caught!" Xenia cried. "Did this start before the princess died."

"No...before she was born..." he croaked.

"Ozma's ghost," Xenia whispered. "Is she your child?"

"I don't know," he moaned. "Lavinia isn't sure either."

"I find that hard to believe," Xenia muttered. Suddenly the brother she loved so much became a stranger to her. She wondered where the intelligence he prided himself on having went when he decided to conduct a clandestine affair with the very married Queen of the OZ.

"Xenia! Look!" Jeb shouted. She turned in his direction and saw him standing beside an opened tin suit.

"Ozma be praised," she whispered. "She's released him..."

"I can't get my hopes up, Xenia." I just can't." he murmured. "They probably realized he was dead and threw him in some unmarked grave."

"The double eclipse is in six days. If the princess is alive, now would have been the time for her return and since she is your father's mate, his dragon essence would have called to hers to lead her to his prison. Let's look around a bit before you give up hope completely," she suggested.

They entered the house and on the kitchen floor they found a mess of long blond hair that had been cut and a pair of scissors, comb and brush on the table. Jeb scooped up the hair and wrapped it in a handkerchief. It was the same color as his father's hair and if it was his, Jeb wanted to keep it.
When they entered the bedroom they found some dirty, rotting clothes on the floor. Jeb recognized the shirt and pants as the same ones his father had worn the day he was captured. Jeb continued to search the room. He lifted up the mattress of the bed and found a pistol with bullets.

"He never went anywhere without this gun...unless..." Jeb rushed out the door with Xenia close at his heels. He was standing in front of a spot of grass and dirt that had been disturbed and an open black metal box. "His silver pistol is missing!"

"Did you say sliver pistol?" she asked.

"Yeah, it's just another gun he had but he never used it."

"Does it fire silver bullets?"

"I don't think this the time to be asking..."

"Answer the question Jeb, what type of ammunition did your father carry in that pistol?" Xenia demanded, now sounding hysterical.

"Okay, okay, it only took silver bullets so he had a lot of them made. Why the hell does it matter?"

"It matters because any bullet fired from that gun, regardless of where it hits is a kill shot. Let me see his sword."

Jeb removed his father's Katana sword from its sheath and handed it to her. She ran her hands over the shining steel blade, nodding slowly. "Just as I thought...a silver coating. The only defense against weapons like these is magic born from the light. They were forged from the melted remains of the original Tin Man that was one of Dorothy Gale's three protectors during her first trip through the OZ and combined with steel and silver to give them their strength. It was the Tin Man's final wish before he died that he would always watch over Dorothy in one form or another. The scarecrow took the weapons and he hid them away in Central City and everyone assumed they'd been lost forever. How did your father find them?"

"He didn't. The Mystic Man gave them to him shortly after he joined his protection detail," Jeb answered.

"The circle is beginning again..." Xenia murmured. "Only this time it spins in a different direction."

Xenia's words seemed to be putting Jeb under a trance. He closed his eyes allowed the essence of the OZ to flow through him as he spoke.

"Once there were three and their charge was to defend her

Another three will come to the last of her kin, one to be her protector and lover

Armed will he be with the weapons forged from the first protector made of tin

He must lead her into the heart of darkness for the final battle to begin."

He opened his eyes again and took the sword back from Xenia. They returned to where the open suit was and Jeb kneeled on the ground, touching the earth at the foot of the open suit. He called on the inner dragon tracking skills his father and mother taught him and combined them with the hunting skills he'd been taught by his grandfather. He caught a faint trace of his father's scent...pine and it was combined with the scent of his mate, the rose.
They were both here...along with someone else.

He moved his hand in the dirt again, pressing harder and detecting another faint scent. This one was the scent of a fresh ear of corn.

"Who would have an ear of corn as a scent?" he mused aloud. He heard Xenia cry out. "Xenia?"

"Focus again Jeb. I need you to be sure. Is the third scent you're picking up an ear of corn?"

He lowered his head and sniffed the patch of earth. "It's not as strong as my fathers or the girl's but it's there. Why?"

"It's my brother!" she cried. "Oh sweet Ozma be praised, he's alive! Jeb, we have to find them!"

"We should be getting back to camp."

"Please!" she begged. "All these years we've both believed someone we love is dead and now we have a chance to find them alive. We can't give up! Can you figure out where they're headed?"

"As long as I can pick up their scents I can but if one of them is masking theirs I'll lose the trail."

"Then we don't have much time." They raced back to their horses. They knew they were deviating from their missions but if the trail they were on led them back to the loved ones they'd lost, it would be worth the hours, possibly days spent searching.
The Enchanted Forest

Six days prior to the Double Eclipse

Emma and Mulan tied Hook to a tree in the woods. Hook was laughing while they wrapped the ropes around him and tied him tight.

"You know loves, if you wanted to play rough, why didn't you just say so?"

"Okay listen you pervert, the next things I wanna hear of your mouth better be the truth. Being tied to that tree's gonna start being very uncomfortable if you have to go. Or maybe we'll just let you pee yourself."

"I already told you. I'm just a blacksmith."

"Sure you are. You don't want to talk to us? Maybe you'll talk to the ogres while they rip you limb from limb. Let's find out." They started to walk away, hearing the ogres coming.

"You can't just leave me here like this!"

"Can't we?" Emma countered.

"What if he's telling the truth?" Aurora asked.

"He's not."

"Good for you! You bested me. I can count the amount of people who've done that on one hand."

"That supposed to be funny? Who are you?"

"Killian Jones, but most people have taken to call me by my more colourful moniker – Hook."

"Hook…as in…" Snow pondered.

"Check my satchel."

"As in, Captain Hook?" Emma finished, shaking her head. The guy looked more like a cheap version of Jack Sparrow with more eyeliner than Maybelline or Max Factor.

"Ah, so you've heard of me."

"You better hurry up. They're getting closer. So, unless you want to be dinner, you better start talking."

"Cora wanted me to gain your trust, so I could learn everything there is to know about your Storybrooke. She didn't want any surprises when she finally got over there."

"She can't get there. We destroyed the wardrobe."

"Ah, but the enchantment remains. Cora gathered the ashes. She's going to use them to open up a portal. Now, if you'll kindly cut me loose."
"No. We should leave him here to die. To pay for all the lives that he took," Mulan said icily.

"That was Cora, not me."

"Okay, let's go. The stink of Guyliner's bullshit is starting to make me gag." Emma muttered.

"Wait. Wait! You need me alive."

"Why?"

"Because we both want the same thing. To get back to your land."

"You would say anything to save yourself. Why are we supposed to believe you now?"

"I arranged for transport with Cora. But, seeing how resourceful you are, I'll offer you the same deal. I'll help you, if you promise to take me along."

"How are you going to help us get home?"

"The ashes will open a portal, but, to find your land, she needs more. There's an enchanted compass. Cora seeks it. I'll help you obtain it before she does."

"So, Cora won't make it to Storybrooke, and we'll be one step closer to getting home."

"Sounds too good to be true," Snow said skeptically. She trusted this pirate as far as she could throw which wasn't very far.

"There's only one way to find out."

The three women huddled.

"You're not seriously suggesting we take him with us!" Emma protested to Aurora.

"I want to see my daughter. Snow, you want to see your husband and Emma you want to see your son. I'm willing to take my chances."

"Yeah, well we're not. I don't know how much YOU know about Captain Hook but I know a lot and he's a pirate. You can't trust pirates. And have you forgotten he's working for Cora? That woman will do anything to harm my family. I say we leave him here and try to find this compass ourselves."

"Or...we make him think we trust him."

"Mary Margaret...are you nuts! He'd try to kill us while we sleep or turn us over to Cora."

"Well then, let's make him think he's going to succeed."

"You tell me one thing, and whatever you say, I better believe it – why does Captain Hook want to go to Storybrooke?" Emma asked when she went back to the tree.

"To exact revenge on the man who took my hand… Rumpelstiltskin."

"Oh great so we're just expected to trust a pissed off pirate with a death wish?" Emma rolled her eyes.

"What other choice do you have? You can't find the compass on your own."
"Says a sexist pig," she retorted. "Okay Guyliner, we'll play along. For now." She slicked through the ropes with Mulan's sword, barely missing his arm.

"Watch it!"

"But I'm warning you...you screw with us and you see that little Vienna sausage between your legs? I'll personally do a Lorena Bobbit special on it and you'll need to start wearing more makeup because you'll be a girl!"

"Who is Lorena Bobbit?"

Snow and Emma smiled at each other.

"Someone you wouldn't want to know," Snow taunted.

But the threat had the desired effect. Hook's eyes lowered to his groin where Mulan's sword was pointed. Winning these women over was going to be bit more difficult than he'd hope but he still had that enchantment on his hook that could rip out a heart and for the moment the only woman he had a chance of getting close to was the one they called Aurora.

"Move...and remember if you try anything I'll make good on Emma's threat!" Mulan hissed.

"Up ahead. We'll find the compass just over the ridge."

They had reached the edge of the forest, seeing a tall beanstalk in the distance

"Let me guess – the compass is up there?"

"Oh, yeah."

"So, how do we get to it?"

"It's not the climb you need to worry about, Emma. It's the giant at the top."

"You have GOT to be kidding me!" Emma exclaimed.

Storybrooke

That same day

"Regina. Are you here to see me?" Archie asked her when she showed up at his office.

"I've been trying to keep my promise to Henry, but it's been difficult."

"To not use magic."

"It's been two days."

"That's an excellent start. Come on in."

"It's just that... magic is the way I've always gotten everything," she said when she walked into the office.

"It sounds like it's also the way you've lost everything. Regina, this is your chance to start over, to earn Henry."

Suddenly Dr. Whale burst into the office, Archie cursing himself for not locking the door.
"Dr. Whale, this is highly inappropriate," he informed him coolly.

"Send me back."

"Excuse me?" Regina asked.

"To my land. Send me back to my brother."

"Why don't you check the "Missing" board like everyone else?"

"Your curse only brought the living."

"Well, then I'm sorry for your loss. But I'm afraid I can't send anyone anywhere."

"Can't or won't?"

"Dr. Whale, I have to insist. Please. Go!" Whale glared at him and left. Archie closed the door behind him and locked it to avoid any further interruptions. "Sorry. What you said isn't entirely true, is it?"

"I'm sorry?"

"About the curse only taking the living. The grave of your father's here, right?"

"I don't care about Whale or his brother. I brought who I wanted. Mostly everyone...and a few of Maleficent's enemies but she wanted them sent outside the barriers."

So that explains why Beth and David were separated, he thought angrily.

"Anyone else? If you want help, you have to try and trust me. Stopping magic is a lot harder than starting."

"Had you said this to me earlier, I would've told you you had no idea what you're talking about. But you do, don't you?"

"I do. My magic was unlocked the moment I arrived in the OZ and reacted to my emotions. I couldn't control it. I still have trouble when I'm angry as you found out."

"His name was Daniel. I preserved his body with an enchantment spell. He's dead, but frozen, and I've kept him in my family mausoleum."

"Because you couldn't let go of him. If you can't let go of the past, Regina, it's doomed to haunt you."

"You know what? I think this has been quite enough."

"Regina, wait. I... I can help you."

"I doubt it."

She got up to leave and tried the door to find that it wouldn't open, even unlocked. She attempted to unlock it with her magic and found that she couldn't.

"You did that!"

"And I'll do it again. There's no point in being stubborn with me because, as I've said, I've faced far
"I'm shocked you didn't blast Whale. You were tempted, weren't you?"

"As tempted as I was to strangle the man that killed my Ambrosia. I may have been timid during the curse and before I was enchanted but living in the OZ all those years 'toughened me up' so to speak."

"You can bring Daniel back."

"No, Regina, I can't. I'm not that powerful."

"Don't lie to me cricket. I've seen what you can do. You were taking my life force and you can restore it too!"

"Resurrecting the dead comes with a price. It can only be done by someone who has a bond with the person they are trying to bring back and has to be done within moments after death, before the soul is taken to its place of rest. Don't you think I would've wanted to bring my Ambrosia back? I have…every day since she died but its too late. Her soul is already at rest. So is Daniel's. We…we have to let them rest…"

"I can't," she said sadly. "Can you?"

He sighed. "No. And what makes it harder is knowing that bitch Bastinda holds my wife's soul in her possession and the only chance she has of being freed is her sister who may or may not be powerful enough to do so. She needs me."

"But how are you going to get back? Jefferson's hat doesn't work anymore and there are no magic beans."

"I'll find a way Regina."

She sighed. "I wish I could go back and change what happened. Daniel didn't deserve what was done to him. My only consolation is that my mother is dead and can't hurt us anymore."

"She isn't Regina."

"What?! But...but I saw her body."

"The Queen of Hearts is alive and well. I've seen her."

"When?" she demanded.

"Right before I came here. She was seeking sanctuary in the OZ but Bastinda refused to give it to her." Archie picked up his silver tea service tray and waved his hand over it showing the Tower throne room where he and Bastinda sat on their chairs while Cora was on the floor at their feet held by a binding spell.

Oz (The Outer Zone)

Ten years earlier

"You should be fortunate you don't have your heart, witch because I would be forcing you to watch while I crush it to dust. YOU are responsible for my prisoner escaping!" Archie yelled when he rose from his chair. Cora looked up at him, her dark eyes glittering with rage. "Do you really think you have the power to go up against me?"
"I know I do," she sneered.

He gestured and she began convulsing.

"I didn't think so. Now WHERE is Killian Jones?"

"I...I don't...know..." she croaked.

"Try again!" he barked.

"I...lost track of him after...ahhhh!"

"Commander, let her speak," Bastinda advised.

"The only words I want to hear are the whereabouts of Killian Jones." He zapped her again and kneeled beside her. "Now, talk!"

"I swaear I don't know!"

"Vy-Sor!"

The advisor raced into the room. "Commander?"

"Bring Lylo. I want her read." He gestured and Cora was lifted off her feet, her wrists and ankles chained. She was dragged to a chair and forced to sit down when Lylo came into the room. He placed his hand on Cora's forehead.

"Heartless Queen speak truth. Doesn't know where pirate is."

"Thank you Lylo. You may go now."

"You are far too kind to our slaves, Commander," Bastinda scolded.

"Sorceress, sometimes you must give a little to gain a little, if you'll forgive me for saying."

"You always are forgiven, dear. Now, what should we do with this?" Bastinda gestured to their angry prisoner.

"I think a few months in one of our prison domes will humble her...if she can be humbled but somehow I doubt that." Archie held out his hands and Cora began to shrink as she flew into them. He clapped them together and she vanished.

Regina burst out laughing. "You...shrunk her!? I didn't think anyone could do that without using a Wonderland mushroom or potions."

"We can. We can even shrink ourselves but Dellia has always been better at it than I am. Cora must've beren released after I was sent over here."

"What do you have against Captain Hook? I know why Rumple hates him."

"He tried to rape my wife, Regina and by rights he should've been executed because doing harm to any member of the royal family is an automatic death sentence but Cora found out when the war started and broke him out. And that pirate better not show his face here."

"I don't want HER here either. I'm...I'm not always strong when she's around."
"Neither was I with my parents."

"What do you mean?"

"We have a lot more in common when you think. I haven't always been a good person. You know that now. Did you ever wonder why I became a cricket?"

"I didn't care," she answered honestly. "I just knew you were my enemy."

"I hope you don't have anything planned because this will take a while."

"No, I don't." She picked up her cup and took a sip while he talked and realized he was right. They did have more in common than she realized. After he was finished she set her cup down. "So that was how you became a cricket. It wasn't what I expected. But...there is something I need to say...I wanted to thank you."

"Thank me?"

"For being the father figure Henry needed. There were a few times during the curse when I thought..." She laughed nervously. "I can't believe I'm telling you this but...I thought about marrying you to maybe...give Henry a father but we would've been married in name only. Only know I know I would've had a very angry Ozian princess on my hands."

"You most certainly would!" they heard Azkadellia say angrily when her image appeared on the tray.

"Dellia!" Archie whispered and picked the tray up, caressing the image tenderly.

"Archie, it's time. DG is in the OZ."

"How?"

"Bastinda summoned a travel storm and sent Lannot's men through when Lylo sensed her magic awakening."

Archie snorted. "Lannot couldn't find his way through a patch of dirt without having his face shoved in it."

"He's dead. She took his life force and made Zero the head of the army."

"Oh she has? Then I suppose it's time for Commander Ozopov to come and take it back, now isn't it?"

"Go to Daddy's farm. They came through in Lannot's travel storm so the token Mother gave them should still be there. Be careful Archie, I love you."

"I love you Dellia. I'll see you soon."

Archie stood up and gestured, his construct appearing beside him. "I'm going to leave him here in case you need him, Regina but I want you to act as if he is me to the others."

"But he's just a construct!" she protested.

"I am yes but I have all of Archie's knowledge and memories. I can still help you Regina. It will be just like it was during the curse, him being here the whole time yet not. The construct sat in Archie's chair and poured himself another cup of tea. Archie teleported back to his house and and
opened his bedroom closet, finding a garment bag hanging in the back. He unzipped it and took out his old uniform, still looking as clean as it had been the last time he wore it.

It's time, isn't it?

Yes, Pongo, it's time. We're going back to the OZ but first we need to go to Kansas to pick up a way back.

He held out his arm and waved his hand over the Dalmatian. Pongo vanished in a puff of smoke and his tattoo reappeared on Archie's arm. Archie gestured again and teleported out.

Topeka, Kansas

This wasn't how it was planned! Elmer Gulch thought, slamming the door to his squad car as he surveyed the ruins of the Gale farmhouse. When he first heard the reports of twister activity near the Gale farm he assumed it was nothing other than typical Kansas weather but when he'd discovered DG's drawings in the rubble he realized that the time had come to take her back to the OZ. He reached into his pocket and took out the travel storm token he'd been given prior to their departure from the OZ years earlier. As far as he knew, he held the only means of getting back to the OZ but someone had activated a travel storm and the bodies of the Longcoats he'd found confirmed Hank and Emily hijacked their travel storm to send her through in a hurry.

"What the hell happened? Why are you still here?"

"Commander Ozopov," Elmer sighed with relief and shook his hand. "You don't know how glad I am to see you! It looks like a travel storm was activated here but not with this." He held up his token. "The witch found out DG was here but thank God they didn't get to her. I need to get back there and find her again before she does."

Archie took the coin from his hand and tossed it, activating the funnel cloud. "We're running out of time!" he shouted over the rising winds. "The double eclipse is in six days."

They jumped into the cloud.

"Where are we going, Jiminy?"

"The Northern Island!" Archie called back. "DG has to learn who she is before she can go to the tower and I hope to the goddess we find her in time!"

Oz (The Outer Zone)

The Northern Island

Wyatt quickly remembered why he preferred travelling by horseback instead of driving. He had such a terrible time keeping the wheel of the truck straight that DG kept asking him to stop so that she could drive while Glitch kept complaining how he was being tossed around like a sack of potatoes. Thankfully Raw was keeping his mouth shut. Two passengers bitching was stressful enough. Worse, they were travelling through gods knew how many feet of snow. He wished his mentor had decided to send the girl to someplace warmer and easier to get to but the tasks Jeb Mysticos gave him were never simple.

He heard the clatter of metal and the truck suddenly stopped. "What was that?" he asked.

"I don't know." Although DG was a skilled mechanic, she hadn't worked on a truck that was from the forties to the early fifties in at least two years. Hank had one in the backyard of the farm but he
sold it to a neighbor to help pay for DG's hospital bills.

"You all right?" he called to Glitch and Raw in the back.

"Yeah, just freezing." Glitch answered.

"You stay here," Wyatt ordered DG as he climbed out. It was hard to see through the blowing snow but when he checked underneath the truck he could see the axle. He groaned with frustration. He grabbed the axe from its handle on the side of the truck. A panel opened up and Glitch and Raw poked their heads out.

"Aw, what now!" Glitch moaned.

"Broke axle!" Raw called over the howling wind.

"No kidding. Come on let's go. We're walking," Wyatt said as he walked to the passenger side door and helped DG get out. They bundled themselves up as tightly as they could and made their way through the deep snow as quickly as they could. DG spotted a tall white mountain in the distance.

"What we're looking for is over there!" she called out through the heavy scarf she had wrapped around her face and neck.

"Ice mountain!" Raw called out.

"That's the Northern Island?" Glitch asked incredulously.

"I know its around here somewhere," Wyatt confirmed.

"Frozen in time in a sea of ice. Just like my dad said it would be." DG said as she started down the hill.

The Talon of the Dragon Grand Master was about to face his final trial. Zero and his men had tied the aging wizard to a chair and wheeled him into the Sorceress's office but he refused to answer her questions. Now he was hooked to one of her viewers. He sent out a powerful masking spell, making the viewer only see nonsense.

"Focus, Lylo. Don't let him sway you," the witch instructed. The alchemist thrust the tip of the electric prod into the Mystic Man's neck. He slumped in his chair. Finally an image appeared in the tank of the Northern Island palace concealed by the wall of ice created when the curse was enacted years before.

"The Northern Island," the witch whispered. "She's going to see Mummy."

"Is he with her Sorceress?" Zero asked.

"Yes. Have the grooms prepare our horses. We have a reunion to attend."

And I have a grave to put a certain Tin Man in, Zero thought excitedly. This was the chance he'd been waiting years for and he had some interesting information he planned to use for the occasion.

Break his will then break him.

"What about him?" the alchemist demanded, indicating the Mystic Man.

"Take him to his new quarters," she commanded.
The Northern Island! Oh, Mother you cannot send her there now. The bond has not been reforged yet!

Azkadellia struggled to take control once again but she was finding it more difficult this time. Once again they would be face to face in the place where the first battle began but she couldn't let DG and Wyatt face the darkness without her or their magic and the bond to protect them.

She cannot find the emerald. In the wrong hands it can be destructive. It will only serve the light when it is in my possession. Please Lurline, help me now! Bring Archie to me, quickly!

Grabbing the axe out of Wyatt's hand, DG began to chop away at the icy fortress, revealing a frozen set of doors. She held her palm up and the House of Gale symbol glowed, serving as a key to the magical lock. Once they were inside DG paused in front of a large portrait of her mother, Glitch standing behind her.

"My mother was the queen?"

"That makes you princess," Raw said as he bowed.

I'll be damned, Wyatt thought. I was right after all.

His memory took him back to the day of her funeral where he'd served as a pallbearer, recalling his suspicions that the princess had survived after all and hearing once again the Mystic Man's sharp warnings to let it be.

You always had me in mind to protect her, didn't you old man?

"You knew my mother," DG was saying to Glitch.

"I knew I wasn't an idiot. Or a convict," he said to Wyatt. "I was the queen's advisor."

As DG recalled the stories Hank taught her she ran upstairs with the three of them trailing behind her and found herself in an old bedroom, all of the furnishings covered with white sheets. A fur lined coat was draped over one of the chairs. Raw touched the coat. "Sad. Mother waited. Couldn't stay."

Glitch lifted the sheet off an old harp while Raw stood in front of the bed, horror filling him at the sight that met filled his vision. He saw the younger DG on the bed, heavy chains of dark magic wrapped around her throat and the Tin Man kneeling on the floor a few feet away from her a second set strangling him as he fought desperately with the little magic he had to protect her.

"Bad things. Bad things happen here," Raw moaned. "We go. We go now," he pleaded as he took DG's hands in his.

"No. No! I need to know. Raw, please." DG begged.

"Bad things..." He turned to the Tin Man for guidance.

"Tell her," Wyatt pleaded softly.

Raw touched the mirror, replaying the image of the possessed Azkadellia entering the room and using dark magic to kill her. As they watched, Wyatt's throat suddenly felt tight as if there were something wrapped around it and he could barely breathe.

Let go of me! he growled in his mind. He felt the pressure ease and his breathing stabilized.
"She tried to kill me!" DG cried.

"No," Wyatt said sadly. "She did kill you."

"But that can't be!" They now watched as Lavinia brought her daughter back to life with her own magic and whispered to her the location of the emerald.

"Mother never could leave well enough alone," the witch said in Azkadellia's voice as a Longcoat disarmed Wyatt. Zero stood behind the witch, smirking with satisfaction.

You're just loving every minute of this, aren't you, you sadistic son of a bitch! Wyatt thought angrily as he watched the trooper hand his pistol to Zero.

The two sisters now stood face to face, similar yet terrifyingly different as one's soul was locked inside a dark cage, begging for release. Azkadellia pushed again with her light when she saw Ambrose step forward, warning the witch to leave DG alone.

That's it. Be strong for her! Fight for your child!

The witch continued to question DG about the emerald and Azkadellia felt her light grow stronger as she watched her sister stare the darkness down and refuse to give in.

That's it DG. Keep your memories sealed tight as I have sealed his. She will not unlock you easily.

Yet the witch did not stop trying. She manifested a small lantern with Lavinia's image inside it calling her name. DG smirked at the witch and slammed the lantern down on the ground, creating a purple mist that blurred the witch and Longcoats line of sight. She, Glitch and Raw seized the opportunity and ran leaving Wyatt behind.

He called once again to his inner dragon and entered attack mode, taking down two Longcoats before he lunged at Zero, delivering a punch that sent his silver pistol flying out of the other man's hand.

Two Longcoats started to pursue the three escapees before the witch called them back. She opened her leather jacket and summoned the mobat demons.

"Bring her to me," she commanded. Three of the demons caught Glitch and forced him onto the floor facedown while the others continued staling DG and Raw.

Up in the bedroom Wyatt was on his knees in pain yet like the dragon he recovered from his wounds and stood to fight again "Now I know why they call you Zero," he taunted. "Still can't fight your own battles."

"I do my share." Zero said and waved his two companions back.

"I am the Dragon. Face my wrath but you will never earn the right to call yourself a master," Wyatt chanted icily.

"No sword this time Cain," Zero sneered. "I took you down once and I'll do it again."

"No, you had your bitch do it for you." Wyatt rushed toward him slinging punches until Zero's cohorts grabbed him, one holding him while the other pummeled him with his fists. "And you still can't fight me!" he shouted as he broke free from his captors and rushed Zero again.

Now the destroyer and the dragon were face to face. All the strength of the darkness flowing
through his heart, Zero delivered a painful that brought Wyatt crashing to the floor and picked up the silver pistol.

"No iron suit for you this time," he said breathlessly. "No wife and child crying for years to free you from it," he lied.

"My family's alive?" Wyatt gasped as blood seeped out of his mouth.

"Hardly matters now, does it?" Zero said and raised the pistol, firing a single silver bullet into Wyatt's chest, directly to his heart. A kill shot.

Inside his vest, the toy horse began to glow with magic forged from a bond that had been formed in the light and broken, calling to the bullet. It buried itself deep into the wood. The force of the shot threw Wyatt back and he fell through the stained glass window into the cold, icy lake.

Zero stared down at the lake, a satisfied smile on his face. He threw the pistol onto the floor. There was no sense taking it as a trophy. Seeing his enemy's body sinking into a frozen grave was all the trophy he needed.

The mobat demons carried DG over to where the witch stood and dropped the terrified girl at her feet. The witch smiled down at her.

"Welcome back little sister. There's no place like the OZ." she said with a menacing grin.
The Tower

They took her and Raw back to the Tower. DG began to understand just how twisted her sister was when she discovered that the nurture units she'd loved so much had been reprogrammed to interrogate her about the emerald. And her sister seemed to be behaving like someone with a split personality, pleasant one minute and malicious the next.

Azkadellia, her light infused with love for her sister kept pushing at the chains around her soul yet she could not break through and now the witch was channeling Azkadellia's memories of precious moments with them to weaken their defenses.

My sister is not going to surrender!

Fool! Do you think you can still fight me after all these years?

You can't hold me forever nor will you find the emerald. It belongs to me.

The western guardian is dead and the eastern guardian is lost. You have nothing.

The witch pushed back with a powerful spell that sent Azkadellia back to her dark cage, her light dimming. Unfortunately for the witch, the bitch had been speaking the truth. Her manipulations had failed. The younger girl refused to devulge her secrets.

"If you remember nothing else, remember this: the next time I snuff out your insignificant little life there'll be no one standing by to save you!" the witch hissed as Zero dragged the terrified girl away.

After several attempts DG was as impossible to read as her counterpart and for the same reason, her memories were locked by powerful magic. The witch ordered her to be placed in a cell near the Mystic Man's. If they talked she would overhear their conversations.

"I have a theory," Jeb Mysticos said from his cell. "Which can't be unproven."

"Mystic Man? You're alive."

"It is called the 'Or Not' theory."

"Oh, I have so much to tell you.." DG began.

"Ahh you know they wouldn't put you in a cell close to mine unless they wanted us to talk," he cautioned.

"She's listening?" she whispered.

"First you must journey to the north...or not?"

"Yes I journeyed to the north. I went to the ice palace and I know who my mother is. Are you sure you're not still on the vapors?"

What are you doing? she mouthed.
"I have never been clearer in my whole life. It's all coming back to me. My troubled childhood, a rich life of scholarly pursuit, my brief but glamorous life in show business...although that part is a bit hazy." They felt a tremor. "Did you feel that?"

"Yeah."

"They're testing a machine."

"What sort of machine?"

"The complete destruction of the OZ," he said sadly.

In the dungeon the two prisoners spoke carefully yet the Mystic Man was determined to give the girl some clues she could follow.

"Your light must brighten a place that is dark. In the south. It's where you'll find a message about your future and your past."

That's going to hard to do without Mr. Cain, she thought sadly. "I'm not good at finding places and now that Mr Cain is..."

"He's what?"

"Dead," she croaked. The Mystic Man shook his head in denial. He wouldn't believe it. He couldn't believe it. He brushed away his tears.

"How?"

"Zero," she moaned. "He...he tried to fight off Zero so that we could escape...and I heard a shot, glass breaking and oh God I heard him screaming!" She sank to her knees in her cell, her body shaking as she sobbed. It was the first time she allowed herself to grieve for the brave man who had been at her side almost every step of the way.

In her office, the witch was enraged. They were both masking but she had another weapon at her disposal. She made her way down to the dungeons where the girls magic tutor was being kept. She tossed him a bag of video disks. In exchange for his freedom, his purpose was to help lead DG to the emerald and leave a trail for her mobat demon Zora to pick up and return to her. Toto however, was hoping that he could somehow trick the witch and lead DG to the emerald anyway.

"...So eager to please the wrong sister," the witch said softly as she sauntered into the Mystic Man's cell.

"Azkadellia...as I live and breathe...so far," he laughed, knowing that it was not Azkadellia in control of that body but Bastinda.

"I don't know which is more pathetic...you on the vapors or off."

"Your sister is more powerful than you."

"She will never be as powerful as me."

"Then why are you so scared?"

The witch reached out with her magic to find his life force.

"I know you...witch!" he hissed.
"What do you know?"

They'll put an end to you.

We'll see.

She began to pull his life force out of him. In the other cell DG was screaming but she saw his essence reach out to her.

Unlock your memories.

The Mystic Man's body fell to the floor while the witch staggered back, sighing with pleasure as his magic now flowed into her. She turned to DG. "Not so great and powerful after all, huh?" she panted and left the dungeon with her cohorts in tow.

The Northern Island

It was too much to hope for yet once the words had been spoken they played over and over in Wyatt's mind.

My family's alive?

A door opening made Wyatt tense and he pulled out his gun. A hand gently pushed it aside. He opened his eyes to see Glitch inside the back of Demillo's truck carrying a load of firewood.

"You've been sleeping for hours like a baby with his pacifier."

"I thought you were dead," Wyatt said groggily.

"Ditto. You know I may have saved you from hypothermia but this is what saved your life." Glitch showed him the toy horse with a bullet from his own gun lodged in it. "It stopped the bullet."

Wyatt took the horse in his hand and held it tightly against his heart. "DG?" he asked sadly.

"Azkadellia." Glitch answered.

That said it all. Wyatt silently cursed himself. Dammit, he should never have left her! Once they got to Central City, that had been his plan but he couldn't let Zero get to her. He didn't even want to think of what Adora suffered at his hands all these years.

"Raw?"

"I don't know. I can't find him. Either they took him too, he's dead or..."

"Or maybe he ran away," Wyatt said bitterly.

Damn coward. Here I thought the kid would be the one to cut and run but she's a helluva lot braver than that furball.

"You know you really should do something about that bitter cynicism of yours, Cain!" Glitch said angrily.

"Why? Somebody's gotta keep your wide eyed optimism in check."

Glitch slammed down a piece of firewood. When did anyone get the benefit of the doubt from Cain? Never as far as he could tell.
"Hey Glitch?"

"What?"

"I owe you one," Wyatt said and closed his eyes, the toy horse still in his hand.

Glitch smiled. "You know Cain profession psychiatric therapy is only a crow's call away these
days. I think a man with your issues of masculinity and what we call Boy Scout syndrome would
benefit from it."

"I don't want medicoats messing with my head," Wyatt grumbled. He struggled to get up. "We
have to find DG."

"Cain, you're not strong enough yet to..." Glitch warned just as Wyatt fell, the sleeve of his shirt
catching on something sharp and tearing a large hole in the upper arm. Glitch grabbed hold of him
to prevent him from falling, gasping in shock when he saw a tattoo of two crossed swords on the
older man's arm.

"I...I don't believe it!"

"What?"

"Take off your shirt."

Wyatt glared at him as he lay back down. "What did you say?"

"I need to see your shoulder. Take off your shirt."

"Have you lost your mind...wait...no I already know you have. My shirt stays on." Wyatt said
firmly.

"Cain, you don't have to hide it from me."

"Hide what? You're not making any sense Zipperhead."

"Oh cripes. This!" Glitch took off his torn jacket and pulled up his shirt sleeve to reveal the same
tattoo as Wyatt's and DG's on his own arm. "I don't know why I didn't see it before," Glitch went
on. "You were on the Mystic Man's protection detail. It made sense that he would have named you
his successor. You have the dragon on your shoulder, don't you?"

"Yeah. You?"

"No. My training wasn't completed. My master betrayed the order when he joined Azkadellia."

"Who was your master?"

"General Lannot."

"Lannot was a Tin Man before I started but I didn't know he belonged to the order. He must've
been the Mystic Man's first apprentice. I was his second. How far did you get in your training?"

"I'm not sure."

"Once all this is over, your training needs to be completed."

"DG is marked too."
"I saw it. Her dragon tattoo is the same as mine although I have no idea who marked her and why. She shouldn't have either tattoo because she's never been trained. Nor should the dragon tattoos be alike."

"Her dragon is exactly the same as yours?"

"Yeah, why?"

Looks like you don't remember your Talon legends, Cain. And are you gonna be in for a shock when you do remember!

Glitch had barely been able to conceal his own when he first saw the image of the sleeping dragon on the young girl's shoulder while she was wearing the dress Demillo had given her. Even more bizarre, hers would disappear and reappear at random but the meaning was the same. If Cain's tattoo was exactly the same as DG's, it meant they were the Talons prophesied as being bound not only to each other as mates but also to the OZ as its heart. It was now his duty as an apprentice to protect them at all costs. For now his purpose was to protect Cain and soon they would have to find DG. Then he would fight until his last breath to protect them both.

"She's marked to be no other Talon master's apprentice but yours," Glitch explained. It was only a half truth and he hoped that Cain didn't have enough magic in him to sense he was lying.

"The Mystic Man..." Wyatt muttered.

I want your word as a Tin Man. You will not leave her side at any cost.

You have my word.

"...For my word as a Talon is my bond," he went on. "He couldn't reveal me as a Talon in that room so he made me restate my vows as a Tin Man. And I have to honor them." He sat up and reached for his coat.

And I have to honor mine. My duty is to protect the South Guardian, Glitch thought.

He watched Cain tuck the toy horse back into the breast pocket of his shirt, another wave of memories flooding back. He saw himself fifteen years younger carrying DG as a small child over to a chair where a younger Wyatt Cain was sleeping and linking their hands, finding himself trapped outside a magic shield that formed over them and heard a female voice in his head...one that sounded just like DG did now.

"Bound now by the light are we, the heart of the OZ
One half is he, the other half me DG
Together we will stand against the dark
At full strength we are not, lacking our spark
Guard us well for this bond can be undone
We are only complete when in love two become one
The heart with our soul, we form a trinity
Through our heirs forever will we protect the OZ."
This was not going to be easy. Cain's House of Gale symbol was missing as was his magic and any memories he had of his past with DG signifying that he somehow severed their bond and paid a high price for it as the prophecy dictated. And they couldn't consummate their bond if that stubborn mule insisted on treating DG like a kid. She was the one who held the key to unlocking his memories and they had to find her before it was too late.

The Northern Island

Hours later

The travel storm deposited Archie and Elmer just outside the doors of the Northern Island palace. Archie went inside and ran up the stairs to the room he'd once shared with Azkadellia and sat down on the bed, his eyes filled with tears.

"It was colder than Alaska but we were so happy here," he croaked.

"Who?"

"Dellia and me."

Elmer gaped at him. "You and Azkadellia were lovers? But...but...but she's a helluva lot younger than you!"

"It was the will of the OZ Elmer but I don't love her because it was what the OZ wanted me to do. I love her because I choose to. And I'm getting her back. I have to reserve as much of my magic as I can from this moment on but it's a long journey to the tower. At least a few more days."

"Archie!"

Azkadellia appeared in the mirror.

"Dellia!"

"DG's been captured Archie and Bastinda tried having her read but Mother cloaked her memories with her magic. DG thinks it was me talking to her and not Bastinda. She won't help me," Az buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

"Then we'll do it alone. That's the way it's always been Dellia. You and me. I'm going to reserve as much of my magic as I can but I am getting that bitch out of you if it kills me!"

"Don't say that! Never say that...I wouldn't want to live without you!"

"Come to me tonight," he pleaded.

"Oh, I will...I will. I've missed you so much," she sobbed joyfully. "Who is he?"

"That's Elmer Gulch, Dellia. One of Jeb's Tin Man." She lowered her eyes. "What is it?"

"She killed him, Archie. I couldn't stop her..."

"I know. I know," he said soothingly. "I'll be waiting for you here."

Her image vanished.

"She's fighting her?"
"She always has but she can't do it alone. She needed her family and they all abandoned her. I was all she had for the longest time until she had to send me to the other side to protect the Strogoff heir but I'm tired of her being made to wait. This ends on the day of that damned eclipse. I want my wife back and nothing is gonna stop me. Rest up. We leave in the morning."

Come to me tonight.

He intended for their meeting to be in their dreams but it would not be enough, not after so many years of separation.

"Perika," she commanded softly. The mobat demon flew off her chest.

"We're going back to the Northern Island. I need to see my husband."

"Oh at last! And I will see my Pallux but what of your sister?"

Az smiled. "She'll be headed to Finaqua. My plan is working perfectly. She'll get the emerald, Bastinda will take it back and be exactly where we want her when Archie arrives."

"Surely she senses his presence."

"Ah but she doesn't because I am cloaking his aura from her. Come, let's go. I can't wait any longer."

She clapped her hands and vanished in a puff of smoke.

He was sleeping in their old bed, just as she knew he would be. He was older and the mustache and beard he'd kept during those years in exile had been shaved off years ago but underneath he was still the same. She pulled back the covers and slipped into bed beside him.

"Archie," she whispered softly.

"Dellia?" His eyes fluttered open. "Am I dreaming...or are you really here?"

"I'm here darling."

"I've waited so long for this. I love you Dellia," he moaned and pulled her to him, the years they'd been apart becoming nothing more than a distant memory as they rekindled the love they'd been denied with so much distance and time between them. As they reached the peak of their passion they were unaware of the golden light emitting from the pendant around Archie's neck and the ring on her finger, the light glowing brighter until it produced a powerful wave of magic that incinerated the closed double doors to the bedroom and shattered all the windows of the palace. Soon the light began to fade and the exhausted lovers drifted off to sleep.

A puff of amber smoke appeared in the room and a tall young girl with ginger hair stepped out of it.

"You conceived me on this day, all those years ago," Ambrosia said softly, pulling the covers up over them and gestured, the broken windows and doors to their chamber repaired and a warm fire burning in the hearth. "As you've done so again tonight." Her fingers touched the pendant around her father's neck. "We'll free her together, Daddy and we'll never be parted again, even in death!"

She leaned over and kissed their cheeks before she vanished.

Storybrooke
The thunderstorm seemed to come out of nowhere. Regina turned on the wipers and defrosters, slamming on the brakes when a car pulled out in front of her.

"You asshole!" she yelled. "When I find out who you are I'm gonna have your license revoked!"

But another sight left her uncertain whether her eyes were playing tricks on her or the dead had somehow managed to rise from the grave, but there he was staring at her and just as handsome as he'd been that final, tragic day when she was forced to watch while her mother crushed his heart into dust. Her love hadn't been a weakness only Cora would never understand that.

"D...Daniel!?"

When she looked again he was gone.

"It's not possible..."  

She turned down Mifflin Street and jumped out of the car, running like her life depended for it to her vault, telling herself that her mind had been playing tricks on her and Daniel was still in the vault where she left him. She moved her father's coffin and descended the stairs into her underground storage chambers. The glass casket was still there but Daniel's body was gone.

"No! NO!" she screamed. "That...that...damned GHOUL!" she snarled. There was only one other person who knew about Daniel and have a reason to take him and that was Dr. Whale. She stormed out of the vault ready to make certain Dr. Frankenstein couldn't put himself back together once she was done with him...and it wouldn't require the use of magic. Her Mercedes would do the job nicely. She drove downtown to the hospital hoping to find Whale in the autopsy room and stop him before he dared to desecrate the remains of her beloved.

"Dr. Whale?" she asked, opening the door. The room was a disaster and on the trolley lay a severed arm. She backed away, fighting back the urge to vomit. She pushed it aside and found an armless Whale lying on the floor.

"Whale? Whale? I know you took Daniel's body and you took one of my hearts. Why? Why?! Did you bring him back?"

"I did it."

"He's alive?"

"Yes. I brought him back but... He's not Daniel."

"What?"

"He's... He's a monster."

"You damn ghoul! What did you do? What did you do?" she sobbed.

"Regina, I swear to you...I didn't know..."

"Liar!" she growled and went upstairs to alert his staff that he needed attention.

"What's going on? I just got a call that Dr. Whale was attacked." Charming asked when he arrived at the hospital. Regina was in Whale's room while he slept. He'd been given emergency surgery to stop the bleeding on the stump and needed several transfusions to replace the blood he'd lost but they were at a loss as to how to reattach his arm.
"You'll have to ask his doctors."

"No. I am asking you."

"I came here to speak with him and discovered he was hurt. It's the truth!"

"What else? What did you come here to speak with him about?"

"Someone from my past. I believe he's come back. Daniel – his name is Daniel."

"The man you were supposed to marry. Snow told me what happened and… How it was her fault that he died."

"Yes, he did."

"Well, then how could he be back?"

"Whale. He believed he could bring him back from the grave and… I don't know how… But he has."

"You don't know how? Guess."

"He practices something more powerful than magic. Or, so I was told. All he needed was a heart, and he took one of mine."

"You have hearts here?"

"In my vault. From our land."

"Whose heart did he take?"

"I have no idea. I took so many, it was impossible to keep track. I need to go. I have to help him."

"No. Where is he? Look what he did – he's dangerous." Charming reminded her.

"Not to me. He won't hurt anyone else, David, I promise."

"You know I can't take that chance. You have two choices Regina – tell me where he is, or jail."

"I think it's like when you awoke from your coma. He's following his final thoughts to where he last met me – the stables."

"No. Henry. Henry's at the stables!"

"Oh my God!" Regina cried and ran out of the hospital with Charming at her heels. "Get in the car! Get in the damn car!" she screamed at him. He opened the door and jumped inside.

'Floor it!' he ordered.

He didn't need to ask her twice.

Henry was in the stall brushing his horse as he'd been instructed to do many times by his grandfather, eager to take him out for a ride but the horse it seemed was not yet ready.

"Gramps says that you'll tell me when I'm ready to ride you. So… Anytime. Like, soon?"

The horse suddenly pushed Henry down and raced out of the stable. Henry looked up to see a
strange looking man lingering at the doorway. It took him a moment or two to realize it was the stable boy from the book, his mother's dead fiancé Daniel.

But if he's dead, why is he here? he mused.

"You… You got to stop. You're… You're scaring the horses. A-Are… Are you hurt? Can I help you?"

He held out his hand and Daniel roared in anger, not seeing the innocent child but the evil witch that had caused his death by tearing out his heart.

"Let me help you."

Daniel seized the terrified by the neck and lifted him into the air. Henry gasped and struggled to free himself.

"Daniel! Let him go!" Regina cried when she ran into the stable with Charming behind her. Daniel released Henry and he fell to the ground. Charming grabbed his arm and pulled him out of the stable.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah," Henry coughed. "But...he...he's supposed to be dead..."

"Never mind that. Go. Go!"

Henry ran out of the stables and into his mother's car, diving into the backseat.

"It's true. You're really here." Regina said softly. He was covered in blood, his clothes were torn and dirty but he still looked like the man she loved, not a monster. Something had gone wrong with Whale's experiment. It was the only explanation for Daniel's sudden violence. The man she'd known and loved never harmed anyone.

He growled and lunged for her. Charming pushed her out of the stall and locked the door. They could hear a furious Daniel growling on the other side while he attempted to break it down.

"It won't hold for long. Can you cast a spell to subdue him?"

"No, I won't use magic on him."

Charming drew his gun from its holster.

"What do you think you're doing?!"

"He's a monster, Regina! If you won't put him down, I will!"

"David, please! Just let me talk to him; she pleaded desperately as she tried to hold him back.

"It's too big of a risk. There's no telling what he'll do."

"You have to at least give me a chance!"

"Out of the way, Regina! Now!" he ordered and shoved her out of the way.

"No! I won't let you hurt him! He'll listen to me! Please! Let me talk to my fiancé," she begged again and pulled David back.
She unlocked the door and stepped inside. Daniel seemed calmer, approaching her slowly. She held her breath as he raised his hand, longing to feel it caressing her cheek as he used to in their intimate moments. Her eyes widened with horror when it closed around her throat and he dragged her out of the stable and slammed against the wall.

"Daniel… Stop. It's me. I love you…" she sobbed.

"Regina…" He released her.

"Daniel…" She threw her arms around him, the stench of blood and death clinging to him but she didn't care. She would love him regardless.

"I can't believe it's really you."

He backed away, grimacing.

"Daniel?"

"Stop. Just stop the pain," He pleaded weakly.

"How?"

"Let me go. This heart...filled with so much pain and rage...I can't control it. I'll become the monster again. Please, let me go!"

"No. No, I won't lose you again. Without you, I'm lost."

"Daniel. Daniel, come back to me."

"Can't…"

"But I love you."

"Then love again."

His face contorted and he stalked toward her. She reached out a shaky hand and froze him, her vision blinded by her tears. She gestured and his body began to disappear until it was nothing but a pile of ashes at her feet.

"Goodbye, Daniel," she sobbed. She stood there for a few minutes before she swept up the ashes and conjured a small urn to place them in. Henry and Charming were waiting for her when she walked out of the stable.

"Mom...I'm sorry," Henry said softly.

"Oh, it's all right Henry," she murmured. "David...will you...take him with you tonight please. I...I need to be alone."

"Call me if you need me, okay Mom?" Henry pleaded.

"I will," she sniffled. "I will."

She could barely see the road when she drove back into town and barely remembered going inside the building until Archie opened his door to her persistent knocking.

"You're back."
"I used magic," she sniffled.

"Why don't you come in and tell me what happened?" he said softly and led her inside, shutting the door.

Oz (The Outer Zone)

The Fields of the Papay/The Northern Island

Jeb and Xenia walked into the Fields of the Papay. Jeb saw the body of a Papay runner on the ground in front of one of their own traps. He could see a single bullet hole in the animal's head, a bullet fired from his father's silver pistol. Once again he picked up the scents of pine, the rose, the corn and another that nearly made him gag.

"Are you all right?" Xenia cried.

"Brimstone," he murmured. He walked over to the tree where the Papay hunter trap remained and studied it. The scent of the brimstone was the strongest inside the trap that had been opened by a sharp object. The scent was mixed with pine...his father's scent and that of the rose.

"The scent of cowardice," Xenia spoke up.

"Father...you know better than to take a runner's dinner," Jeb said with a smile. "She must've talked you into it." He stepped back and picked up another scent, blood. He turned back to the runner's corpse seeing blood on its fangs, blood with the scent of pine. He looked up at Xenia. "He shot this one after it bit him."

They continued into the fields, spotting more Papay runner corpses felled by silver bullets from Wyatt's gun. The trail took them to the edge of the cliff. They opened their packs and took out some rope, tying it to the strongest tree they could find and began to climb down the cliff and jumped into the river below.

Outside the Tower Wyatt and Glitch were hiding in the hills. They needed a way to get inside but they were severely outnumbered if they staged an attack.

"...I'm not saying they called me twinkletoes but I cut quite a rug," Glitch rambled.

Remind me again how I ended up being part of this pointless conversation?

"Oh, you can make a face Cain but it's true. There was a time when I was a fantastic dancer."

And this is important now, why?

"She may have taken my brains but rhythm that comes directly..."

"Do you have any bright ideas how to get in there?" Wyatt demanded.

"I mean I don't mind taxing my half a brain for DG but I wish someone would acknowledge me for my rhythm. Which I was about to say before I was so rudely interrupted comes directly from the soul."

Are you done yet?

Wyatt asked, looking at him with a frown.

"Sometimes Cain you make me feel just like those ladies at the dance did. Like I blend right into
Wyatt watched a small group of Longcoats. Finally he'd been able to find something in those mad ramblings that actually made sense. "That's a good idea."

Glitch turned and saw that Wyatt was smiling. "Wanna dance?" he asked.

"I'll lead, you follow."

Jeb and Xenia picked up the trail on the shore and retrieved their horses. The trail led them to the cyborg village of Milltown and the residents were not too happy to find more humans invading their territory. As DG had before her, Xenia was able to calm their wrath by explaining that they were in search of the humans who had passed through the village before them.

"One of them was my brother and the other was his father," Xenia said, indicating Jeb. "Please, you must tell us where they were headed."

"The girlchild was to see the Mystic Man in Central City," Father Vue answered. "The man with the hat knew him. I believe he said he worked on his protection detail."

"Thank you," Jeb said softly as he and Xenia mounted their horses. They stopped just outside the gates of Central City. A group of Longcoats was still outside the gates inspecting vehicles.

"Someone had to have smuggled them in but who?" Xenia asked.

Jeb kneeled down and placed his palms in the dirt, bursting into laughter when he caught his father's scent and the scent of cheap cologne.

"Good one, Father."

"Jeb?"

"Demillo took him in."

"Antoine Demillo? The Whoremaster of Central City? Your father's an ex-Tin Man. How would he have gotten Demillo to sneak them in."

Jeb grinned. "My father had something on him that involved Zero's first wife. I remember him telling Mother about it once."

"Oh, well I can see how that would have made him squirm. Too bad he can't get us in too."

"Maybe he can...look!"

Another truck, this time blue with the same elaborate designs was making its way up the road. Jeb stepped out onto the road and stood there, forcing Demillo's mother to stop. The side door to the truck opened.

"Aww shit, not again! I swear Cain I'm gonna...who the hell are you?" Demillo demanded.

"A chip off the old block," Jeb answered. He grabbed Demillo and shoved him against the truck, unsheathed his sword and held the blade against the other man's neck. "Where is he, you son of a bitch? I know you got him into the city."

"Who are you?"
"I asked you a question first where is my father!"

Demillo groaned. It was bad enough dealing with Cain Senior but Junior was more scary. He actually had the look like he wanted to take that sword and slit his throat.

"He took my other truck and left."

"Where?"

"I don't know!"

"Think harder," Xenia growled as she took out her own sword and pointed it lower. "Or you can kiss your livelihood goodbye!"

"I swear I don't know. He didn't tell me."

"Well can you at least tell us what direction he was headed you pathetic piece of shit?" Jeb hissed.

"N...North." Demillo gasped.

"Looks like you're gonna be walking from here on out," Xenia said as she got in the truck and chased out the occupants. She started the vehicle.

"Not again!" Demillo moaned.

"You're gonna have to find another truck," Jeb said with a grin as he climbed into the passenger side. "Thanks for the ride!"

"You Cains are real assholes, you know that!" Demillo shouted.

"We aim to please," Jeb taunted as he and Xenia sped away.

The Longcoats were too busy paying attention to something they were watching on a portable monitor that they didn't see the two figures sneaking up behind them until they attacked.

For the first time Wyatt was able to see his new apprentice in action. Glitch did not yet have the skills to call on his inner dragon yet the martial arts techniques he demonstrated were a clear signal to his new master that he was at least partially ready for the trial.

"You're a deep well Glitch," he said proudly.

"It's all about rhythm," the younger man said confidently.

"Well, it seems that dancing you brag about does give you the ability to move faster." Wyatt tossed him a leather coat belonging to one of the unconscious troops while he donned the other one over his duster and they followed another group of soldiers into the Tower.

I have to get out of here! DG thought frantically. She held up her hand but her light didn't seem to be cooperating. A small squeak made her focus her attention to a small rat outside her cell, begging for food.

You want food, I want out of this cage. Let's make a deal, she thought as she reached into the bowl of what was the OZ's version of a decent prison meal...mashed up fruit. She tossed a piece of fruit out of the cell onto the ground. The rat scurried over to it, chewing eagerly.

There's more where that came from now be a good boy and fetch...
She threw another piece onto the ledge just above the crank that lowered the cell doors. The rat eagerly followed. She tossed another one onto the crank itself. The rat jumped on and a door opened...just not her own.

Shit!

She heard footsteps and a dog barking. The rat ran away with a terrified squeak.

"Hey!" she yelled at the dog.

You chased my key away asshole!

Still there was something oddly familiar about that dog. "Do I know you?"

The dog was now above the crank, pushing down with his paw in the opposite direction the rat did, opening the door to her cell. "Hey..." she said softly. "Thanks."

She could've sworn she heard it say 'you're welcome'. "My friend's this way," she said to it as she raced down the hall toward Raw's cell with the dog close at her heels. They finally found Raw's cell and let him out but when they saw two Longcoats coming around the corner, they hid, Raw holding a wrench in his hand. He slugged one of them on the head.

"Ow! That could bust a zipper!" Glitch cried as he glared at the viewer.

"Glitch!" Raw gasped.

"Hey there Princess," Wyatt called out.

"Cain, you're alive!" she cried as she threw her arms around him and held him tightly.

You have no idea how glad I am to see you!

Seeing how uncomfortable he was by their closeness but not being able to understand why she pulled away from him.

"Barely. Furrylips here really packs a punch," Glitch complained.

"We gotta get out of here!" DG cried.

"Well we can't go out the way we came in," Wyatt reminded her.

DG could see the dog running down the hallway and followed him with her friends behind her. They were now a few feet away from a huge machine, Wyatt acting as lookout. He motioned for Glitch to take his position on the other side of him. Raw crept up behind Wyatt, grabbing his shoulder.

You mind?

The alarms sounded and a group of Longcoats headed to the dungeons. The dog scurried out and DG chased after it much to Wyatt's irritation. The dog was leading them through the maze of a machine before it stopped.

"Which way?" DG asked it.

"You're taking directions from a dog?" Wyatt asked. Making matters worse, Glitch seemed to want to follow it too.
No way in hell I will.

"Longcoats!" Raw warned.

"I think he wants us to go in there," DG said as the dog was standing in what looked like a tunnel.

Got no choice now, do I?

"I think we better hurry," Wyatt finally agreed as they raced after it.

Through the windshield Xenia spotted something bright orange in the distance. She stopped the truck and she and Jeb got out.

"It's the other truck. Father!" Jeb called out over the howling wind.

"Ambrose!" Xenia yelled as they ran to the other truck and looked inside. It was deserted.

"Dammit, we missed them!" Jeb growled in frustration.

"Can you still pick up the trail?" Xenia asked hopefully.

"I'll try but we'll never be able to make it through the snow in the truck. See if you can find something we can wrap ourselves in."

They trudged through the snow, Jeb following the scents his father and his travelling companions had left behind. Suddenly they found themselves standing in front of an icy mountain.

"The Ice Palace..." Xenia breathed. "They're not supposed to be here now...unless..."

"Unless what?"

"Unless they've consummated their bond."

"Why would that bring them here?"

"This is where it must be done," Xenia explained. "At the curse's point of origin."

Jeb blushed. "I really don't want to catch my father in the middle of...doing that."

"It would have been done by now," Xenia said as she opened the double doors. There was nothing but silence.

"Father!" Jeb called out, his voice echoing throughout the halls. They ran up the stairs.

"Where was the curse's point of origin, Xenia?" he demanded. She led him to a bedroom at the end of the hall and opened the door. Jeb froze as he saw the broken stained glass window and smelled blood.

"No...no...please don't be his..." he moaned. He kneeled on the floor and touched the fading drops of blood on the marble floor, the scent of pine mixed with it. He stood up and gazed down at the lake. There was a hole in the ice where someone had fallen through, condemned to an icy grave. The young man sank back to his knees, sobbing. He barely felt Xenia's hand on his shoulder. He couldn't feel anything anymore. He'd been a fool to hold on to hope. It only led to heartbreak.
Five days prior to the Double Eclipse

DG thought she had already learned that things were not always what they seemed in the OZ but even she was stunned when their canine guide transformed into a human right before her eyes.

Toto hadn't seen his young student in fifteen years. She'd grown up to be a very beautiful young lady and also would be a very powerful one with his guidance and she had an interesting set of travelling companions, two he knew well. One was Ambrose Benu, Lavinia's advisor and the second was Wyatt Cain, the now Grand Master of the Talons of the Dragon, also her bondmate. He only knew Raw from the wanted poster he carried in his coat. As he faced the small group, he felt Wyatt Cain's dragon spirit clash with his canine one as Wyatt pulled DG back.

Harm her and you will face my wrath, it warned.

"It's okay. I'm a friend of your mother's. She sent me to help. We'd better go. We have an emerald to find."

"Well we're not going anywhere til we get rid of these coats, pooch or unless I say so," Wyatt snapped, clearly acting like someone was invading his territory. DG glared at him.

Oh for God's sake you're acting like a dog in front of a fire hydrant. Are we going to have to hold a pissing contest now?

"What?" Wyatt asked her when he noticed the angry frown.

"You planning on marking your territory next Tin Man?" she demanded while the others watched them, Glitch grinning from ear to ear. Oddly enough their fighting was actually starting to strengthen their bond.

"What does that mean?"

"Don't play dumb with me. You know exactly what it means."

"Well if we're gonna hash this out, we're doing it in private!" Wyatt growled as he grabbed DG's arm and led her away from the others.

Toto glanced over at Glitch. "Shouldn't we...?"

"Nah, this is normal."

"Okay kiddo, you want to explain to me what that was all about?" Wyatt inquired, hands on his hips. DG, not in the least bit afraid of him while he was in Tin Man mode, crossed her arms over her breasts and gave him a look that was as cold as his was to her.

"You!" she yelled. "That guy just helped us escape hell and you're acting like a dog that is jealous that someone is invading his territory. What's next? A pissing contest?"

"The things that come out of your mouth..." he muttered.
"Well this alpha male shit you have going on is annoying me. Should just put you in a cave wearing just a loincloth and a big club."

Now where have you heard that one before, Wyatt? Oh, now you remember. Didn't Adora get pissed at you for acting like that with her?

One incident in particular stuck out. They were sixteen and Adora got asked to go to the school dance. Wyatt's feelings for her had changed that year but he couldn't work up the courage to finally tell her and when she told him another boy was taking her to the dance, he made it look and sound like he was happy for her. Deep down what he really wanted to do was knock the other boy into next week. He finally decided to ask another girl to go to the dance with him but they were both miserable. When he caught the boy trying to kiss Adora, his temper got the best of him and he walked over to them ready to fight. Adora was furious with him and took him outside.

"What the hell was that about?" she snapped.

"He's no good for you!" Wyatt shot back.

"I'll decide who's good for me or not, Wyatt Cain. You do this with every guy who tries to court me. If you want me for yourself, why don't you just come right out and say it!" she challenged.

Wyatt had always been a firm believer that actions spoke louder than words but the women in his life seemed to have a hard time understanding that.

"Look, kiddo, we don't know who this guy is. He says he's a friend of your mother's but I'm not going to take that at face value, nor should you," he said calmly.

"Well I'm willing to go on a little faith here," she said as she walked away leaving him shaking his head.

"She's going to be the death of me," he muttered.

"Everything okay?" Glitch asked her.

"For now," she said.

Wyatt and Glitch tossed the leather coats into the bushes. "You ready kid?" he asked DG when he saw her staring up at the tower.

"Yeah," she said wistfully. "That machine that we escaped through, the Mystic Man said that she was going to use it to destroy the OZ."

"Wait a second...you saw the Mystic Man?"

DG looked up at him and took his hand. "He's dead...she killed him."

Wyatt turned his head away. Damn you, old man! Why didn't you leave with us like I wanted you to?

"He said that she needs the emerald to make the machine work," DG was saying.

"That's interesting. How?" Glitch asked, curious.

"Folks, I suggest we keep moving," Toto spoke up.

What did I just say, dog breath? Wyatt thought angrily. "Sorry pooch, but this is where we part
"company," he said firmly. He didn't trust this thing and he wanted to get it the hell away from them.

"Part?"

"With the Longcoats on our tail and the mobats in the sky, I don't have time to figure out what your angle is in all this."

"My angle is her mother sent me to help."

"And you did. I'd even thank you for what you did back there if I knew who you were. Or what!"

Oooohhh dammit Tin Man! Didn't we just have a discussion about this? DG wanted to strangle him.

Glitch, fearing the two men would soon come to blows, stepped between them. He knew as an apprentice he should be showing respect to his master and he could feel Cain calling on his dragon's spirit and getting ready to attack but he also knew that the fighting was hurting DG. He had to calm the dragon's wrath before it spiraled out of control.

"Whoa, Mr. Suspicious! This is the man...dog...who helped us escape!" he pointed out.

"Shapeshifter," Raw spoke up. He too could feel the dragon's rage building and realized Glitch would not be able to calm him alone.

"Yes!" Glitch confirmed.

"Yes Mr. Raw," Sidney said softly.

"He knew your name," Glitch said worriedly.

Maybe Cain has a point after all! "How did you know his name?"

The master and the apprentice, now sharing the same fears focused their icy stares on the shapeshifter. "You're all quite famous in the OZ and in high demand...dead or alive." He took out the wanted poster. "Now look, I'm sorry if I scared any of you back there but there's never really a great time for the whole beast into man moment. I just...whoom...and hope for the best."

"I don't know," DG said softly as she looked at Wyatt.

I'm sorry I doubted you.

"You're still a stranger."

"Am I?" Toto reached into his pocket. Wyatt reached for his pistol, relaxing his grip when he saw the small doll the other man held in his hand. "Let's just see about that."

"Hey, that's mine!" DG cried.

"It was yours when you were a child," he confirmed.

DG held out her hand and the doll began to spin in the air, moving toward her. The others watched, astounded. "Am I really doing this?"

"Indeed you are. Magic is in your blood. Let it shine a light on your past so that you may better face your future."
And as you rediscover yourself, he will do the same as you are his light as he is yours.

"Now concentrate DG..concentrate!" he instructed.

DG closed her eyes, a memory appearing. She was trying to make her doll fly but it wouldn't. Finally Azkadellia stood up and approached her, taking her hand. A bright light glowed and the doll began to spin.

"Toto. You were our tutor."

"Before you were sent over to the other side your mother put a spell on all your memories in case you were ever taken into the wrong hands."

"So I've been told," she muttered.

"She sent me to help you reawaken them and what you're going to need to find the Grey Gale and the emerald of the eclipse."

"Wait, how did you see her if she's in Azkadellia's prison?"

Wyatt gave him a cold stare. Toto was nervous and found it difficult to hide. "She came to me...in a dream but she's growing weaker and weaker. There's no time to waste."

Raw and Glitch looked at Wyatt. He looked at DG. The poor kid actually trusted the guy but he still suspected the dog man was lying through his teeth. He would have to keep a close eye on him.

"Mystic Man said to head south."

"Then that's exactly what we should do. Don't you think Cain, south?" Glitch asked as he licked his thumb and tested the direction of the wind. He started walking but in the wrong direction. Wyatt pulled him back and pointed in the correct direction.

"Unfortunately the only route to the South leads through the Fields of the Papay," he grumbled.

"Papay..." Raw panicked and followed the others. Once they were out of sight Toto tossed a viewing disk onto the ground and started after them.

The Northern Island

Archie awoke early the following morning expecting to be alone as he often was but he could feel his wife's breath on his shoulder while she slept.

Lurline, I beg you, let her still be in control, he prayed and reached out to caress her cheek. She opened her eyes slowly and smiled up at him.

"Dellia?" he inquired hesitantly. She raised her head and kissed him.

"Give me a little more time with you," she pleaded.

"Oh Dellia," he whispered and kissed her back, more than willing to give her all the time, all of him that she wanted.

Elmer awoke shivering. He crawled out of bed and was shocked to see broken glass on the floor of the bedroom he now occupied and glanced up to see that all the windows had been broken. He threw on his clothes and raced down the hall to the bedroom Archie now occupied only to find it locked. He drew his gun and started shooting at it.
"Elmer, for Lurline's sake will you please STOP SHOOTING!" Archie yelled and jumped out of bed. Az was giggling as she sat on the edge of the bed, the blankets wrapped around her while she watched him struggling to put his pants back on. "This isn't funny!" he cried.

"What the hell happened? All the windows in here are broken!"

Archie opened the door a crack. "I don't know how they got broken but mine are fine."

"I heard something...are you okay?"

Az laughed again.

"I'm fine."

"No you're not." Elmer kicked the door open and his mouth dropped open to find Azkadellia on the bed with only the blankets covering her. "Holy crow! What's SHE doing here!" He raised the gun.

"Elmer Gulch, you fire that gun and I'll blast you into the lake!" Archie snarled.

"It's the Sorceress!"

"No, it's Azkadellia! She's in control but won't be for long!"

"Elmer, would you please wait out in the hall until we finish getting dressed?" Az asked calmly.

"Umm...yeah...Jiminy Crickets..." he muttered.

"Watch it!" Archie snapped. "You know I hate that expression!"

Elmer shook his head and ran out of the bedroom like his feet were on fire. Az lay back on the bed and burst into laughter.

"Did you see his face? Oh Archie..." she giggled.

"Dellia! He almost walked in on us..."

"If he's smart...he'll stay where he is until we come for him." She got out of bed with the blanket still wrapped around her and walked over to the door and let the blanket fall to the floor as wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him. "Now, where we we?"

He swung her up in his arms and carried her back to bed.

Elmer amused himself by playing fetch with Pongo and Perika in the Dalmatian forms in the sitting room, once in a while glancing up the clock. It was almost noon and Archie hadn't come downstairs yet.

Then again, if I had a beautiful woman waitin in my bed, I wouldn't either, he thought with a grin. That 'said' woman was the possessed Princess Azkadellia was still hard to fathom but Commander Ozopov had always been a level headed man and he wouldn't fall for the witch's tricks like everyone else. DG certainly had her work cut out for her.

"We're going to have to use that broken down truck to get out of here," Archie said from the doorway, Azkadellia at his side. She was blushing.

"I ahhh...sorry I busted in on you," Elmer said sheepishly. "I didn't know there are times when you...aahh, never mind."
"Archie is the only one who knows the difference," Az said. "But I don't have much time. It'll take too long to repair the truck if you do it yourselves."

"You're thinking, Dellia. What is it?"

She gestured and teleported them outside then repaired the truck her magic. "DG is safe in Mr. Cain's hands. Archie, head straight for the Tower. When you get there no one will see you because your presence will be cloaked."

"Dellia, you know how much energy a cloaking spell takes!" Archie protested.

"I do...but you can't use yours to cast it. I need you at full strength when we face her. Reserve every bit of it you can. I have to go before she breaks through." She cupped Archie's face in her hands and kissed him. "I love you...and I'll wait for you."

"I love you, Dellia."

She clapped her hands and vanished.

"Man, that has to be hell."

"You have no idea. Come on. We've gotta get moving."

Inside the truck he took off his coat and unbuttoned his shirt as Pongo and Perika took their demon forms and disappeared onto his chest as a tattoo.

The Tower

Zero was pissed. He stormed through the Tower halls wanting to kill anything and everything in his path. Just once he wanted to have the upper hand with Wyatt Cain but somehow the man always bested him. He seized the witch's advisor Vy-Sor.

"I should kill you!"

"Shhhh, she's in conference!"

"My men just told me Wyatt Cain is alive and was here. If she finds out..."

"Finds out what? That you're utterly incapable of putting one man in his grave?" the witch said icily as she faced her destroyer.

"I shot him out a window into a freezing lake. The man's got nine lives."

"He's not the only one," she threatened. The mobat demon Zora flew onto the balcony, handing the witch the viewing disk she'd picked up from where Toto dropped it. "Zora, that's my girl," she said affectionately. She placed the disk in the machine and watched as the travelers started heading south.

"She's heading south."

"My men will blitz the area immediately."

"No, they won't."

"You have them dead to rights and you don't want to take her?"

"No. I want her to lead me straight to the emerald."
Zero watched the tutor drop the disk through the viewing tank. "You planted a spy." The Sorceress never failed to impress him.

"Just keeping an eye on her as any concerned big sister would. I want you to shadow her...don't get too close. Think you can handle a little restraint, Zero?"

Dammit! He wanted to take them and when he did, he would force Cain to watch while he had his way with the girl and then he would kill him and her. He would restrain himself...for now...but sooner there would come a time when not even the Sorceress would be able to stop him from having his revenge.

Resistance Headquarters

The Lowlands

Dagon was waiting for Jeb and Xenia when they returned to the camp but Dagon noticed that his commander was not in a talking mood. The younger man retreated to his tent.

"I am Xenia Benu, Jeb Cain's guardian," she said to him.

"What's wrong?"

"We went back to his childhood home and found the suit his father had been locked in...opened."

"Sweet Ozma, he's alive?"

"We lost the trail in the North," Xenia said sadly. "Jeb believes his father is dead but I am not so sure. He won't be ready to talk for a while but I'd like you to bring me up to speed on what is going on here so that I may serve you effectively."

"You're joining...?"

"She is," Jeb said from behind them. "The Benu are the strongest of the warriors from Lurline's temple. What reports do you have?"

"Not many since you left, sir, however there is something we just learned from one of our spies in the tower. It appears the Sorceress is having a little trouble keeping her prisoners again. There was another breakout."

"Who?" Jeb asked, his curiosity aroused.

"The viewer Raw, the princess Dorothia and Toto. Two men posed as Longcoats got them out but they weren't from our resistance cell."

"What did they look like?" Jeb demanded.

Was it possible...?

"One of them was wearing a hat, we know that for sure and the other was a headcase."

"Oh Jeb! It was my brother and your father!" Xenia cried.

"Did your source find out which direction they were headed?" Jeb asked Dagon.

"South."
"We need to send an alert out to all the safe houses there to put the horse out to pasture. If my father is heading in that direction he'll need to find a safe house. The blue smoke was the original resistance signal and it'll be the only one he'll remember. The oldest fighters still use it. He should also remember the old code words too, I hope."

"What does 'put the horse out to pasture' mean?" Xenia asked him. Jeb led them into his tent where she noticed several toy horse carvings on a table.

"This is my signal to him. He should still have the toy horse he made for me. I've left them at every safe house my mother and I have stopped at across the OZ. If he gets to one of them and sees the horse he'll know I'm looking for him."

"I'll see to it right away," Dagon said as he hurried off.

"I told you Jeb. What do you want to do? Should we try to go after them again?"

He shook his head. "I can't get my hopes again Xenia. The only thing we can do now is pray to Lurline that he'll find us. I know you want to find your brother too but we're not the only ones looking for them."

"Which is exactly why we should go after them!" Xenia insisted. "A troop of Longcoats can outnumber them easily. Your father and my brother are good fighters but they won't be able to take them alone." She mounted her horse.

"You're insane! You can't take out a whole troop of Longcoats by yourself either!" Jeb growled. "Now you get down off that horse or I'll drag you off."

"I'd like to see you try it," she challenged. He grabbed her by her hips and pulled her off the horse. She screamed and kicked at him, the noise alerting the rest of his soldiers. They stood and watched the show, amused. No one else dared to oppose Jeb Cain's authority before but the red haired Temple of Lurline guardian wasn't in the least bit afraid of him.

"Put me down, you son of a bitch or I'll slice off something you'll miss a lot!" Xenia threatened.

"Like watchin' his mom and dad, ain't it?" one of the older troops asked his female counterpart.

She grinned. "I'm just waitin for them to end up in bed. That's what his mom and dad always did after they fought," she reminded him and they laughed.

Jeb set Xenia down on her feet and glared at his troops. "Don't you assholes have better things to do than stand there? Move it!" he barked. The crowd quickly disbanded. Xenia was still furious with him but if she left on her own, she was violating her own oath to protect him and her parents would never forgive her for it. She glared at him one last time before she headed off to the women's tent. All she could do now was hope Jeb's father found his son's signal and led them all back to where she and Jeb were waiting.

The Fields of the Papay

"Hunter parties are around. Stay sharp!" Wyatt warned as they once again found themselves in the desolate fields the Papay called their home. Raw was holding a sharpened stick for protection.

"Did it always look so...dead?" DG asked Wyatt.

"No. This used to be some of the most fertile land in the OZ. Orchards, nurseries," he answered.
"Gotta love a good orchard. Full of succulent fruit for all the people to eat. Free too if you're a good fence climber. Mind you those scarecrows kinda freak me out!" Glitch rambled.

"So what happened?" DG was curious to learn everything Wyatt knew about the place they all feared so much.

"About fifteen annuals ago all the crops died which then caused a great famine."

"I bet I can guess who was responsible," DG said bitterly.

"Yeah."

"You'd think someone would've helped them with their crops," Glitch said and stopped. A vision of him sitting at a table sketching a machine appeared in his mind. "Maybe engineered a do hickey with a couple of thingys..." Then the image vanished as his synapses misfired again. "Gotta love a good orchard." He ran to keep up with the group.

"Papay once peaceful," Raw said softly.

"Yeah well the only piece they're interested in is a piece of us!"

"Were farmers, now hunters."

"No wonder they're desperate. They don't have any food." DG suddenly felt sympathetic to the creatures even though they'd bitten Wyatt and scared them half to death the first time they saw them.

Wyatt heard a screech. "Shhh...runner scouts. They're signaling to the others."

A pack of runners started toward them. "Run!" DG screamed only they found the pack waiting for them. Wyatt raised his gun and when he heard the click of an empty chamber he was now terrified. He laughed nervously.

You ass! Why the hell didn't you load it before you came through here! Looks like you're going to be the main course for their banquet.

"Good boys..."

Like that's gonna do any good. They see you, they see fresh meat.

The runners moved closer. He could already see them salivating. "Good boys..."

"It's almost dinnertime," Glitch said shakily. He, Raw, Sidney and DG were backed against the tree. Wyatt stood in front of them. He could try to reload the pistol but the runners would have him torn apart before he got the chance.

"DG...use your gift!" Toto instructed.

"To do what!" she cried.

"Focus, DG. You've got it in you! C'mon."

"I don't know how!"

"Just focus!"
The cool blue waters of a lake were always the first thing she saw now when she tried to call on her light. She could feel her marked palm glowing but when she opened her eyes the runners were still approaching.

"It isn't working," she moaned as she pressed up against a tree, a golden hue appearing on the bark and traveling up to the dead branches. Suddenly the runners bowed as a show of respect.

"Why are they bowing?" Glitch asked.

Is this normal for them to salute their supper?

"Thanking us," Raw explained.

Wyatt looked up and to his amazement he could see flowers and fruit blooming on the trees. "That is one heck of a defense kid," he said proudly. "Let's get out of here. Easy...thank you," he said as he took his hat of to the runners, giving them equal respect for not harming them. He had a feeling the kid had just earned herself some allies if she ever got in a pinch there again.

DG followed close behind him, feeling as if she were floating on air. For the first time on this trip together he seemed to be pleased with something she'd done and it felt wonderful.

I wasn't trying to impress him...I was trying to save our asses.

Oh, but seeing the look on his face certainly brightened your day, didn't it? Especially since when you hugged him in the tower he was trying to back away from you like you had a disease.

He wasn't the first person she met who was like that. Some people just didn't feel comfortable being touched and in her experience it was because of some sort of trauma they'd suffered in the past. She had been like that for months after prom night. Being locked up in the suit was enough trauma to cause him to be leery of physical contact but she suspected there were some scars that ran deeper than the years in the tin suit. It wasn't going to stop her from trying to reach out to him.

The Tower

Azkadellia's dreams took her back to the day when her possession began. She could see DG running out of the cave and back to the gazebo where her mother sat reading a book. The queen gathered the sobbing child into her arms and comforted her.

"DG my darling, you're shaking like a leaf. What's wrong?"

"A...Az...she fell and I let go..." the child sobbed.

"What are you talking about. There's Az right there."

But the young girl coming toward them was not Azkadellia. Now bearing a mobat tattoo on her shoulder, they were now in the presence in the most powerful force of evil in all the OZ.

Azkadellia awakened with a gasp. She walked slowly toward the mirror and studied her own reflection, no longer recognizing the woman looking back at her.

Part of me died that day. Why can't I go back and make it right?

You never will. You belong to me!

The witch's face appeared in the mirror. Azkadellia screamed. Suddenly she felt a hand on her shoulder.
"Archie," she moaned, rubbing her cheek against against it. "You're here..."

"I don't know what you did to that truck but it got us here faster than I expected. Elmer's out in the hall keeping watch. No one knows we're here."

"Stay with me tonight...help me keep her away a little while longer..."

He lifted her out of her chair and carried her back to her bed. She waved her hand and cast a locking spell on the doors to her chamber. No one would dare intrude on her time with the man she loved.

"Dellia, darling, you should stop using so much magic," he advised. "We'll all need to be at full strength during the eclipse. The cloaking spell you have on me is already draining you!"

"I won't let her find you!" she cried fiercely. "You are the only person keeping my heart alive and I will NOT let her take you from me again!"

"She'd have to kill me first," he vowed.

They prayed with all their hearts it would never come to that.

The Forest

While the others carried on their own conversations, Wyatt kept watch over his young charge while she slept on his coat. She sat up, the expression her face a mix of terror and confusion.

"Are you okay?" he asked softly.

"Yeah," she said breathlessly.

"You look like you were having a nightmare," Glitch said. "A bad one."

"DG dream of Azkadellia?" Raw inquired.

"Yeah," DG confirmed. "She told me once that we were friends when we were little and I didn't believe her but now I'm not so sure."

"Maybe your dream's trying to tell you something," Toto spoke up.

DG stood up. She could feel Wyatt's eyes on her and the fears she'd had when she first woke up began to fade and she started to recall more about her dream.

"In the dream I'm scared and my mother is rocking me on a swing in a special place. A beautiful place by a lake."

"Well there's about a hundred lakes just south of here," he said.

"DG know which lake," Raw said to her as he stood up.

"No I don't."

Now it was Glitch's turn to stand. "You do DG, because you were there before as a little girl. Try. What was it like?"

"It was..." She could see several images in her mind...skipping stones across blue waters, running through tall hedges. "Magical." She looked at Wyatt. With waters as blue as your eyes.
Wyatt got to his feet and put on his duster. "To get to Lake Country we'll have to cut across the crack in the OZ. This ain't gonna be easy," he warned.

Nothing ever is, she thought.

What's wrong with me? I'm supposed to be remembering my past and when I do, he sometimes pops into my mind one way or another. Lake waters have nothing to do with his eye color.

More bizarre was the feeling she had the moment her head was resting on his coat. It was as if she could feel him beside her, his arms wrapped around her protectively although he was a few feet away from her, his gaze never leaving her.

They started walking again, Wyatt in the lead as always with her right beside him while the others trailed them, Glitch and Raw feeling that something was happening between their friends.

DG remembering love for Tin Man. Making memories come back and magic stronger. Tin Man feel protective of DG.

It's his dragon's spirit trying to help him remember she's his mate but there's a lock on his heart's memories just like there's a lock on hers.

How you able to talk to me in head? Raw thought back to Glitch.

It's a skill every Talon of the Dragon learns. Cain should be able to do it too but he doesn't remember how.

Can Tin Man and DG hear us?

No. They will only be able to hear us if we want them too. Same with Toto. We have to keep an eye on him Raw. Cain's right. Something's off about him.

Dragon apprentice and Raw protect DG and Tin Man together?

We have to, Raw now that we both know who they are.

Azkadellia let us out of Tower to find and protect. She trying to fight witch but not strong enough.

Yes but we need to help DG get her magic back so she can free Azkadellia from the witch.

Azkadellia needs sister and lover to make her strong again.

Jiminy...but..but he's dead?

Azkadellia lover still lives. Came back to her. Azkadellia using magic to hide him from witch.

"I think that's the longest the zipperhead's been quiet," they heard Wyatt quip and DG swatted at him.

"Be nice," she scolded as she walked over to the others. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, Deege," he assured. Then his synapses began to misfire again. "Can't we rest?" he asked.

"No time. We've got to get to Finaqua," Toto said.

Glitch spotted something on the ground and kneeled down to see a rotten apple. He picked it up, gasped from the smell of decay. "I'd give my last synapse for a juicy apple," he said softly and
threw it away.

DG picked it up. "Apples!" Wyatt turned around, his eyes on hers again.

"What is it?" Toto asked which Glitch and Raw watched intently.

"Something Azkadellia said..."

We'd explore the woods...gather apples.

She saw herself as a child again in the woods collecting apples just as Azkadellia said they did back at the Tower. DG had tricked one of the trees to throw fruit at them just the scarecrow, her ancestress's protector had done centuries before. A large bear came running toward them. Azkadellia gripped her sister's hand in hers and held it tight.

"Just hold my hand Deege. Nothing can hurt us if we stay together!" she instructed as the light pulsed through them, forcing the bear to retreat.

"Azkadellia, what happened to you?" DG pondered aloud. How had the sister who loved and protected her so fiercely once turned into a cold blooded, ruthless killer?

"Hey kiddo? Are you coming?" Wyatt called out.

"Yeah." she said as she hurried after him, dropping the apple onto the ground.

When the dragon calls to his mate, she will always answer, Glitch thought.

They found themselves standing on the edge of a cliff overlooking a river while a group of Longcoats stood on a bridge.

"We're not getting past them in broad daylight." Wyatt said.

"The eclipse is almost upon us, we don't have time to waste," Toto reminded him.

"Look quick and dead might be okay with you, dog man but I'll take slow and breathin' any time. Even then, we're gonna need some help."

"Cabin!" Raw pointed out.

A resistance safe house! Wyatt thought with relief as he saw the blue smoke rising from the chimney. He began to remember something from his days as the resistance's leader.

He, Adora and Boiling Belle were in her kitchen as she was preparing another of her lethal stews. "We gotta find someplace to hole up til we move on those Longcoats," he was saying.

"Problem is we don't know who's with us and who's with them," Annabelle spoke up.

"Maybe if we had some kind of signal..." Adora suggested.

"Good idea!" Wyatt cried excitedly.

"Ahhh, dammit, how'd that get in there!" Annabelle growled as the smoke from her pot turned blue. "I thought I told Sarah Jane not to be messin with my pots."

"How'd you end up with that blue smoke, Belle?"
"My granddaughter must've left her drawing sticks in there again and the heat melted 'em."

"Ozma's ghost, that's it!" Wyatt exclaimed.

"What?" the women asked in unison.

"We'll use blue smoke as our signal. You think Sarah Jane'll let us borrow more of her drawing sticks?" Wyatt asked Belle.

"She ain't gonna get much of a say in it," Belle replied with a smirk.

"Adora, I want you to put the word out: no one is to go near a house that isn't blowin' out blue smoke," Wyatt commanded and then stopped her. "That may not be enough though. We'll need some kind of code to go along with to make sure no one walks into a trap." He looked down at the liquid boiling in Belle's pot over the fireplace. "Something to do with heat...May your hearth be warm and your smoke be blue..." he murmured.

"That's perfect, honey." Adora said. "Should I go now?"

"Yes. That's the signal. Blue smoke and those words...in that order."

The travelers headed toward the house and were immediately confronted with a couple bearing shotguns. "State your business," the man demanded.

"We mean you no harm," Wyatt began calmly. "We're travelers of the realms seeking a warm meal and a cold cup of grog."

"Food is scarce this time of year and the grog has long since been seized."

"Then we will leave you peace. May your hearth be warm..."

"And your smoke be blue. Come in, quickly."

"Thank you for your help." Wyatt said once they were inside.

"I'm Ralph. That's my wife, Lorraine."

"Put your gun on the table," Lorraine ordered.

"They're friends, Lorraine," Ralph advised his wife.

"No such thing anymore." she muttered.

Wyatt had to agree with her. He'd seen enough friends betray each other to last a lifetime. "It's okay. We just need shelter til it's safe to cross," He placed the silver pistol on the table.

"it's never safe but the cover of night will help. Until then sit, rest." Ralph said gently.

Lorraine seized the pistol, horrified when she saw a door open in the wall. "Get back in there!" she hissed, slamming the door shut.

"Let us show some trust," Ralph pleaded. "It's all right children," he said as he opened the door. "Come out." A boy and a girl emerged from their hiding place.

Just like me and Adora used to do, Wyatt thought as he remembered the many times he and Adora concealed their son behind walls and under the floors of the many safehouses they'd been smuggled
into across the OZ.

DG's heart went out to the frightened children. She smiled. "Hey there." The boy seemed to relax a bit.

She'll make a good mother one of these days although the man who marries her is gonna have his hands full.

Everyone was more at ease after dinner. "What news from the resistance in the east?" Ralph asked them.

"I was hoping you would tell us," Wyatt said while he was pacing near the windows keeping watch while the others were gathered at the table.

"Do you know anything about a machine Azkadellia is building?" DG inquired.

"Only rumors. We helped a captain from the Lowlands. All he said was that Azkadellia was pushing the miners and metalworkers til they dropped."

"What mine?" Wyatt stopped his pacing.

"A mine in the Black Mountains."

"Moratanium," Glitch piped up. "Big M, little. Number 216 in the Ozian Periodic Table. Ha ha...school days. I remember a lovely lass named Leona..."

"Moaritanium, what's it for?" DG placed her hand on Glitch's arm to keep him focused.

"Besides its strength moraritanium is known for its ability to conduct magical energy."

"So if she gets a hold of the emerald she can focus the power however she wants."

"Not unless we get to it first," Toto said.

"So it's a weapon?" Wyatt asked.

"No, it's a sun seeder," Glitch said.

"What's a sun seeder?" DG demanded.

"I don't know but it sounds cool." Glitch misfired again. "Wait...I invented it."

"Well what's it used for?"

"I can't remember...I can't remember."

Frustrated, she stood up. "I'm sorry. We don't have time for this. We have to know. Raw, we need you to read him."

"Cain?" Glitch pleaded.

"Do it," he ordered the viewer.

They moved into the living room and made Glitch sit in a chair by the fireplace while Raw stood over him. Above the mantel a small mirror hung.

"Glitch, if Azkadellia is building a machine you designed you may be the key to stopping her." DG
said softly as she kneeled beside him.

Raw placed his hand on the mirror and they all watched in horror as Azkadellia and her troops seized him and the queen, strapping him to a table and removing his brain to extract the powerful knowledge it held.

When Raw released him he looked up at DG and saw that she was close to tears.

"Are you okay?"

"Yes Glitch, I'm fine."

"What? Is my machine so bad?" he asked.

"No, but whatever it is you sure sacrificed a lot to stop Azkadellia," Wyatt said softly having deeper respect now for his apprentice. As they were getting ready to leave, Wyatt spotted DG standing off by herself, her head bowed. He didn't have to look to know she was crying and there was nothing he couldn't stand to see more than a woman crying.

"You okay?"

"I'm disappointed in myself. My mother gave up her power to bring me back to life and that's how Azkadellia was able to take over," she sobbed.

"You know kiddo there are some things in life that are just out of our control. And we need you."

He turned her around and they were now facing each other, her eyes meeting his, his hands on her shoulders. "You gotta let it go. C'mon."

You need me. I need you too but you don't let me get close, only when you feel you have to, she thought as she walked away.

Wyatt felt his heart jump into his throat when he spotted a small toy horse on the table in front of him. "Where did you get this?" he demanded of Ralph as he held the horse up.

"We should go," Ralph insisted.

"Where did you get this?" Wyatt pursued as he took his own out of his breast pocket with the silver bullet still in it and held them side by side.

"A resistance fighter made it for my son. He came through here a couple months back with his mother. Their names were..."

"Jeb...and Adora. My family. They really are alive." he said his voice filled with hope while on the other side of the room a heart feeling the first flames of a love renewed burning again shattered into cold, icy pieces.

He'll never need me again. He has her and once he finds her, I won't even be a memory.

Why do I even care? He's just a friend and he deserves to be happy with his family again.

Is he, DG?

I'll be fine without him.

Will you? When he finds her can you do it, DG? Can you let him go or will you fight to keep him?
Why the hell does it matter?

It does. A real woman fights for what she loves.

What the hell does love have to do with it? He's my friend. I don't love him...that way!

Don't you?

We barely know each other and he's a lot older than me. It wouldn't work. Let's just forget about it! He'll be gone soon anyway and it won't matter anymore.

"Deege, are you okay?" Glitch asked her as he walked beside her.

"Yeah."

"You sure."

"Ummm hmmm," she murmured.

Glitch sensed she was hiding something and went in search of Raw.

What happened?

DG find out Tin Man wife and son may be alive.

WHAT? His wife? Are you sure?

Heard Ralph say they come by here.

But...I heard rumors Adora Cain was executed in Central City square months ago.

Longcoats probably lie to weaken resistance.

If Adora Cain is alive he'll go back to her and...

DG heart will die. DG will die...

And so will the rest of us unless Adora Cain releases her hold on him. It doesn't matter if we find the emerald, or free Az. The OZ won't survive with a broken circle.
The Price of Letting Go

Chapter by cjmoliere

Who wants to live forever?

Who wants to live forever?

Who dares to love forever?

When love must die...

Queen - Who Wants To Live Forever (Wyatt and Adora's Love Theme)

Ralph led the group through the woods to a crude but effective looking high wire device concealed under some heavy branches.

"Your family crossed this same line friend. Said they were headed to an old cabin three spans on the other side tucked behind a giant white elm, the only one there."

"Thank you," Wyatt said softly.

"We should thank you." Ralph shook his hand.

"I'm too big for that thing!" Toto shifted into his dog form and moaned in fear. Wyatt scooped him up while the others made their way across the river Toto whimpered while they were gliding across. On the ground below them a Longcoat looked up thinking he'd heard something but passed it off as the wind.

"If you shapeshift I swear I'll drop you!" Wyatt threatened the frightened dog.

Glitch slammed face first into a tree once he reached the other side while DG and Raw landed safely.

"You okay?" Wyatt asked DG when he appeared behind them.

"Yeah."

"All right, let's go."

DG walked close behind him trying to remember that every step they took was bringing her closer to the time when she would have to let him go.

I can't do it, I just can't.

You have to!

No...please...not now.

"Where are we headed?" Toto asked.

"There. That's it. That's where my family made their new home," Wyatt said as he spotted the white oak tree, his heart beating faster.

Would they even remember me? What if Adora found someone else?
She's not like that and you know it. Now stop it.

"I really don't think there's time for this," Toto pointed out.

"He's always made time for us," DG reminded him.

And our time together is over, she thought sadly as she watched him running through the field screaming his wife's name along with his son's, feeling a cold chill spread through her body.

Bound to another he was not meant to be mine

Yet we were blessed with one shining moment in time.

I never had my shining moment...now I never will.

Then she felt a deep pain in her heart as if she'd been stabbed but it wasn't her pain. It was his. It nearly brought her to her knees.

"Deege, what's the matter?" Glitch asked her.

"Oh God...no!" she moaned. "Please...he's been hurt enough...!" she cried as she raced after Wyatt. To her horror she found him standing in front of an empty tin suit. Then something caught his eye, a wooden grave marker. He took off his hat and kneeled beside the grave, his heart shattering as he read his wife's name carved into the wood, touching the marker lovingly. He placed his Tin Man's badge over the patch of earth and grass that served as her final resting place, his eyes filled with tears.

DG stood off to the side with the others, feeling his pain as if it were her own and cursing herself for being so selfish now that she saw him such agony. He had just found his heart again and it was being ripped out like Glitch's brain had been ripped out of his head.

Are you happy now? He's not going to stay here now, is he?

Go to him. He needs you. Make your strength his.

How can I...now?

Will you leave him alone in the dark again? You said you couldn't let him go. Then fight for him. Make him come back to your light where he belongs now.

He turned his head away when he saw her approach, not wanting her to see him. She touched his shoulder, expecting him to shrug her hand away. It moved away only when he leaned forward and kissed the marker. He stood up without a word, donned his hat and walked away.

He barely spoke as they continued on their journey. They stopped at the creek. While the others washed up, Wyatt sat up on the hill alone.

I never should've went looking for them. I should have known better than to believe Zero when he said they were still alive. It was all part of the game and we're all nothing but pawns in it.

He felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Your son Jeb still lives," Raw said.

"No!"
Don't get my hopes up again. I won't hope again. It dies...everything dies.

"He lives to honor you. I feel it," Raw went on and tried to touch him again. Wyatt brushed him off.

"You feel too much," he said bitterly. "C'mon let's get a move on."

Raw watched him walk away sadly feeling the heavy walls being thrown up around his new friend's heart.

Unless DG unlock his heart, heart will not survive.

She walked by his side and although they didn't speak, she wanted him to know she was there when he needed her. She could feel him trying to distance himself from her as he'd done when they first met and when he left her behind in Central City but she wouldn't let him go without a fight this time.

"Which way now?" Glitch asked him.

"Well both ways head south."

"Your mother said your memories would guide you DG. Let them," Toto instructed.

"I don't know. It looks familiar."

"Well dig deeper. Remember DG."

She closed her eyes. "I remember her swinging me on a swing. The sun's reflecting in my eyes and the breeze off the water..." She started running down the patch with Raw and Wyatt behind her. Glitch was walking in the opposite direction. Sidney took a disk out of his pocket and dropped it while Zora waited in the tree.

"What's that," Glitch said as he spotted the disk and bent down to retrieve it. Zora, not willing to give up the next piece of the trail swooped down to attack.

"NO!" Toto yelled. Wyatt pulled his pistol out and fired a shot, missing the demon. He fired again, the second shot hitting its target and sending the demon crashing to the ground.

"What happened?" DG asked.

"Little beastie just came out of nowhere." Glitch answered as they stared down at the corpse of the demon.

"Why did it attack now?"

"Probably a random hit. It's dead now," Wyatt added as he was kneeling down in front of the demon.

"We should just...move along like it never happened," Toto suggested. All eyes were now on him, Wyatt's the most dangerous of all as he approached the shapeshifter.

"Never happened? Once Az finds out that this one's missing, she's gonna have Longcoats crawlin all over the Zone looking for it."

"All the more reason to get moving."
"You okay? You're sweating up a storm," Wyatt observed.

"I'm fine."

They heard DG running away. Wyatt glared at the shapeshifter. His bullshit detector was on overdrive and he smelled a dirty white lie coming out of the other man's mouth although he didn't understand why.

Something other than you sweating smells here and I'm not liking the stink of it. I'll be watching you, dog man.

Once the others were out of sight, Toto buried the tracking disk under some dirt and hurried to catch up. He had to be more careful next time or he would end up with a bullet in his chest from the legendary silver pistol made from the remains of the original Tin Man or worse. Wyatt Cain did not have a reputation for being ruthless unless someone he cared for was being threatened and threatening the safety of his mate by leading Azkadellia to her was cause enough for Cain to tear him apart.

"C'mon!" DG called out as she ran toward the entrance of a large maze. Once she was inside, she seemed to know exactly where she was going although there were endless twists and turns.

A person could get lost in this damn thing. "DG!"

Wyatt called out. It was difficult to keep up with her as she was not leaving them any kind of trail. Calling on his inner dragon again, Wyatt tracked her by the scent she gave off...the sweet scent of the rose. When they emerged from the maze they found her sitting on an old swing.

"You're right about the magical waters DG," Glitch said. "That's what Finaqua means in the ancients language. Not sure about the translation now though."

"This used to be paradise," she said softly.

"Not paradise now." Raw mumbled.

"It was one of the first places Az scorched when she came to power," Wyatt told them.

"Well she sure didn't leave much," added Sidney.

"No."

DG heard a faint voice.

Your adventures have a way of getting me into trouble!

"What was that?" she asked as she jumped off the swing. Wyatt started to go after her.

"Wait guys. Let her do this alone," he advised.

"Bullshit...what's down there?" Wyatt demanded.

"Something she needs to see."

He sighed. "Why do I have the feeling I'm not going to like this?"

"We all have terrible truths we have to face at some point."
"What could be so terrible about her past that she doesn't already know? Her sister killed her, her mother lost her magic to bring her back to life. She doesn't need anything else upsetting her. I'm going after her. You want to stop me, go ahead and try it," Wyatt challenged. "You won't get far."

"I second that!" Glitch declared. "C'mon Raw. Let's go."

Wyatt picked up her scent in the deepest part of the forest, climbing over large moss covered rocks and dead tree limbs with Glitch, Raw and Sidney behind him.

Ozma's ghost, she could fall and break her neck here. If I find out she got hurt down here I'm going to shoot that damned dog man. What the hell was he thinking sending her down here alone?

"DG!" he called out.

"Cain, will you wait up!" Glitch complained. "This place is worse than the maze."

"Well be careful!" Wyatt growled, not in the mood to listen to his complaining when he had to keep his eyes and ears open for any sign of DG. "No telling what's lurking around."

"I doubt anything else could get through this jungle."

"Zip the mouth or I'll do it for you. I can't hear a damned thing with you bitching. DG!"

When they got to the bottom of the hill they could see the entrance to a cave. Wyatt stood there, gasping for breath as he was overcome by a violent panic attack.

"Shouldn't be in there," he gasped, pressing his hand to his chest where his heart was pounding rapidly.

"Cain, are you okay?" Glitch asked worriedly.

"Cave remind Tin Man of suit. Cold, dark...closed in." Raw murmured as he placed a hand on Wyatt's shoulder to try to calm him.

"Okay, c'mon Cain. Breathe," Glitch coached. "If DG's in there we have to go in. Okay? She needs us. She needs you."

"Could get trapped in there...worse than tin suit."

"If anything happens we'll just grab her and run like hell. We're not gonna get trapped. Oh shit! C'mon Cain, don't you pass out on me," Glitch seized Wyatt's shoulders as the older man's eyes closed and he started to sway, his face and neck drenched with sweat. "I can't keep him up by myself!" he snapped at Toto. "Help me out here."

"Going to be sick..." Wyatt moaned.

"Aww not that! C'mon Cain! Snap out of it! You are not throwing up on me! Dammit Tin Man, DG needs you now. Get your act together!"

"DG," he murmured.

"That's it, think about DG. You want to help her don't you?"
"Yeah." he slurred.

"Can't help her like this, can you?"

"No..."

"DG need Tin Man." Raw said gently, patting Wyatt's shoulder.

"She needs me..."

"That's it, C'mon Cain keep thinking about DG," Glitch chanted. "If she's facing something terrible in there she needs you now more than ever!"

Wyatt's breathing returned to normal again and he started to regain his composure. "Thanks," he said to Glitch and Raw. "C'mon, let's go."

The things I do for that kid, he thought as they entered the cold, dark cave. He never wanted to be in another cold, dark, closed in space again once he got out of that damned suit but his friends were right. She needed him and he didn't want her to face her own darkness alone. They found her sitting on the ground sobbing.

"Azkadellia, my sister! All the terrible things that have happened...they were all my fault! I should never have let go!"

What does she mean by that? Wyatt wondered.

How can everything be your fault, kiddo? You didn't lock me in the tin suit. You didn't rip Glitch's brain out, kill the Mystic Man and turn the OZ into a den of horrors and kill my family. Your sister did that or she had Zero do it for her.

"DG," he said gently letting her know she wasn't alone anymore. She turned around and saw him and the rest of the group behind her. Choking back a sob she raced out of the cave. "Let me handle this," he said to the others as he hurried after her unaware that they had no intentions on stopping him.

She couldn't look at them, him most of all now that she knew the full truth. It was her fault...all of it. Had she just listened to Azkadellia and stayed the hell away from that damned cave her mother would still be on the throne, she and her sister would still be friends, Glitch would have his brain and Cain would still be with his family!

Out of all of them, he's the one my cowardice harmed the most. How can I face him now? I should ask him to take out his pistol and shoot me right in the heart because I've broken his beyond repair. It's what I deserve.

She could him again kneeling before his wife's grave with tears in his eyes and wished she could back in time, grab that stupid, scared little girl she'd been and make her hold onto Az that time. Her mother never should've cloaked that memory. She didn't deserve that protection. She should have been forced to see how stupid she was over and over again.

"Want to talk about it, kiddo?" she heard Wyatt ask from behind her.

Oh God...please...I can't face him NOW!

"I'm fine," she sniffled.
"Bullshit. What happened in there? You said all the terrible things that have happened are your fault. What did you mean by that?"

You don't want to know...you'll hate me and you know what? I deserve it. I deserve whatever punishment you see fit to give me. Lock me in a tin suit, shoot me, strangle me...

"I... I can't talk about it."

"Can't or won't, kiddo?" he pressed.

"I..."

"C'mon Deege. It can't be that bad."

"Oh yes it can!" she sobbed. "Do you know what was in that cave? A witch. She was trapped there centuries ago and she should've stayed there had a stupid little girl not decided to do a little exploring and led herself and her older sister right into a trap!"

"A witch? How do you know it was a witch?"

"Because I saw it!" she screamed. "At first she looked like a little girl but then she changed right before our eyes. Az and I always held hands when something threatened us and our combined magic always protected us. Az held my hand and warned me not to let go because she knew nothing could hurt us if we stayed together but that damned witch scared me. I let go of Az's hand and the witch took control of her and she's still controlling her!"

An image flashed before Wyatt's eyes. He was standing beside the empty sarcophagus that should have contained DG's body and a younger Azkadellia had a tight grip on his arm and she was speaking to him in a strange voice. Wyatt repeated the words aloud.

"Your memory of your purpose you will one day recover
Until that day, take heed or you will be made to suffer
Think of these events as a bad dream
And mark that things are not always what they seem.
If the darkness succeeds with it has planned
It will be you who must lead the final stand!"

"What was that?" DG asked as she turned to look up at him.

"Your sister said that to me the day of your funeral. Son of a bitch...she was trying to warn me!"

"Wait...you were at my funeral?"

"I was one of the pallbearers," he answered. "I always thought it was strange that you would've died in your sleep at such a young age but when I questioned it the Mystic Man got upset with me. Now I know why. They were already planning to hide you on the Other Side. The rumor was that Azkadellia found out your mother was planning to alter the succession and pass the crown to you so she killed you to get you out of the way but she wasn't acting like she'd just gotten rid of a rival at your funeral. After she said all that to me she changed, acted like the bitch she is now."

"Oh my God...Cain...what if Azkadellia is trying to fight the witch's control? She acted like two
different people at the Tower too! There might still be a chance I can save her!" DG exclaimed hopefully.

"She may be too far gone now," Wyatt said.

"I have to try..." she said as she looked away again.

But no matter what, I can't change the past. I can't undo all the pain she's caused you. The pain I caused you.

"Hey...you still in the cave?" he asked. He could feel her distancing herself from him.

"I just feel so bad that I let her in there."

"You can't blame yourself."

"It's because of me that the witch got out."

It's because of me that you lost everything precious to you.

"Look, you were just a kid."

"And I ran!"

Kid or not I was a fucking coward.

"You're not running now, are ya?"

"No, I'm not but..."

"DG, that witch was determined to get out no matter who went in the cave and standing there beating yourself up over it isn't going to make her go away."

"How can you be so calm about this when...I'm the reason why your wife...?"

"Did you kill my wife?" he demanded.

"No...not directly..."

"You didn't! And you didn't lock me up in that suit, take out Glitch's brain and lock up your mother.

She did that. Were you even listening when we had that talk earlier? You have to come out of that cave. We still need you," he reminded her.

He said we but in her heart she heard him say I still need you and it was all she needed to hear. She smiled through her tears.

At the cave's entrance Glitch and Raw watched the exchange between them nervously, wondering what they were saying to each other. Then they saw DG smile.

Tin Man able to reach DG. DG happy now.

I knew he could do it.

Tin Man still not able to remember who DG is.
He has a cloak on his memories that is a lot stronger than the one DG has on hers because his was a punishment for breaking their bond. His dragon's spirit has some of those memories but his punishment won't let him see any memory he has of DG being his mate.

We tell them?

Their bond has to reform without any outside interference, Raw. DG is the only one who can break the lock on his memories but as long as she only has half of hers she won't know how.

Not fair. DG and Tin Man belong together. Make each other happy.

I know Raw but look what happened to Cain when he tried to go against the will of the OZ even though it was a mistake on his part. He lost everything.

What we do now Glitch?

We protect them.

Recalling the Mystic Man's words, DG raced back to the swing. Her mother left a message for her in Finaqua and she needed to find it.

"How is she going to find anything now? The palace and lake are gone. Azkadellia's torched the place!" Glitch cried.

"Shhh! Quiet Glitch," Wyatt admonished.

As she recalled her favorite past time of skipping stones across the lake, she realized she and Azkadellia had hidden a stone shaped like a heart beneath a pile of larger rocks. She discovered the pile exactly where they left it fifteen years earlier and recovered the lost stone. She held it in her hand and kissed it tenderly.

"I hope this is the perfect day," she said as she tossed it, waves of golden light shining in the ground as the ruins of Finaqua were once again restored to the paradise she remembered.

Wyatt looked around, astounded. He knew the kid was powerful but what she'd done was nothing short of a miracle. Having just seen the kid toss a stone across some dirt and bring back her childhood paradise convinced Wyatt he was in the presence of one half of the most powerful force in the OZ, it's very heart. Oddly enough, he wasn't afraid of her.

Wonder if she knows what she is. Probably not since her mother put that spell on her memories. She barely remembers how to use her magic. She's a good kid, just needs a little more self confidence, that's all. But where's her other half?

Do you really want to know?

It would help.

Maybe. Maybe not. What if her other half is some snot nosed punk who abuses his powers just for the thrill of it? Do you want her around someone like that?

Hell no!

The truth was, even once they got the damned country back in order he was going to ask to stay on as her bodyguard. There were a lot of scoundrels in the OZ and he was determined to keep them away from her. If they tried one thing out of line, he would start using them for target practice. She
needed a good man in her life, not one who would take advantage of her.

A image of her mother appeared in the middle of the gazebo, instructing her to go to the Realm of the Unwanted to find the consort himself.

What is the consort doing in that hellhole? Wyatt wondered. Is he insane?

While they were walking he noticed that Toto was trailing behind and he was still as skittish as he’d been when the mobat demon attacked.

Time for a chat, pooch.

"Hey pooch, you okay over there? You've been antsy as a guild fighter since we left Finaqua."

"I'm...just nervous about being a man on the run I suppose."

And the scent of your bullshit is gagging me. Out with it!

"I hear ya. Sky's clear but I've got this funny feeling we're being followed. What do you think?"

"Another mobat? It's probably a random scout that stumbled across us."

"Then you say we should pretend like it never happened." Wyatt could hear something clinking in the other man's pocket. "You were sweating then too." He grabbed Toto's arm, a handful of disks falling to the ground. Furious, he took out his pistol and aimed it at Toto's chest. "I'd shoot you in the heart if I thought you had one!" he snarled.

"Cain," DG said gently. "What are those?"

"Bread crumbs for Azkadellia," he said angrily. "She had an inside man all along. Didn't she?"

"A spy!" Raw growled.

"Tutor?" DG asked. Toto lowered his head while Wyatt kept the gun on him.

"Your trail ends here."

You bastard. I knew it! I should shipped you on your way a long time ago.

"You don't understand. I stopped dropping those a while back."

"Afraid you'd get caught?" Wyatt pulled back the trigger.

"But you were family," DG said, her voice breaking.

"I still am DG. I care about you more than anyone else in the world."

"Then why would you do that?" she sobbed, her sadness only adding fuel to the fire of Wyatt's rage.

That's it, dog man! You're dead.

"For the last fifteen annuals I've been locked up. In a dark hole, Azkadellia came to me. She offered me my freedom if I track you. If I'd said no, she would've killed me on the spot." I was locked up in a dark prison too you son of a bitch and I was offered my freedom too but I never betrayed anyone I cared about!
"So I figured at least I could keep her off your back while I helped you rediscover your magic."

"All right if that were the truth, why did you drop those disks? Why didn't you let us get away clean?" Wyatt demanded.

"You know as well as I do that would've never worked. She would've been on us quick as death. Now look you guys, whether you like it or not, those things bought us valuable time."

"Why didn't you tell me sooner?" DG inquired, still in tears.

"I swear DG I was just about to."

"I think its time to put this dog down," Wyatt said icily.

"No!" DG pressed her hand down on his arm to move the gun away and looked up at him. Don't do it, kid. It's a mistake.

"We're all looking for second chances. Tutor too." Her blue eyes met his, silently pleading with him and once again he felt bound to obey her.

Ahhh, dammit! I hope to hell we don't regret this. That I don't regret this.

"Thank you DG," Toto said softly.

"It doesn't mean that I trust you!" she snapped. "But we're almost to the Realm and you're the only one who knows what Ahamo looks like.

"Well we can't just let him walk," Wyatt pointed out.

"Maybe we could keep him on a short leash," Glitch suggested.

"That's a good idea. If you really mean what you say then you won't mind travelling with us as Toto." DG grasped her former tutor's arm tightly.

Wyatt moved closer so that he and Toto were staring at each other. "One wrong move and I'll take you on a walk you don't come back from. You hear me?" he said firmly.

"Yeah," Toto said as he stepped back and shifted into his dog form.

"Now that we know Azkadellia had a spy she's a lot closer than we thought. We gotta pick it up a notch. C'mon. Let's go." They began to walk out of the woods, Toto trailing after them.

They were in the middle of an overgrown field and hopelessly lost much to Wyatt's dismay although he'd be damned if he wanted to admit it. His dragon's tracking senses which had proven useful to him earlier seemed to have deserted him.

Fine time for that too, he thought angrily. Then he could feel the eyes of his companions on him, wanting to know what do next.

"What? Trust me. The Realm of the Unwanted is here...somewhere," he said nervously.

It's like finding a damned needle in a haystack.

Only the haystack went on for what looked like miles. They heard Toto barking as he raced through the field.
"I think he's found something. C'mon!" Glitch whispered. He stumbled once and quickly got back on his feet. They found Toto standing over a wooden door his tail wagging excitedly. Once the others approached him, he started scratching at the door and barking. DG picked him up while Wyatt opened the door to reveal a hole in the ground.

"Well, that's something you don't see every day," Glitch remarked.

"I'll go first with the pooch. Then the rest of you," Wyatt instructed.

DG was shocked to see what looked like a town underground only it looked like a rough one. There was a boxing ring where two men were battling while their supporters cheered them on and discussed the bets they had on them.

"Cain, uhhh help a zipperhead out with a memory or two. In this realm who exactly are the unwanted?"

"Criminals, outlaws and a few living experiements gone wrong," Wyatt answered.

"Oh, and my father's here. How odd," DG said flatly.

Why in the hell would my father be living in a place like this unless...no...she wouldn't have married a criminal! Would she?

We can't choose who we fall in love with all the time, DG. Sometimes it just happens. And sometimes it's with the last person we would ever expect it to be.

Yes but since my mother was the queen I think she'd be a bit more...choosy.

"Hey look!" Glitch cried out as he ran over to what looked like a booth.

"What's he doing now?" Wyatt grumbled.

"I don't know," DG answered, frustrated herself. Now wasn't the time for Glitch's synapses to misfire and let his curiousity get him into trouble.

Your adventures have a way of getting me into trouble!

Look what happened when I decided to let my curiousity get the best of me, Glitch. For the love of all that is holy, get control of the part of your brain that you do have so that we can find my father and I can fix this mess I've made!

"Anybody got any money?" he asked them as he was staring at the coin taking machine that read: Ask Airofday. Questions are answers unspoken.

Do I look like a bank, you damned headcase? Here's your damned money!

Wyatt thought angrily as he took his pistol out and slammed it down on the coin taking machine and some money dropped out. Glitch dropped the money into the machine.

A woman stood inside the booth, she had at least six arms. Glitch grinned. "Can't say they didn't welcome us with open arms."

The woman moved her arms and said in a mechanical voice: "Questions are answers unspoken."

"Isn't it a little cramped in there?" Glitch asked her. DG rolled her eyes. Wyatt shook his head. They did not have time for him to be standing there flirting with Spiderwoman. Raw laughed.
"Reference to uncomfortable tight spaces. Answer: yes." the woman replied to his question.

"Isn't that good?"

Okay Glitch, party's over.

"It's okay...we gotta go find Ahamo," DG said through gritted teeth. Glitch was her friend but when he started acting like this she wanted to strangle him and understood now why Cain wanted to strangle him half the time.

"Answer: Ahamo is a hard man to find." Airofday spoke up.

"You know him?" Glitch asked.

She pointed toward the coin machine. Wyatt held up his gun, his lips curled into a small sly grin.

You take bullets, bitch?

"Answer: know personally, no."

"Okay, great thank you for nothing," DG said sarcastically. "Goodbye." She was through wasting time. Wyatt reached out and touched her shoulder. She was shocked that he was willing to go along with this nonsense. In her opinion, the spiderwoman was useless.

"We were told that Ahamo was here in the realm." Glitch said to Airofday.

"Reply: know of someone who might know this Ahamo. Answer: the Seeker."

"Where can we find the Seeker?" DG demanded. The woman waved her arms and pointed in the directions of east and west.

"And you thought I had trouble with directions," Glitch muttered. The woman stepped out of the booth, the two other women who were acting as her other four arms still inside.

"The Seeker doesn't talk to just anybody. Doesn't like strangers," she said to them.

"He'll like us," Wyatt said firmly. "Where is he?"

"I might be able to arrange a meeting."

"Really? What's the catch?"

"Twenty platinums."

"Twenty platinums!" Glitch exclaimed.

"Done," Wyatt interrupted. "Where is this meeting place?"

"The local tavern at the edge of the realm. Meet there at the rising of the first moon after midnight."

"We'll be there," DG spoke up. The woman smiled and went back inside her booth.

"Now where are we gonna get twenty platinums?" Glitch asked Wyatt as they walked away.

"We could sell you for experiments," he retorted.
"Oh ha ha ha. Very funny Cain," Glitch grumbled. "Why don't we sell you?"

Raw started laughing again.

"We don't have time for this shit!" DG barked. "No one is getting sold but since you got us in this Cain, I suggest you find another, more realistic way to come up with the twenty platinums because I get the feeling that we're not going to find Ahamo unless we pay up!"

"And what would you have me do, Princess?" he demanded as they faced each other. He'd never seen her so angry before.

"Figure it out!" she snapped. "Is there even a damned clock around here?"

"Clock there," Raw said as he pointed to a clock on one of the other buildings.

"We have less than two hours to come up with twenty platinums and get to that bar so start thinking Cain!"

"Fine!" he growled. "Although I have no idea what the hell you think we can do in this hole for money that doesn't involve breaking the law and I am not doing that."

"You're not a Tin Man anymore, remember?" she reminded him.

"I'm still not breaking the law."

"Then I guess we're up shit creek without a paddle."

The revving of an engine made her jump. She ran in the direction where the sound was coming from and saw a pack of men on older looking motorcycles gathered behind one of the buildings. A group of them seemed to be having an argument.

"There's a two hundred platinum pot and Smitty's the fastest racer we got."

"I'll do it."

"You'll fall off on the first damn turn and I can't make the turns that good."

"You assholes gonna shoot the breeze all night or are we gonna race?" she heard someone from the other group yell.

"Give us a minute, will ya!"

"You got five minutes or the pot's ours!"

"DG, what the hell are you doing? Let's go!" Wyatt whispered as he started to pull her back.

"If those guys will let me race for them maybe I can convince them to give me the twenty platinums we need."

"Are you insane!" he cried. "You do not want to make a deal with..."

"Well, well well, what do we have here?" a rough looking man said from behind them. "Out for a little late night stroll lovebirds?" he said as he grabbed DG. Wyatt pulled out his gun and aimed it at the man's head.

"Let her go or you'll be sportin' another hole between your eyes," he growled.
"I think we'll have a little fun with her first. Whaddya say boys?" he called out to the other bikers. Two of them grabbed Wyatt by the arms, his gun falling out of his hand while another came forward with fists raised.

No...not again. Oh God, Cain...I'm so sorry. Every time I fuck up you're the one who gets hurt.

Wyatt howled with rage as he had on the time loop and looked at her. She could swear that his blue eyes were now blood red and watched, astounded as he kicked out and sent his two captors crashing to the ground and started fighting off the others like a martial arts expert.

I had no idea he could fight like that!

She was even more surprised to see Glitch approaching them and start attacking the bikers with the same martial arts techniques Wyatt was using. When one of them tried to grab her again, she found herself fighting the same way although she hadn't been taught to.

Her magic flared and she focused on a set of metal garbage cans. "Time to dump the trash," she hissed as she used her magic to raise the cans up and sent them flying at the group of bikers, making sure she avoided hitting Wyatt and Glitch.

"She's a fucking witch!" one of them yelled. "Let's get out of here!" They jumped on their bikes and sped out of the alley.

Wyatt leaned against one of the buildings, gasping for breath while Glitch sank to the ground beside him and tried to catch his own breath.

"W...What the hell happened, Cain?" Glitch asked him.

"Ask her!" he snapped. "You almost got us killed!" he yelled at her. "I told you: you don't make deals with people like that!"

"I'm sorry..." she moaned. "I didn't mean to...

"You never mean to but you end up doing it anyway. You're going to be the death of me one of these days!" he growled as he got to his feet and stormed out of the alley, leaving her staring after him, every word he spoke feeling like a knife being thrust into her heart.

He's not going to make me cry. He's not going to make me cry. He's...

The dam of her emotions broke and she burst into anguished sobs. Glitch seized hold of her and wrapped his arms around her.

"He hates me," she sobbed. "And you know what? I deserve it because every time I fuck up, he's the one who gets hurt the most. It would be better if he told me to go to hell and left. He'd be safer..."

"Shhh...it's okay, Doll. He's not going to leave you. Just needs some time to cool down." He opened a mental connection to Raw.

Raw, find Cain and calm him down.

DG upset too. Feel it.

I've got her. You work on the hardhead.

Dragon has him. Not going to be easy to soothe.
You have to try. Their bond is getting stronger and we can't afford to have it broken again, especially now.

Raw try. Glitch take care of DG.

I will.

The viewer found Wyatt sitting on the steps of a closed pawnshop. He could feel the dragon's rage surging through the man and also a twinge of regret. He placed his hand on Wyatt's shoulder. He backed away. Raw touched his shoulder again and grasped Wyatt's coat.

"DG didn't mean to get Tin Man hurt."

"She should've known better than to..."

"Mistake made. DG learn from it. Can't take back."

"You think I was too hard on her?"

"DG not going to be death of Tin Man. DG young. DG make mistakes. Tin Man older and make mistakes too. Not perfect."

"I know I'm not perfect fuzzball!" Wyatt snapped as he glared up at the viewer. "But I gotta tell you when that kid screws up, it's never anything minor."

"That why DG needs Tin Man to look out for her."

"I tried and look what happens. She doesn't listen to me!" Wyatt cried. "It'd be better if we just got the hell away from each other."

"Saying bad things to each other and walking away not going to fix it. DG say she's sorry. Tin Man say he's sorry too. Tin Man really want to leave DG alone?"

"I can't. I gave my word and I'm bound by it."

"That only reason why you stay? You give word?"

He sighed deeply. "No. She's a good kid even when she does crazy things like this." He stood up and walked into the alley where Glitch and DG were. Glitch had his arm around her shoulders and her head was bowed.

"Glitch, you mind if I talk to her alone?" Wyatt asked him.

"Don't upset her again, Cain." he warned, not giving a damn that he was showing disrespect to his master at the moment. Their mutual stubborness was making it difficult for them to get their broken bond back to where it should be. "We won't be far, okay, Deege?"

"Okay," she croaked. Now they were alone in the alley, she leaning against the building, him standing in front of her. She kept her head down, afraid to look him in the eyes and see nothing but contempt for her.

Oh but I'm asking for it. I'm asking for every hateful look and word he gives me.

"DG, look at me," he said gently.

"I'm sorry. I ddn't mean to get us in that mess. I thought maybe I could get us those twenty..." she
said, keeping her eyes on her shoes.

"Forget about them. We'll get information out of this Seeker without them. And for Ozma's sake will you stop staring a hole in your shoes and look at me!" he cried.

She raised her tear filled eyes and met his. Instead of anger and hate she could see remorse and compassion in his. He reached out and brushed a stray tear from her eye, his touch sending a shiver through her that was pleasantly warm instead of ice cold.

What's happening to me? she thought. What's happening to us? He's never allowed me to get this close to him before. He's never allowed himself to get this close to me.

"I didn't mean what I said," he said softly. "I was just...worried, that's all." He placed his hands on her shoulders and the wave of warmth exploded into a raging fire and she could barely breathe.

He looks like he wants to...kiss me and oh God...I want him to!

Are you crazy? He's old enough to be your father?

Oh, then tell me why I'm having trouble keeping air in my lungs while he's looking at me like this...while he's...touching me?

"Cain, I..." she began, her lips trembling.

I think I'm falling in love with you.

"What's wrong?" he asked worriedly.

"Will you...?"

Will you kiss me?

"Will you still go with us to see the Seeker?"

"Yeah, I'm going. This place is still not safe for you to go alone."

Is that the only reason? Just so you can protect me or are you falling in love with me too?

Are you kidding? The man just found out his wife's dead. Running ahead of the starting gun, aren't you Deege?

Am I? Why does he still have his hands on me and why haven't his eyes left mine yet? He can't spend the rest of his life alone. Not when he could have...

Have what? A future with you? And what kind of future would that be? You're at least twenty years apart in age. He's at least fifty years behind the times and you're just a kid to him, not a woman and you'd better face that or you're going to be in for a world of hurting later on.

I could make him so happy...

The only thing you've done so far is get him shot at, beaten within an inch of his life, locked away for eight years and have his heart ripped out when his family was taken from him. He wouldn't want to share a home and a bed with someone like that unless he's a masochist. No, you're better off friends.
"Kiddo, you okay?"

"Ummm...yeah. Just thinking."

"About what?"

What it would be like if we kissed.

If she knew Wyatt Cain as well as she thought she did, his kisses would be unlike any she'd ever had before: slow, soft...deep, soulful.

"DG...do you need to sit down? You're flushed."

It's not the right time for this. You've got to find Ahamo and the emerald. You can play out your romance novel fantasy later...in your head because that's all you're gonna get.

"No, I'm fine," she said as she regained her composure. "We better get back or the others'll think we killed each other."

He laughed. "Probably."

Glitch and Raw could sense a change in both of them when they emerged from the alley although they were trying to hide it well. As their friends walked ahead of them, they smiled.

Toto, still in his dog form could also sense the change.

The queen's lock on DG's memories is weakening. All it will take is one very powerful emotion focused on him and everything will come back to her.
The Tower

Az waved her hand over the seeing globe and the image of Wyatt and DG vanished.

"Just like us," she murmured, reaching across the table and taking Archie's hand in hers. He raised it to his lips and kissed it.

"But I'm not as stubborn as Wyatt with the memory of an ex-wife I loved. That's going to be the stumbling block, Dellia. We don't know how strong the hold Ozmalita had on his heart was in either of his lives."

"But at least she'll get to see Daddy." Az smiled wistfully. "He would be so happy we're together. He always liked you."

"This is a dangerous game you're playing Dellia, pretending to cooperate with that bitch."

"I have to. The emerald has to be in her hands during the eclipse."

"DG stil doesn't know when you're in control and when she is."

"She doesn't have to. She's seen enough that it should start making her want to come and free me. She'll learn everything she needs to know in Finaqua."

Archie gasped. "Lavinia's sending her back THERE? Is she out of her mind?"

"She has to know what she's up against."

They heard noise outside the chamber. Archie pressed a finger to Az's lips and opened the door to see Zero marching down the hall with a small company. Archie snapped his fingers as Elmer passed him and crooked his finger. Elmer crept into the room and shut the door.

"Zero got a tip. DG's in a bar in the Realm of the Unwanted."

"Dammit!" Archie cursed. "We'll never get there in time to intercept her!"

"You won't have to," Az said softly, the seeing globe in her hands. "Daddy will take care of her and Zero's path will take him right through a resistance stronghold. Jeb Cain's stronghold!"

Archie smirked. "More like you're compelling them to take the path through the stronghold."

"I don't enjoy using her powers but they do prove useful once in a while."

"Elmer, go to Jeb Cain's stronghold. You know the layout of this castle and can get Jeb's forces in. Tell them...tell them the Cricket is flying again. Jeb should remember my old code." Archie commanded.

"Yes...Commander Ozopov." Elmer saluted with a smile before Az teleported him out

Archie walked up to the mirror, stroking the beard that had just begun to grow back in along with his mustache. "I need to be him...one last time."
Wyatt had an uneasy feeling in the pit of his stomach the moment they walked into the bar. He held DG back as she started forward.

"I don't like the looks of this place. Why don't you guys wait outside. I'll cut the deal myself," he said.

"No, I think we should stick together," DG insisted.

I am not leaving you alone in here. If something happens you'll need help.

"I feel...very safe with you guys."

Especially you.

"Really? I don't." Glitch said.

"You! Sit and stay!" Wyatt ordered Toto. He sat under one of the tables.

"There's nothing to be afraid of," Airofday said as she appeared from behind a corner. Wyatt reached for his pistol and the other patrons of the bar jumped out of their seats and fled for the nearest exit.

"Where can we find the Seeker?" DG asked her.

"I'm here," a man with long blond hair and a mustache said as he appeared from behind another doorway.

"We were told you know how to find Ahamo."

"Show me your palm," the Seeker demanded.

"What for?" Wyatt asked suspiciously. He didn't like the looks of this guy, not one bit. He kept his hand on the butt of his pistol.

"You want my help or not?"

"It's okay." DG gently pushed down on Wyatt's arm.

Like hell it is kiddo. I don't like this guy. We need to get the hell out of here.

DG stepped up to the man and held up her unmarked palm. The Seeker stared hard at her.

"The other one," he commanded.

She held up her marked palm.

"Now!" they heard Airofday shout and some rough looking men appeared from hiding places bearing nets.

"We had a deal," the Seeker growled.

I knew it! Wyatt thought frantically.

A trap. Walked right into a damned trap!
Suddenly the bar went dark and before the lights went out the Seeker grabbed DG and started carrying her out as Airofday's henchmen attacked. Glitch and Wyatt called on their inner dragons and fought back until a thick net dropped down on them.

"I can't see...DG!" Wyatt howled. "DG!"

"Well...fancy meeting you here." he heard a familiar voice say as the net was lifted up and he found himself staring at his nemesis.

"Zero!" he spit.

"Been awhile, hasn't it?" the other man asked with a sneer.

"Not long enough for me! What did you do with DG you son of a bitch?"

"I don't have her but we will...soon enough." he added. "Get them ready for transport back to the Tower," Zero commanded his troops and they dragged Wyatt and his companions outside.

Over my dead body!

"Yeah, that's right, abuse the guy with the zipperhead!" Glitch yelled at one of them as they chained him and his friends to a large log. The leader took Wyatt's hat and put it on his head.

"It amazes me that you once influenced the queen," Wyatt grumbled.

"I know. Me too. Bet she wouldn't be very proud of me right now though. Being empty headed enough to led her daughter walk right into a trap."

"Yeah, you and me both." Wyatt thought sadly.

Some guardian I am. I can't even protect this world's most valuable treasure from a group of lowlifes.

"Hey look, look," Glitch cried and pointed at Toto who was a few feet away from them. "Hey Toto, come on. Show these Longcoats what you're really made of."

The dog scurried away.

"He just did!" Wyatt said with disgust as he tried to free his arms from the chains but they wouldn't budge.

Yellow bellied, worthless sack of shit. When I get my hands on you I'll neuter your ass before I put a bullet in it.

The only bright side to their situation was that the bitch Airofday was going to get her just desserts...a bullet in the head now that she'd served her purpose.

Zero approached Wyatt with the silver pistol in his hand. "At least I'll have a souvenir to remember you by." He would add it to his collection of trophies that grew day by day.

"Why don't you unshackle me? I'll teach you how to use it," Wyatt said sarcastically.

Zero cackled. "You surprise me Cain. Not a lot of men make it out of the iron suit with their sense of humor intact. Let's see how funny you are when you're hanging from the gallows in Central City square. Let's go!"
I'll be having the last laugh when you and your bitch sorceress cower before the heart of the OZ. You're no match for her and you know it! Neither is your little errand boy the Seeker. If he laid one hand on her...

How are you supposed to help her when you can't help yourself at the moment?

Just have to think.

Well you'd better think fast because the longer she's with that guy, the more time he has to...

He touches her and I'll kill him! She doesn't belong to him!

Then I suggest you find a way to get loose and find her before he decides to make her his permanent bed partner. You have abilities beyond those of a mortal male...use them!

Abilities that once again deserted him when he needed them the most. He tried calling on his dragon's spirit but there was nothing there. He wished he had his sword. His sword's blade had been powerful enough to cut through anything but where was it now? Back at that small farmhouse in his wife's grave? Locked in a tin suit with his son...or did that son of a bitch Zero have it?

"...Put me down!" DG was screaming as the man called the Seeker put her over the back of a horse

"I'm sorry about this," he said as he sprayed something in her face. She lapsed into unconsciousness.

Tyler Bennett, known to everyone in the OZ as 'Ahamo' or 'The Seeker' gazed down at his daughter and smiled with pride. She'd grown into a woman as beautiful as her mother and he was certain she had Lavinia's temper to go along with it.

Wyatt Cain has his hands full with her, he thought. They'd only been in each other's company for a few minutes but Tyler already knew he and his wife had misjudged the ex-Tin Man. Although their bond wasn't complete yet, Wyatt was fiercely protective of her and would without a doubt kill anyone who threatened her when he got a chance.

He on the other hand wanted to kill that bitch Airofday. He should've known she'd double cross him. She would sell her own mother for money and so would anyone else in the Realm of the Unwanted. Tyler fit in well there over the years because it reminded him of his own neighborhood in Kansas. Had he not become a successful balloonist, he probably would have joined the gang he used to run errands for when he was a youth. It wasn't the most honorable job but it kept him and his mother out of poverty.

He hadn't told Lavinia about his unsavory past. He left it behind the moment he crossed over to the OZ and buried it deeper once they married and had their daughters. He still mourned the loss of their Azkadellia and missed Lavinia so much it hurt but now that their younger daughter was back and she was reunited with her bondmate, there was still a chance for their family and the OZ.

He rode out into the forest where he lived underground. It was more primitive than the farmhouse in Kansas and it served its purpose. He'd lived there undetected for while he waited for Hank and Emily to bring DG back to the OZ and to him. He wondered what happened to them or Elmer Gulch.

While DG slept he searched until he found the compass that would lead them to the Gale Crypt and the emerald. The compass would only obey DG's commands. All he needed to do was get her there and for this they needed his old balloon, still in good condition after all those years. When he walked into his makeshift living room his daughter was waiting for him, eyes blazing and a broom...
in her hand.

"Going somewhere?" he asked.

"What have you done with my friends?" DG demanded as she held the broom up and pointed it at her captor. Touch me and you die, pervert!

"Last I saw of them they were putting up a good fight."

"Oh, so you only got a quarter of the bounty."

"I didn't take you for the money."

"Where I come from freaks like you drive vans!" Dirty old man! They kidnap you and rape you...or worse...

He chuckled. "DG, you don't understand so just calm yourself."

What don't I understand? You're a dirty old man who took me so you can have some fun but let me tell you something buster. You touch me and I'll give you the Lorena Bobbit special...cut the damn thing right off!

"Calm myself!"

"I'm not a kidnapper."

"Okay so take me to my friends, Seeker!"

"I only call myself Seeker so others in the realm will come to me when they went to find Ahamo."

"What?" she gasped. No, it couldn't be!

"It was your mother's idea."

"What do you know about my mother?"

"Oh I know you look just like her. You get your passion and your grit from her." He walked over to a small table where two little dolls with magic glowing on their hands sat. "Your artistic ability from me..."

DG reeled as she remembered how she and Azkadellia made those dolls for their father as children. "You're my father?"

"Yes, DG. The one your mother calls Ahamo. I have been dreaming of this day, seeing you again..."

"Okay, so you've seen me. So give me whatever it is my mother sent me here for and I'll be leaving your...teepee," she said nervously.

"Like it or not DG, I'm your father," he said with a smile.

"No, no. I had a real father. He was a robot. He was there for me but he was a good guy." She swung the broom and smacked him with it. "That's for kidnapping me!" She hit him again. "And that's for abandoning my mother!" She hit him in the stomach. "And that's for being a complete bastard!"
"Stop, DG! Stop!" Tyler commanded as he grabbed the broom. "Everything you think you know you don't. Now let me explain."

She slapped his hand. "Explain what?" she said through gritted teeth.

"Oh you're a pistol, I'll give you that much. Just like your mother. Just as lovely too."

Oh, please. Flattery will get you nowhere.

"Don't play that fake lovey dovey part with me I don't buy it for one second!"

Been played before so I know the rules asshole!

"My feelings are as real as they get DG," he said as he handed her what looked like a compass. "Come on. It's from your mother."

"It's from my mother?" DG asked softly. She grabbed it out of his hand and sat down. "What is it?"

"It'll lead you to the Grey Gale and the emerald. DG," he began as he kneeled beside her. "I know this is a lot for you to handle right now but all I ask is that you open your heart and trust me. Can you? We have a long way to go and not much time."

"But I can't go anywhere without my friends!" she protested.

"DG the eclipse is almost here and you're the OZ's only hope. Now your friends understand how important this mission is. Ask yourself: what would they want you to do?"

In her mind she could almost hear Cain's voice.

You have to find the emerald and end this, kiddo.

Without you?

You have no other choice.

I'll miss all of you but I'll miss you the most Cain...I'll always wonder what we could've been...

Maybe there's a chance he's still alive. You can't give up hope of that Deege. He's been down before but he always gets back up. Find the emerald first and then look for him. He'd be pissed if you didn't.

That he would.

Her mind made up, she followed her father out of his hiding place and into the woods unaware that the witch was watching them from a distance, a sly smile on her face. The cries of her minions were growing stronger as the time for the eclipse approached.

Have patience, my precious pets. Soon I'll have the key and you'll be free again. We'll all be free.

Resistance Stronghold

Zero marched his prisoners into the woods. They came across a group of people who were trying to turn a wagon that was lying on its side. "Get this out of our way!" he ordered.

One of the men had his face concealed with a grey cloak. He stood up with a bucket of water in his hands. "Sorry."
"Now!" Zero yelled.

"Would you and your troops like a drink of water?" the young man asked. Zero kicked the bucket out of his hands and the attack began. One of the Longcoats was thrown from his horse as a poison dart was shot at him. Another was unseated when he was struck by a barrel on a rope. The cloaked man and a companion yanked Zero off his horse and began punching him. The woman struck one of the Longcoats with a long stick.

Just like us folks from Elba, Wyatt thought with pride. Use whatever you got laying around. He and his fellow prisoners rushed one of the Longcoats and knocked him down while still chained to the log and crushed another one against a tree. The cloaked man jumped in front of them.

"Father?" Jeb asked as he removed his cloak.

"Son?" Wyatt stared at the young man and could see traces of himself and Adora in his features.

"Ambrose!" the woman screamed and threw her arms around a shocked Glitch. He gazed at her face and smiled with tears in his eyes as he remember the baby sister he loved so much.

"Xennie?"

Jeb simply stared at his father, unable to believe he was actually seeing him. "Get them loose," he ordered his men. In a few minutes they had Wyatt and the others freed from the log. Xenia still held her brother tightly. "And take that piece of shit back to the camp," he said indicating Zero.

"I knew you were alive...I just knew it," Xenia sobbed.

"I've missed you Xennie," Glitch said softly.

"Glitch?" Wyatt asked with a grin on his face.

"Get your head out of the gutter Tin Man. She's my baby sister! Xenia, this grump is Wyatt Cain and that's Raw," he said, indicating the viewer.

"I know who they are." She walked over to where Wyatt and Jeb were standing. They seemed uneasy in each other's presence. "Oh for Ozma's sake Jeb, are you just going to stand there like a damned tin suit?" she snapped.

Wyatt glanced over at the furious redhead thinking how much she acted and sounded like DG. If she was his son's woman, then he had his hands full. He smiled. "You remind me of someone else who likes to chase people with sticks."

"My sword is back at the camp otherwise he'd be missing a head!" she snarled. "And your son is quickly pissing me off. After all the time we spent looking for you he just stands there!"

"Xenia!" Jeb growled. "I'm sorry Father. It's just that...I..."

"It's all right," Wyatt said softly to calm his son, sensing the dragon's rage burning in him.

"Let's head back to camp. Gather up the wounded," Jeb said to two of the men. Wyatt walked beside his son while Xenia stayed a distance behind with her brother.

"Does he know?" Xenia asked him. Glitch shook his head.

"His memory is still partially locked and DG has been kidnapped."
Xenia paled. "By whom?"

"We don't know. Why are you here?"

"I'm protecting the East Gate," she answered.

"Cain's kid?! He's the fourth?"

"You shouldn't be surprised Ambrose. He's the great grandson of Alana Kantrine herself and we both know the four Gates had to be bound by light, love and blood. That's what will make the seal they create unbreakable."

"Does he know he's the fourth?"

"Yes but his powers are partially locked like his father's."

Once they were at the camp Wyatt felt a chill run down his spine when he spotted a tin suit.

"What's that doing here?"

"I keep it to remind me. To remind everyone what we're fighting for," Jeb answered. As he was about to walk away he felt his father's hand on his shoulder.

"You know I uhhh...I thought you were dead."

"They told Mother and I you were dead. If I knew you were still alive I would have risked everything, crossed enemy lines to come get you. You know that, don't you."

"Yeah, I do."

"Excuse me sir. Sargeant Malcom is asking for a moment."

"Sir? You uh, you running things around here?" Wyatt asked his son with a smile.

"It just worked out like that."

"I'm proud of you, son." Wyatt embraced his son but the boy still seemed distant. "Hey. You all right?"

"Sure," he said as he walked away.

It took every ounce of strength Wyatt had not to cry.

I'm a stranger to him. I've lost my boy all over again.

He waited until he was away from everyone before he allowed his tears to fall.

He heard footsteps behind him and saw Raw. The viewer touched his shoulder. This time Wyatt didn't ask him to go away.

"No need for Tin Man to cry. Your son loves you."

"No he doesn't. He's...he's just like me when I came out of that damned suit...cold...distant." Wyatt said sadly. "They may as well have locked him in one too."

"Young Cain fights in your honor. Shows love that way."
"I don't know what to do. How to reach him..."

"Spend time with son then you won't be stranger to him."

"This damned war. It's taken everything from all of us."

"We find DG, stop war and Tin Man can have family again."

"It's too much to hope for."

"Tin Man not alone. Tin Man have Glitch, Raw and DG to help son see the good man his father is."

Wyatt smiled through his tears. "You're all right fuzzball."

"Raw Tin Man's friend. What friends are for." The viewer patted his back and for the first time since he and his son had been reunited, Wyatt felt calm.

After his briefing, Jeb sought out Xenia. She was in another tent with her brother. She stood up and glared at him. "You are an ass!" she hissed.

"What?"

"That man is your father and you're treating him like he's a stranger."

"In a way, he kinda is..."

"That doesn't matter!" she yelled. "You know what he is! His heart is in a fragile state as it is and the last thing we need is for you to make things worse by shutting him out. I should cut your heart out!"

"Xennie, stop. Fighting isn't going to solve anything," Glitch spoke up.

"You're right. We have to try to help Wyatt recover his memories."

"We can't. DG has to do it."

"We may be able to recover some of them, specifically his Talon abilities. Jeb, give me your father's sword."

Jeb lifted the mattress of his cot and handed Xenia Wyatt's Katana sword. She removed it from its sheath and held it up, the silver blade shining brightly.

"Xennie, is that the sword of the first Tin Man?"

"Yes, Ambrose. And the chalice made from Dorothy Gale's slippers." She reached into a backpack and brought out a silver chalice. "Watch." She set the chalice down on the table. The sword flew out of her hand and they heard the clash of metal as the blade's tip struck the center of the elegantly designed cup and was held there. They heard footsteps outside and Wyatt entered the tent. Xenia, Glitch and Jeb kneeled and began to speak in unison.

"The blade finds its resting place
In the chalice's loving embrace
Awaiting the Grand Master to answer its call
To reawaken the dragon once and for all!"

Wyatt grabbed the hilt of the sword and removed it from the chalice and held it up, feeling the spirit of the dragon flowing through him again as he touched the blade. He gazed down at his son, Xenia and Glitch. "Rise, my apprentices." he said softly. The three younger people stood up. "I've found one of the Guardians. I have given my word that I'd defend her until my last breath. Will you make the same pledge?"

"You have our word, Master," the said in unison. "For our word as Talons is our bond."

Wyatt sighed as he returned his sword to its sheath. "She was kidnapped in the Realm of the Unwanted, apparently as part of a setup by Zero and that bitch Airofday."

"Then he better talk if he knows what's good for him," Jeb growled.

"Glitch, go get Raw. We'll need him to read Zero because he sure as hell won't volunteer any information," Wyatt grumbled.

"We need to know more about the machine too," Jeb added. "And believe me...if he lies...we'll know."

Wyatt was beginning to suspect that his son had a cruel streak in him and it made him feel uneasy. His mother and I didn't raise him like that. We taught him never to stoop to their low level. Did the best of him die with her too?

It was highly likely that it would lead to more conflicts between them but he couldn't let his son turn into the same cold heartless bastard he'd been when he first got out of the damned suit.

Being alone in a hot air balloon DG the opportunity to learn more about her father. He told her his real name was Tyler Bennett and that he'd grown up in Kansas like she did. As he recalled how he met her mother, he was smiling.

"When I took off from the Nebraska State Fair I got caught in a freak storm and somehow slipped over to this side. It was a rough crossing but when the clouds cleared I was hoving over this crystal blue lake and the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen."

"My mother?" DG asked with a smile.

"From that day on I was hers. We married, had two beautiful daughters. The perfect life."

"Until I mess it all up by letting the old witch escape."

"Your mother and I would have given anything to keep that memory hidden from you."

"No. I have to know."

"When Bastinda...killed you...when your mother gave you a second life we both knew something drastic had to be done both for the OZ and for you. That's why I took you to the other side, brought you to that tiny farmhouse."

"Why didn't you stay?"

"My job was here. To protect the secret of the emerald and prepare for your return."

"So all that time you and my mother could never be together?" The compass began to make noise. "There!" she cried.
"We'll be together again," he said softly.

"I hope so and I hope I'll see my friends again. I miss them all but...I miss Wyatt the most."

"Which one is Wyatt and why would you miss him the most?" he asked, hoping his daughter wouldn't sense that he already knew the answers to his own questions.

"He's ummm...he's the one who looks like an old west gunslinger and it may sound strange but...I think I'm in love with him."

"I noticed that he's very protective of you."

"He is and for the love part...it may sound crazy because...well...he has to be around your age."

"He looks a little younger than me and there is a ten year age difference between your mother and me so it's not so crazy. Why aren't you sure how you feel about him?"

"He's giving me mixed signals. A lot of times when he looks at me I feel like I can't breathe. He's barely touched me but when he does, I feel like...I know...I know...I should be having a talk like this with Mother."

"I'm still your father and its my job to know about any man who has an interest in my daughter. It sounds to me like he feels the same way about you."

"He runs hot and cold. When I get too close he freezes me out. I understand he probably isn't over his wife and a part of me thinks he'll never get over her."

"Your mother always used to say that love was the strongest magic of all. He might just need a little time and so do you to know for sure if you do love him."

"Thank you...Dad." she said as she embraced him.

All of Raw's efforts to read Zero had proven futile. Bastinda shielded his memories with her magic just as Lavinia had with DG's. They had his arms bound behind his back using a makeshift stockade.

"I'll make this easy for you if you tell us everything you know about the machine," Jeb said in a soft but firm voice. Zero glared at him and spit in his face.

Wrong move asshole.

Jeb wiped his face and stood up. "Bring it in," he commanded.

"What do you got there?" Zero chuckled. The kid was as stupid as the bastard who spawned him. Wouldn't you like to know? Jeb grinned at him.

Hearing what sounded like knives suddenly made Zero nervous. "W...What is that? What ummm what are you doing?"

Want to see you squirm like a worm on a hook. "Hold his fingers."

Zero started screaming. Although Wyatt had always thought of seeing his mortal enemy at his mercy, he knew what his son was doing was wrong.

"Not the fingers!"
"Shut up!" Jeb yelled.
"I'll tell you what you anything you want to know."
"It's too late!"
"I'll talk!"
"Son, let him talk," Wyatt said. "Talk!" he ordered his nemesis.

"The machine forms an intense beam of light. Focuses the power of the emerald on the eclipse. Locks the two suns behind the moon. It'll bring darkness to the OZ forever."

"Damn thing's the anti-sun seeder." Glitch said angrily.

"Sun seeder?" Jeb asked.

"Was a little do hickey I designed to slow the suns and extend the growing season."

"How do we shut it down?" Jeb demanded of Zero.

"Ask him," he said indicating Glitch.

Glitch insisted he didn't know.

"Part of you does...Ambrose."

Jeb explained that it was Glitch's brain that was running the machine and where to find it. After Zero had told them everything they wanted to know Jeb showed him what he'd been threatening to cut his fingers off with...two spoons. He then walked over to the table where Zero's sword lay and unsheathed it. The expression on his face was cold, dark...terrifying as he pressed the blade against Zero's throat.

"Jeb, what are you doing?" Wyatt asked fearfully. That's not my son...it's a monster. I can't let him do this...

"Job's not done yet," Jeb declared in an icy voice. "Now I can finally finish this."

"Not like this," his father pleaded as he pulled his son back. "Put it away!"

"This is the guy who killed Mother. He destroyed your life and mine and you want to let him live!"

"He deserves to die."

"Yeah!"

"I won't deny that."

"Then what?"

"Killing him won't bring back your mother. And it won't honor her memory either."

For a moment father and son stared into each other's eyes, engaged in silent clash of wills. One thought he'd lost his heart forever and was just finding it again, the other's heart was turning as hard as stone. Jeb stormed away from his father, thrusting the blade of the sword into the ground.

Sleep proved difficult for Wyatt that night. He and his son were barely speaking and he was
plagued by nightmares of Adora. He woke up and went into the tent where Zero was still
imprisoned and broke him out of the stockade.

"We're going for a walk. Stand up!" Wyatt ordered as he pulled his pistol out of its holster.

"Can't let your kid take the glory, eh?" Zero sneered.

"Shut up and get moving!" Wyatt hissed. He led him down to the empty tin suit and shoved him
inside, slamming it shut.

"Let me out you son of a bitch!" Zero screamed.

"After a few days in there, you're going to wish for death. Now you'll find out exactly what kind of
hell I went through in there for eight years only there's no one left who cares about you enough to
plead for your release. Think about that. I'm done with you and done letting what you did to me
make me push everyone who tries to care about me away." He spun on his heels and walked away.
Zero was saying something but he didn't hear it. The only sound he heard was his own heart
beating stronger than it had in years.

It's because of her, he thought. I owe that kid more than I can ever repay her. I have to find her.
There's so much I have to tell her.

Tell her what? That she helped you find your heart again?

That she is my heart...

He stopped in his tracks, feeling as if he'd been struck by a lightning bolt and started shaking his
head violently. "No...not like that! She can't be. We can't be..."

Why not?

She's bound to someone else.

Bonds are meant to be broken.

There's always a price.

Sometimes the price is worth the reward especially when love is the reward.

Not this time. Not with her. What kind of life would we have? I'm twice her age and have enough
issues to fill at least three Central Cities. All I'd do is break her heart. She deserves someone who
can devote himself entirely to her and that's not me.

It could be if you tried.

I can be her guardian and her friend but nothing more. It wouldn't work.

He lay down in front of a tall tree and pulled his hat down over his face. He drifted off to sleep but
this time instead of being haunted by Adora, he was now being haunted by DG, trapped in a cold
dark place and screaming his name. A hard kick to his leg woke him out of his slumber early the
next morning. He raised his hat and gazed into his son's furious face.

"What did you do?" Jeb demanded angrily

Wyatt got up and led his son down to where Zero was locked in the suit. "If we stop Azkadellia
we'll be back for him in a few days. If not, he's going to be there a long time. I hope that's justice
enough for you."

"It's not my first choice but Mother would approve."

Wyatt pressed his hand against the boy's heart. "If you don't have heart, you have nothing," he said softly. The trouble was, he feared he was losing part of his again by losing his son and the young woman who helped reunite them without even trying to.

"I can't think of a more fitting punishment," they heard a voice say and spun around, their mouths agape. "Close your mouths boys or you'll start catching flies...or crickets."

"Commander Ozopov! I thought you were dead." Wyatt exclaimed.

"Everyone said the same about you from what I've heard."

"Where the hell have you been, Jiminy?"

"The Other Side and it's Archie now."

"Oh yeah? Doing what?"

"Protecting the Strogoff heir," Archie replied. "But now I'm back and I'm getting my wife back and I need your help to do it. I'm conserving my magic because I need to be at full strength when we take that tower and stop Bastinda from locking that eclipse in the sky."

"The OZ can't survive without sunlight."

"Oh, she's gonna do much worse than that Wyatt. She's opening the gates of Ephesis itself."

"J...Jiminy Crickets!" Elmer exclaimed when he joined them. Archie glared at him.

"What'd I tell you about using that expression around me, Gulch?" he barked.

Jeb threw back his head and started laughing. "I remember how you used to get riled up every time you heard us use it."

"Yes well, I don't like it," Archie huffed. "And you Ozians never would've heard it if Dorothy Gale never came here. She used it all the time. I hope to tell her modern version doesn't or I'll be having a talk with her."

"Wait...what? What are you talking about Jiminy?" Wyatt asked him.

"Dorothia, Wyatt. She's Dorothy Gale reborn."

"Jimi..."

"Don't say it, Gulch! And would everyone please stop saying Azkadellia is to blame for all this because she's not. It's Bastinda."

"She's fighting her, isn't she?" Wyatt asked him.

"But she can't do it alone. She needs me...and DG. You get DG to that Tower and destroy Bastinda's army. Leave the witch and the eclipse to us."

"If we can find her."
"Where is Toto? I didn't see him with you?"

"Tucked tail and ran, the bastard."

"Is that right?" Archie's eyes narrowed to slits. "He can't run anywhere I won't be able to find him. Come on, Elmer! We're going dog catching!"

He took off his leather jacket and unbuttoned his shirt. "Pallux, Perika!" he called out. The mobat demons flew off his chest and bowed. "Dalmatian forms please," he instructed.

Before Wyatt and Jeb's astonished eyes two dogs now stood in front of the former Ozian army commander.

"Wyatt has Toto's scent. Pick it up and find him!" he ordered.

The dogs sniffed Wyatt's hands and barked several times before they took off into the woods with their master and his companion in pursuit. Wyatt stared after him, smiling and put his arms around Jeb's shoulders.

"The cricket's flying again son. We might win this war after all."

DG and Tyler reached their destination late in the afternoon. At first she couldn't see anything but as she got closer two emerald green doors appeared in front of her. She held up her marked palm and it began to glow. The double doors opened and she and Tyler entered what appeared to be a monument.

"Your mother told me about this place but I never dreamed it would be so beautiful."

"Who's buried here?"

"The ones whose blood runs through your veins. The royal succession that leads to you." He led her over to a set of white double doors. "The oldest rests here. She was your greatest great grandmother. The original slipper. The first to make it over to the OZ from the other side."

DG looked up at the gold plaque that read: DOROTHY GALE.

"Dorothy Gale." DG read aloud.

"You were named in her honor."

The emerald is guarded by the Grey Gale," she recited and held up her palm again to open the doors. As she walked inside she looked back at her father.

"This you must do alone," he said and stepped back. She continued on and found herself in a black and white version of her farmhouse. She heard footsteps behind her and faced a young girl about twelve years old...her ancestress...the legendary Dorothy Gale still wearing the silver slippers that had been given to her by the good witch of the North.

"I've been waiting for you," Dorothy said.

"You're Dorothy?"

Dorothy handed the emerald to her. "The emerald of the eclipse is in your hands now and the darkness must be returned to its prison."

"How?"
"The prison's lock can only be created by bond of the heart and soul of the OZ in light and love. The seal Nicolai and I created was not strong enough and that is how it escaped this time. You must find your other half and consummate your bond. Only then will your seal lock the prison forever."

She waved her hand and DG could see an image of an older Dorothy and a man she recognized as Prince Nicolai. They were standing in the cave where she and Azkadellia found the witch.

"In this prison the darkness do we bind
Lock it away forever for no soul to find," Dorothy and Nicolai were chanting as they stood face to face and held hands, light flowing through them and into the earth. A mist made of black vines tipped with sharp thorns appeared between them and DG could hear a demented laugh.

"I will be free from this prison like before
My victory you have taken but I will have another
Gale sister will turn against sister and Gale brother will turn against brother
Until your bloodline exists no more!"

"How will I find my other half?" she asked. Dorothy faded away. "Well, some help you are!" she cried. The precious emerald in her hand, she and Tyler exited the crypt.

"It won't be long before the eclipse, we have to hurry" Tyler reminded her. "DG, you're everything I hoped you'd be. I am so proud of you."

"I'm so proud of you. My little girl," the witch mocked from behind them. "You're everything I hoped you'd be. Daddy, you old romantic." She waved her hand and Tyler shrunk to the size of a pencil. He floated into her hand. "Daddy. I've missed you so much." She snickered and slapped her hands together. He vanished.

"What did you do with him?" DG cried.

"He's quite comfortable." She held out her hand. "You have something for me. C'mon, want to share your shiny new trinket with your big sister."

"No. You're not my sister."

The witch pushed with her magic, forcing the emerald to float to her hand. "It doesn't look like much, does it? But it has so much power," she whispered.

"Green's not your color," DG countered as she tried to grab it back. The witch shot a ball of magic that took DG's breath away.

"I thought you were dead, little sister. Buried in the ground all these years."

"You're not... DG coughed.

"No, it's where you belonged. You look good in marble. Green marble."

DG found herself locked inside a sarcophagus. Terrified, she screamed and began pounding at it with her fists.

"Help! Someone help me! Wyatt!"
He can't hear you.

"I'm scared... I don't know what to do. I don't want to die again..." DG whispered fearfully. She closed her eyes and the tears fell down her cheeks as she thought about all the loved ones she'd leave behind. Glitch, Raw, her parents, Az and Wyatt. Now she understood how he felt being locked away all those years, yet he'd managed to call out to her to tell her how to find him and set him free. Could she do the same?

Find my prison and release me Wyatt, she chanted and pushed with her light, willing it to travel across the distance to the one person who could help her. I love you...

There was no sense denying it any longer. She was in love with Wyatt Cain. He was at least twenty years her senior, widowed and pissed off at the world but he'd been at her side through some of the best and worst parts of this journey and once she got him alone she was going to tell him just how much she loved him.

She couldn't really be sure when it started. Some part of her thought it was once they'd been smuggled into Central City and he decided to abandon her to go after Zero only to return or was it when he came to rescue her at the Tower when she thought he was dead? She held onto him longer than she should have then. Was it when she broke down after seeing what Glitch suffered in order to try to keep the sun seeder plans from the witch or after the pep talk he'd given her once she realized she was to blame for this whole mess in the first place? Or was it in the alley when she'd waited for him to kiss her? As her emotions took control of her, her light pushed against the lock on her memories forged by Lavinia's magic. It shattered, taking her inside them and allowing her at last to see the truth that had been concealed from her for so long. Her spirit left her body and journeyed with its unseen guide through her memories.

"Come Deege," it said softly, sounding somewhat familiar to her. "See at last what your heart was forced to conceal but longs to reveal..."

She saw herself as a child being held in Wyatt's arms, her small hand pressed against his heart, the light flowing out of her into him and speaking to him in his mind, sounding just as she did now.

Have courage for the task at hand will be hard

This half of our heart you must now guard

The other half lives inside of you

And to both you must always be true

Divided we will fall

As one we form an impenetrable wall

Bound by light and love will we be

One heart forever to protect the OZ.

Her memories took her back to the day the witch first killed her only this time she was seeing Wyatt in the room with her, the two of them combining their light to try to fight back only finding it not strong enough. She was taken to Wyatt's room in he Mystic Man's mansion, watching him endure her pain as if it were his own and hearing the Mystic Man instructing him on what to do.

What's happening, Wyatt?
The kid...she's killing her!

Who is killing who?

The kid's sister is killing her.

Her sister? That's impossible.

She's using dark magic on the girl to strangle her and I can feel it! There's another presence in the room with us, one stronger than any of us. I can't fight it off. I'm trying but whatever it is, it's blocking me.

Concentrate on DG Wyatt and try. If one of you dies so does the other. Give her the will to fight!

I'm trying!

Try harder dammit!

"S...She's dying. Can't help her. Dark magic is too strong."

"Wyatt, listen to me. No, I want you to open your eyes and listen to me! You have your wife and your son, my godson. They need you."

"Don't know what to do."

"Wyatt, it's a bonding spell! You'll follow the princess to her grave unless you break it now."

"You...told me not to."

"I know I did son and you tried to use it to save her but it wasn't strong enough. Let her go. For the sake of Adora and your son, let her go."

"I don't know how."

"Look in your heart. The answers are always in your heart."

She saw the sadness on his face as he spoke the words that would separate them and it brought her to tears, her heart filled with a sorrow that not even her guide could soothe.

"It is with regret I that now undo

This bond to make one heart from two

The future now is impossible to see

For with a severed heart comes a severed memory.

Myself I can never forgive

For the sacrifice I have made for us to live

Soon a storm will take you away

And through a storm we will be reunited one day

Then at last we can redo
This bond to make one heart from two
And only then will we be
One heart forever to protect the OZ."

"Oh Wyatt, what did he make you do?" DG asked through her tears. It was her guide who answered.

"The punishment is severe for those who defy the will of the OZ
A heart bond of our choosing is one that is meant for eternity
Should this bond be broken by human device
Everything it holds most dear it will be made to sacrifice
The rivers of its memory will flow with the image of spilled blood
Until the dams burst and they become a raging flood
If one day the lost half of its heart returns to reclaim
The one who has forgotten it, through love shall it be relieved from its pain."

"Oh God," she moaned. "His wife...his son! They're dead because of me! It is my fault. I've taken everything away from him...everything! I'm the one who needs his forgiveness!"

"The fault was his tutor's not his or yours, Deege. Because Wyatt was the stronger of the two of you, he would have lived longer...a few hours. You had already been brought back to life so the bond held."

"Until he broke it. He suffered so much. All those years locked away alone..."

"He did not spend the entire eight years alone, Deege. Come with me and I'll show you." Her guide took her to their reunion when she was just sixteen. She couldn't help laughing as she watched her past self interact with his dragon spirit in almost the same way she interacted with him now.

"How could he stand me at that age? I was so immature."

"Yet even with a lack of maturity you knew he was a comforting presence in your dreams and gave him a brief escape from his prison. Unfortunately when his dragon spirit awoke, the witch sensed it and wanted to find out the cause."

A chill ran down her spine, knowing what was coming next. "Oh, no...no!" she screamed, body shaking with rage while she watched the witch shove what looked like a probe into his heart while Lylo tried reading him. "Y...You bitch! I'll kill you. I swear to God I'll kill you! Make it stop," she pleaded with her guide. "Please...don't let her hurt him anymore..."

"I can't stop what has already been done."

"It was only one meeting and he had to endure all of that."

"No Deege, it was not the last time he came to you. You've already unlocked part of your memory of what happened to you after the prom but this is the truth that has been taken from you by all the medicines you were given."
She could see the two of them sitting on the porch of what she now knew was Wyatt's cottage, locked in a passionate embrace and sharing their first kiss, finally admitting their love for each other after so long only to have the witch tear him away from her again and continue to torture him until he shut his body down.

"You have to go now! If you stay she'll find a way to unlock my heart's memories and track you."

"I can't leave you now! Not now that we..."

"D...Dottie, please. She's already taken Adora and my son away from me. I can't lose you too."

"Wyatt, please don't leave me. I love you..."

"Find my prison and release me..."

"I'll find your prison and free you Wyatt, I promise...We'll be together again soon my darling..."

She was taken back to her old bedroom back in the Northern Island palace and saw the witch standing over her bed with her hands pressed down on the mattress reciting a spell.

"In this bed I give birth to a curse of pain
On the hearts of Dorothia Gale and Wyatt Cain
I call upon all the darkness to heed my will
Cast upon their hearts a bitter chill
Destined mates you will no longer be
For you will not have that memory
When in love you try to fall
Wrap around your hearts a icy wall
Hateful words you will speak until your last breaths
For broken hearts shall be your deaths
Here I will at last claim my final victory
And permanent darkness will come to the OZ!"

"We'll see about that bitch!" DG screamed to the empty room. "He may not remember us but when he does, the two of us are going to send you back to hell where you belong!"

"DG," she heard a familiar voice whisper and turned to see her sister standing in the room in shadow form. She looked different. Instead of the leather suits and elaborate hairstyles, this version of her sister wore a simple white satin gown with her long black hair hanging loose around her shoulders.

"Az? You're the one who has been guiding me through my memories?"

"Yes."

"But...how are you able to come to me now?"
"There are times when I am able to take control of my soul and body but it is mostly at night while she sleeps. Just as Wyatt was able to escape his prison through your dreams. I've been fighting her since the day she took control. You have to stop her Deege. The emerald cannot be held by anyone other than me. We will need it for the final battle."

"The eclipse?"

"No. It is only the beginning. You have to release me from her grip and we must fight the final battle along with those whom we are bonded to."

"How do I break the curse on Wyatt and me?"

Azkadellia smiled and glanced over at the bed. She waved her hand and two symbols appeared in the center of the mattress. One was a Katana sword and the other was a chalice.

"In this bed was born a curse to make the hearts cold
Of destined heartmates, you are young, he is old
In his heart lies the truth you seek
Heed not the angry words you hear him speak
You are his fire and he is yours
Your kiss and your touch will shatter all his icy doors
You are the chalice, the darkness has chilled the waters of your desire
He is the blade, only he can make them flow with passion's fire.
To this bed you must return
Yourself you must give to him to make a single flame burn
A single flame burning with love will shatter the final wall of cold
And join forever the hearts of destined mates, one young and one old
From your love a child there will be
To continue the bloodline that will forever protect the OZ."

"Remember DG, restore his memories and consummate your bond at the curse's point of origin. It is the only way to break it! For now, you need to free yourself, find Wyatt and release me from the witch!" Azkadellia instructed before she vanished.

The witch stood on the balcony of the tower gazing out at the dark sky. Vy-Sor approached her with a box in his hands. Encased inside a pendant that she would wear around her neck was the prized symbol of the North Gate, the emerald.

"History is about to be repeated. And this time I'll get it right," she vowed.

You will fail as before! she heard Azkadellia's enraged voice scream out. The emerald belongs to me and me alone.
Who will stop me silly girl? Your sister? The Tin Man? One of them is locked in her coffin and the other my destroyer will finish off as he should have years ago.

You underestimate my sister and her Tin Man, bitch. You think your curse will break them? Think again! We four guardians will unite and bind you in a prison you'll never escape from!

Your fourth is lost.

We'll see.

Toto, who had been following Tyler and DG as best he could in his dog form, finally reached the locked doors of the Gale Crypt. He picked up DG's scent inside. She was trapped inside but he could not help her. Only those of the Gale bloodline could access the crypt. He ran as fast as his canine legs could carry him in search of Wyatt Cain until he was confronted by two Dalmatians. The larger dogs snarled at him and he backpedaled in fear until he felt his backside brush against a pair of leather boots.

"Pongo, Perika, stand down."

Commander Ozopov! But...but he's DEAD!

"I'm very much alive Toto and I want an explanation. Why did you run when the Longcoats came to the bar?" Archie demanded.

Ahamo took DG. I was tracking them.

Archie breathed a sigh of relief. "Well at least that part's going according to plan."

DG is trapped inside the Grey Gale. We need to get her out.

"We can't. Bastinda sealed the doors with a lock on DG can break and she needs an emotion strong enough to do it. Love and the only person that can inspire that is back at a resistance stronghold not far from here. Go get Wyatt Cain and bring him here and I swear to Lurline if you double cross us I'm stripping you of your shapeshifting ability and locking you in a tin suit for the rest of your life!"

There's the Commander Ozopov I remember. Ozmalita choose Azkadellia's bondmate well. She is taking back control more isn't she?

"Mostly at night. She feels safer at night."

You make your bond stronger every night you spend with her, Jiminy. One more night.

"Go. Find Wyatt and hurry! We're running out of time."

Wyatt was determined to find DG even if he had to tear the entire Realm of the Unwanted apart to do it. Then when he got his hands on the so-called Seeker he was going to tear him apart if the bastard did anything to her.

"Are you sure you trying to find DG is the right thing?" his son asked him. He'd disappointed the boy by how he'd handled Zero but DG had been his responsibility since she left him out of the suit and she needed him. as a friend and nothing more, he reminded himself. "She's alive. I know she is. Someone in the realm has to know how to find this Seeker. You heard what Jiminy said. DG is the key to bringing the witch down."

"Well goddess willing I'll see you at the tower," Jeb said aloud.
Be careful, he warned his father in his mind. I don't want to lose you again.

Father and son gazed at each other.

You and DG are the most important things in my life now, Jeb.

Jeb wrapped his arms around Wyatt and held him tightly for the first time since he was a child.

I love you, Dad.

I love you too, son.

I can just imagine what Granddad would be saying now. 'What's all that huggin' for? 'We Cains ain't huggers now cut that shit out!'

Yeah, that'd be something he'd say all right. Never liked it, even when your mom and Aunt Mari tried to do it. DG's the hugging type too. I kinda acted like your granddad when she first hugged me.

"Thank you," Jeb said softly as they separated, both of them smiling. "Okay, let's move it, men! We don't have much time."

Wyatt sighed with relief. He'd been terrified his unwillingness to kill Zero had severed his ties with his son completely but despite that one lapse in judgment his son still loved him. Once this damned war was over, he was going to spend more time with his boy. He lost enough time with him already.

Lavinia was free from her prison for the first time but it was merely for torture. The witch entered the room, her hand covering something dangling from her neck.

"Oh, don't you look pretty," she said sarcastically. "Good thing because I brought you a date," she said as her guards escorted Tyler into the room. Seeing her husband again after so many years apart shattered the older queen's self control. Husband and wife kissed passionately.

"Enough!" the witch hissed, removing her hand and allowing Lavinia to gaze upon her emerald prize. "Do you know how long I have waited to see that look on your face? No phony smile. No brave front. Just pure and utter shock. Probably the only honest gift you've ever given me, Mother!"

"I am not your mother!"

"Our daughter is really gone?" Tyler asked.

"Both of your daughters are gone."

"DG is dead?"

"Your little girl's quest is ended as your royal line ends today. In darkness, permanent darkness," the witch announced triumphantly. "They do not leave this room," she ordered the guards as she left the room and went out to the balcony to wait for the eclipse to begin.

Toto finally picked up Wyatt's scent in the woods. The first people he encountered were Glitch and Raw. Once Wyatt was with them he shifted back to his human form.

"I can take you to DG. I know where she is. She's in trouble."
"How do we know you're not lying to us again?" Wyatt asked.

Raw approached the shapeshifter and placed his hand over Toto's heart. "Speak truth," he confirmed.

"All right, where is she?"

"She's a long ways away and we'd better hurry."

"Hurry, how?" Glitch asked. They heard a flock of horses in the distance.

"Does that answer your question?" Wyatt asked as he approached their riders. "You mind if we borrow these?"

"Not at all, sir."

"Much obliged. Lead us to DG pooch, but mark my words...I find out you're lying and I'm puttin' you down. Understood?"

"Yes, Mr. Cain." He shifted back into a dog and raced off toward the crypt opening a mind connection with Wyatt having sensed that he'd finally regained his mind speech ability.

She's trapped in the Gale crypt.

Why didn't you let her out!

I can't. The crypt can only be opened by one of their own or the Talon Grand Master...and that's you now.

What if it doesn't open for me?

It will open for you once it recognizes you.

I hope to hell you're right, pooch.

DG was once again back in the sarcophagus, hearing her father and Toto coaching her how to make her light obey her commands. She closed her eyes again and pushed out with her light, undoing the screws securing the coffin closed. Using her marked palm, she moved the lid aside and jumped out.

After so many years of searching she'd finally found her home and along with it her heart in Wyatt Cain but before they could be together again she had to save the other person she held even closer to her heart, her sister and best friend. She ran out of the crypt and could see Toto running toward her. How had he been able to find her? "Toto?" she asked. He barked affirmatively. She looked up again and saw a group of riders coming toward her, a man with a familiar grey fedora hat leading the pack on a white horse.

Wyatt, you found me. I knew you would,

she thought breathlessly. It was as if she'd woken up in her ultimate fantasy...the hero on a white steed coming to her rescue and sweeping her off her feet. Her heart was pounding so fiercely she was terrified it would burst out of her chest. He quickly dismounted and hurried toward her.

"You okay?" he asked worriedly.

I'm fine now that you're here...I do love you.
The only thing she was able to do was hold out her arms to him.

"DG," he said softly as he and Raw embraced her.

"Do you have the emerald?" he asked pulling her out of her romantic reverie. She shook her head sadly. "Where is it?"

"She's got it Cain," she mumbled. Raw began to gesture worriedly.

Wyatt gazed up at the sky, the twin suns edging closer to the moon. "Okay come on, let's go. We don't have much time."

They raced back to the horses.

"You wanna ride with me, Deege?" Glitch asked.

"Ummm, if it's okay with you I'll ride with Mr. Cain."

And right then, even though it seemed like the world as they knew it was about to be turned on its head, the only place she wanted to be was with the man she loved. Wyatt mounted the white horse and pulled DG up behind him. She wrapped her arms around his waist.

"Hold on tight, kid."

As they raced through the woods, there were so many thoughts swirling in DG's mind. She thought of her parents, the sister she'd loved and lost, her new friends and lover...if he'd have her again and wondered how it was going to be possible for them all to survive this new storm that was coming.
Nothing Can Hurt Us If We're Together

Chapter by cjmoliere

Walk the dark path
Sleep with angels
Call the past for help
Touch me with your love
And reveal to me my true name

Nightwish - Nemo

When they reached the Tower Wyatt introduced her to his now grown son Jeb, a resistance leader just like his father. It was hard for her not to see the brave little boy who had stood up to Zero while his father was getting beaten within an inch of his life behind the young man just three years younger than her. Jeb picked up a pair of binoculars and glanced out at the tower.

"Security is as high as I've ever seen it," he said.

"Yeah," Wyatt agreed.

"Of course," Glitch complained. "Why would it be easy?"

"Well if you guys can blow the generators that power those turbines we can sneak in the same way we escaped," Wyatt suggested to his son.

"I'll send my best men down to light charges." Jeb said.

"It kinda boggles the noggin to think that we're going in there with all guns blazing," Glitch remarked.

"Well let's hope we're the quiet part of this plan," said Wyatt.

"We're almost ready," Jeb informed him.

"Have you guys seen Raw?" DG asked softly as she placed a reassuring hand on Glitch's shoulder.

"I, uh think he's lost his nerve," he answered.

She spotted him pacing behind a tree, his hands shaking and started toward him, Glitch close at her heels.

"Hey Raw," she said gently. "I wanted to show you something." She held up her palm and the House of Gale symbol was no longer there.

"That's bad...right?" Glitch asked worriedly. "I mean, you lost the emerald so what does that mean?"

"It means that I don't need it anymore," DG answered wisely. "All that I need is right here," she went on, placing her hand over her heart. "Raw. You are no coward." She placed a reassuring hand
on the Viewer's shoulder. "You have taught me that courage is not about being fearless. It's about standing up in spire of your fear. You stood up to the Papays and threw yourself off a cliff. You escaped from prison."

"Raw do that for DG," the Viewer said timidly.

"No. You did that for you. Courage has been in you all along." DG insisted. The viewer smiled and embraced her. Not far away Wyatt listened attentively while he pulled his gun out of his coat pocket and checked the chamber.

"You know when I had a brain I was twice as scared as I am now with half a brain. Which means if I had no brain at all I would be four times braver than I was when I was brainy," Glitch said, trying his best to put up his own brave front. DG smiled with pride.

"Glitch. You're the smartest guy I know."

"No you're just saying that to make me feel good," Glitch laughed nervously.

DG touched his shoulder. "You helped me remember my past and that's probably the most important weapon I have now." Glitch threw his arms around her. "Thank you," DG whispered. After all, this man had sacrificed so much to try to prevent what she'd started in the first place. He nodded his head toward Wyatt and he and Raw walked away, leaving them alone in the woods. He stood rigid, his back to her.

Oh God, let me do this right...

"I know what you're doing kid," he said before she had a chance to. She gasped. "I've led men through battle myself." he went on. It was true, what she'd been doing is trying to give her friends courage but this talk was not the same.

This is different, can't you see that? Raw and Glitch are my friends but I could never say to them what I want to say to you.

"And umm...how am I doing?" she asked, unable to mask her disappointment.

"Well, there's less hugging when I do it," he said with a smile. "But not so bad."

She felt her heart breaking. No matter how hard she tried to reach out to him, she could feel him pulling away and the ice around his heart growing colder.

"We better get going."

"Look," he said abruptly. She stopped and they were gazing into each other's eyes. She felt her heart beating faster with hope renewed.

Tell me you love me, Wyatt. If you can find the courage to say it, so can I.

"You may not be able to save your sister. So if our plan doesn't work you will try to get to get out of there. Right? This is the one time I'm not going to be there to help."

"You've already helped me Mr. Cain," she said stiffly.

"I'm serious! Don't go up there and lose your head and forget about what's really important."

"What's really important is family," she croaked, trying desperately to hold back her tears. Once again he'd taken her hopes and shattered them. "I can't remember who taught me that," she added,
glancing at her shoes. He lowered his own head.

You love me, you have to. Why are you looking at me like that if you don't? And why can't you say it?

She held out her hand. "Good luck Mr. Cain," she whispered. Instead of taking her hand he pulled her into his arms and held her against him. When they separated she could see that he looked as if he were about to cry himself yet he said nothing. Of their little group, she and Wyatt were proving to be the biggest cowards of all, lacking the courage to express their true feelings to each other.

She ran down the hill and leaned against a tree, her body shaking as she sobbed. "I love you, Wyatt! Why can't you remember me, remember us?" She could see him in the distance talking to his son. She dried her eyes. Now was not the time to break down. As she'd said before what was really important was family. She would free her sister from the witch, find her parents, reunite with her friends and come hell or high water, she was going to shatter the ice around Wyatt Cain's heart for good.

"You okay Dad?" Jeb asked his father when Wyatt returned, his eyes bloodshot. "You and DG didn't have a fight, did you?"

"No. There were just some things we needed to say to each other, that's all." he replied evasively. And plenty I didn't but it's better this way. Neither one of us can go in there losing our heads. "You might want to have a talk with Xenia too."

"Xenia?"

"I don't know what went on between you two but you have to work it out. If there's one thing your mother and I never did, that was spend too long mad at each other. And no matter how much DG and I piss each other off, well...we can't stay mad at each other long either."

"Do you love her Dad?" Jeb inquired, staring hard at his father. He heard Wyatt take a deep breath.

"Your mother..." he began.

"Is gone, Dad. And the last thing she'd want for you is to spend the rest of your life alone and miserable which is exactly what you'll be."

"It's impossible Jeb. I'm old enough to be her father and she's a princess. They marry their own kind. No, we're better off being friends." Wyatt insisted.

"I said that once and right now I'm living to regret it," Jeb confessed sadly. Wyatt glanced over in Xenia's direction. "Don't make my mistake," he pleaded.

"I don't know...maybe when all this is over I'll feel differently. If...something does happen between DG and me, you sure you're gonna be okay with it?"

"We've all lost too much already," Jeb said wisely.

This war has made him grow up too fast, made us all older than we should be, Wyatt thought.

Even if we do win, what kind of world will we be waking up in tomorrow? A better one? Or will it be the same?

Wyatt threw his arms around his son. "Your grandpap can bitch all he wants to about this from wherever he is but I'm not caring right now."
Jeb laughed. "We Cains aren't huggers now cut that shit out."

"Go talk to Xenia but I have to tell you, if you upset her, I don't think I'm gonna be able to hold back the Zipperhead. That's his baby sister after all."

"Thank the goddess she has more brains in her head than he does in his," Jeb muttered. His father patted his shoulder affectionately. Jeb gave him a reassuring smile and went in search of Xenia. He found her kneeling on the ground, her eyes closed, her hands resting on the hilt of her sword as she prayed.

"Great Lurline, hear my prayer

Let us win this battle right and fair

With hands strong and hearts true

We will claim our victory in honor of you."

"Xen?"

Xenia opened her eyes and stood up. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing, just need to talk, that's all."

"I know what you're going to say. None of us know if we're going to make it out of here and its messing with our heads. I don't want you to stand here and tell me now you wish things could've been different for us because it never would've been. I'm a Temple of Lurline soldier, bound to protect the East Guardian and I cannot let my feelings for you become more than that again."

"Now who is condemning herself to spending the rest of her life and the afterlife alone?" Jeb countered. "There's no law in the books that says I'm forbidden to love a guardian. If Azkadellia can do it, so can I!"

"Y...You're saying..." she stammered.

"I'm saying that I love you, Xenia. I always have and I'm damned tired of seeing you look at me with nothing but hatred in your eyes because I was too stupid to admit it. If you don't have heart, you have nothing and you are my heart."

"Oh, Jeb!" she sobbed as she threw herself into his arms and kissed him.

"This mean you love me, Xenia?"

"If I have to say it you're more stupid than I thought. Yes, I love you!" she cried and they kissed again.

Wyatt watched from a distance, his face beaming with pride. He barely noticed that someone was standing beside him until he felt a gentle touch on his shoulder.

"You might be a grandfather soon, Tin Man," DG said with a grin.

"They better get married first."

"And just think...you and Glitch will be in-laws," she added.

"Aww, damn, forgot about that! Oh well, I can put up with her crazy brother as long as she makes
my boy happy."

"Everyone deserves to be happy, Wyatt."

"What happened to Cain, or Mr. Cain?" he asked.

"I think we know each other well enough now that I can start calling you by your first name. We're going to win this. We have to. We all have so much to live for, to look forward to..." DG whispered.

If Jeb is willing to take a chance for love, why can't you? He may want to make you a grandfather but you're the only man I would ever want to father my child.

From our love a child there must be

To continue the bloodline that forever protects the OZ.

She felt him take her hand in his and squeeze it tightly. "No witch is gonna stop me from holding my first grandbaby," he said determinedly.

And she's not going to stop me from asking you to hold our first baby and the ones that come after because I intend to give you more than one, Wyatt.

"Are you ready to go?" she asked him.

"As ready as I'm gonna get, Princess," he said as they joined the others.

Artie Dagon stood high on the hill, his hand poised over the switch of the detonator. In the distance he could see a flash of light as Jeb raised his Katana sword. He pushed down on the handle and a loud explosion rocked the ground beneath the Tower. The leader of a division of Longcoats shouted orders to the others and they ran off in the direction of the blast.

The witch, from her position on the balcony of the tower, glanced down and smirked. "The resistance is giving me a fireworks display. No matter. There will be nothing left of them once I unlock the gates. Soon my pets, soon, you will have a feast laid at your table."

A second explosion erupted. As the Longcoats scurried after it, Wyatt and his companions started their descent into the Tower through the pipes.

On the tower balcony Bastinda stood on a platform, her head held high, her body quivering with anticipation.

"Ahhhh...let it begin!" she whispered. In the cellar of the tower the alchemist and his assistants threw the switches on the machine. Fans hissed, gears shifted and the Tower shook sending a burst of emerald green light up the platform where the witch stood. She held out her hands and sighed with pleasure as she felt the mauritanium in the earth responding to the commands of the emerald, sending the beam of light up to the moon with the double suns moving closer toward it.

A grey fedora hat flew out in front of a Longcoat standing guard near one of the pipes. As he turned around, Wyatt jumped out and delivered a hard punch to his face. He fell to the floor. Glitch pushed the unconscious man out of sight, brushed off Wyatt's hat and handed it to him.

"Let's go," Wyatt whispered when he felt they now had a clear path. Another group of Longcoats ran past them and they took cover behind another pipe. "Raw, which way?" he asked once they were out of sight.
"Up one floor."

Wyatt checked his pistol to make sure it was fully loaded. "All right, let's do it!" DG saluted them. "Good luck," he called to her as she started toward the balcony.

Wyatt, Glitch and Raw were sneaking up behind a pair of Longcoats ready to strike when the Longcoats were distracted by a loud bark. Toto shifted into dog form, raised his fists and punched both of them. Wyatt grinned.

"I thought you hightailed it."

Toto lightly slapped his shoulder. "Go. I'll watch out for you. Go."

You're okay, pooch.

Be careful, but be strong.

You too.

"Are you ready?" Jeb asked Xenia as they stood on the top of the hill, hands joined. Using her free hand, she pulled her sword from its sheath while Jeb drew his father's sword.

"He wanted me to use his today," he explained to her.

"I love you." Xenia whispered.

"I love you too Xen." He raised the sword up.

In the distance he could hear the ringing of a dinner bell.

"It's dinnertime boys!" they heard a female's voice call out in the distance and the sounds of a catapult being loaded.

From her position on the opposite side of the hill Sarah Jane, granddaughter of the famous 'Boiling Belle' watched with pride as her grandmother's famous pot was being loaded onto the catapult with a lethal stew she'd been cooking for several days in honor of the very same person her grandmother had dedicated her best stew to years before.

"Taste Return of Wyatt's Wrath you sons of bitches!" she screamed. "Launch it!" she commanded her assistants.

The lethal stew soared high in the air followed by enflamed arrows just as it had years before, engulfing everything it touched into a blazing inferno.

"Charge!" Jeb shouted from the top of his horse. Like his mother and father before him, he rode down the hill with his army at his back, weapons raised high ready to fight to the death for their freedom.

"Give em the second course!" Sarah Jane's voice bellowed out as a second pot was launched followed by flaming arrows.

Concealed behind large rocks, the daughters of the Lethal Laundresses raised their clothesline and tied it to sticks that had been hammered into the ground, waiting for their fellow soldiers to lead the Longcoat cavalry to their trap.

Behind another cluster of rocks a group of young men waited with their slingshots poised, a
collection of small rock ammunition piled up beside them. Fifteen years earlier they had successfully defended their village from a smaller Longcoat army and fought beside their friends and families in the battles that followed once they got older but today they wanted to go back to their roots in honor of their original leader.

In the years since that first battle, the villagers of Elba were no longer alone in their fight. They now had help from all four guilds having won their respect by their sheer determination to fight for their freedom no matter what the cost and it was this unity that made them create a magic of their own.

Wyatt kicked open the door to the brain room. As Glitch gazed at the missing piece of him he cherished so much he smiled.

"I'd recognize me anywhere."

He stepped up to the glass case wishing he could just reach inside it, take his brain out and return it to its rightful place but he knew it couldn't be done now.

"Glitch, it's time to get reacquainted with yourself," Wyatt said softly. "Connect him to it," he commanded Raw.

Raw placed one hand on the glass and the other to the side of his friend's head. Memories began to flash through his mind, his work as the advisor, his family, his friends.

"All right, Glitch, I need you to remember something for me," Wyatt said to keep him focused. "Glitch, can you hear me?"

"My name isn't Glitch. It's Ambrose," he corrected softly.

"Okay, Ambrose. I need you to remember how you designed the sun seeder and how to shut it down."

"Do you see the keyboard numbers that control the light pulsing?"

Wyatt glanced down at the keyboard. There was so many. "Yeah...about a million of 'em. Which ones do I turn off?"

"Proper shut down sequencing to light pulsing is imperative!" Ambrose snapped.

Well I'm not a genius Zipperhead! Damn, I think I liked you better when you didn't hook up to your brain. Now you sound like you have a huge stick up your ass! "Okay but which numbers?" Wyatt asked, frustrated.

As Ambrose recited the numbers, Wyatt typed them out on the keyboard and pulled back the small handle. He could hear the machine slowing down as it responded.

"What's causing the trouble?" Vy-Sor demanded as he and the alchemist noticed that the gauges were showing low power readings.


Now on the balcony DG stood face to face with the witch trapped in her sister's body.

"Azkadellia!" she called to her sister, hoping that her sister's light would be strong enough to break
through and hear her. "There's still time to stop this!"

"Look up!" Bastinda commanded. "The power of the emerald is about to lock the double eclipse in
the sky and bring permanent darkness to the OZ. A fierce new world is awakening!" she declared.

"No! Listen to me my sister!" DG pleaded. "This is not what you want, remember who you are!"

"Your sister is dead," the witch sneered.

"No," DG insisted as she moved toward the platform. Bastinda sent a powerful wave of dark light
out at her, tossing her over the balcony. DG reached out with her light and made her hands large
enough to grip the railing but she was finding it difficult to pull herself back up.

Out of the corner of his eye Toto could see the alchemist heading toward the brain room with the
viewer Kalm and some Longcoats. He shifted into dog form and crept up behind them, hitting one
of them and grabbing his gun, shooting the other with the gun he'd taken. The alchemist zapped
him with the electric prod. He fell to the floor unconscious and shifted back into dog form.

Wyatt watched as the power showing on the gauges in front of them decreased. "I think it's
working!" Ambrose called out another number.

Seeing the light dimming sent Bastinda into a rage. "Why are we losing power!" she growled.

"Synapse interference," Vy-Sor answered.

"Get it fixed, NOW!" she ordered.

"We're working on it!" he cried.

"Work faster!"

She focused with her magic and saw an image of Ambrose standing in front of his brain, connected
to it by the viewer Raw and Wyatt Cain controlling the keyboard.

You won't stop me.

We're just about to, bitch.

Ahhh so the dragon has been awakened again, has he?

I have and I'm hungry for blood. Yours.

Come and take it then.

It's not mine to take. Yet. You face her wrath now bitch but she'll never give you the right to call
yourself her master!

We'll see.

"Wyatt was laughing. They were almost there...

"And the last number.."

"Yeah.."

"To reverse light pulsing..."
"Yeah!"

Come on just give it to me, we're almost there!

The door burst open and Wyatt felt an electrical charge strike his right shoulder blade. He groaned and fell to the floor. Another charge threw Raw against a wall while one of the Longcoats grabbed Ambrose.

"One more and it will be your last," the alchemist threatened.

Wyatt slowly got to his feet, the electrical pulse surging through his body, blocking his dragon's spirit. He drew his pistol, ready to aim. A Longcoat fired his gun, the bullet striking Wyatt in the shoulder and tossing him into the hallway.

"No, don't fire your weapon in here! Kalm, tell me what they did in here and how to fix it!" the alchemist commanded the frightened young viewer, shocking him when he hesitated. As he started reciting the numbers, Ambrose attempted to interrupt him by reciting the wrong ones. "Shut him up!"

A hand was clapped over Ambrose's mouth, silencing him while Wyatt and Raw lay unconscious on the floor.

Bastinda cried out with delight as the suns were finally locked behind the moon and the OZ began to turn dark. "Now you'll cower before me Lurline. Your guardians have failed."

"I wouldn't be celebrating just yet!" Archie growled when he appeared on the balcony, the cloaking spell Az had been holding on him now broken. "I've been waiting a long time for this." His hands sparkled with magic. "Now GIVE ME BACK MY WIFE!"

"She's mine... as you soon will be!" Bastinda conjured an energy ball and threw it at him. He caught it in his hand and threw it at the roof of the tower.

"Did you forget you're the one who taught me dark magic, Bastinda?" He laughed harshly. "You wanted me to be your consort but I would never choose you over her! Dellia! I know you're in there. Break through!"

"She can't!"

"Yes, you can!"

Bastinda stretched out Azkadellia's arms and blasted him again and he could feel himself weakening from the power she wielded fueled by the moratanium that had been mined beneath the Tower but he would not falter. Not this time. He opened his umbrella and held it out as a shield, his hands shaking.

"Dellia, listen to me! I've been with you almost from the day you were born. I've protected you...but most importantly...I've loved you. I love you. Not because the Oz wills me to, because I CHOOSE to! See as I see, feel as I feel." He lowered the umbrella, placing his hand over his heart as he approached the platform. "Our two hearts are one Dellia and not even in death can it be undone. Remember every moment we've had together. See them. Feel them!"

"Archie," Az whispered, her eyes filled with tears as every precious moment they had together replayed in her mind.

"You're too late!" Bastinda laughed. "The eclipse is locked in the sky and the gate is opening."
"Come to me Dellia...give me tonight." He held out his hand to her.

Az reached out her hand to him, their fingers almost touching.

"Give me tonight Dellia. Give me the rest of our lives. She can't stop us now."

"NO!" Bastinda roared and blasted him again, slamming him against the side of the tower. He fell to the ground unconscious.

"Archie," Az sobbed, brokenly, feeling her control slipping away again as she felt her lover's pain as her own.

Tyler and Lavinia watched the darkness spreading throughout the land, holding tightly to reach other. "Please Lurline, if you can hear me...help us now!" Lavinia prayed.

"Jeb, behind you!" Xenia screamed as she saw a Longcoat sneaking up behind him with his gun ready to fire. She tossed her sword like a boomerang and beheaded the attacker with a single stroke.

They were now standing back to back, swords poised as a group of Longcoats surrounded them. Suddenly a barrage of arrows came flying from all directions, striking every Longcoat. A group of munchkins formed a protective perimeter around them.

"I am Red Hat. Come with us," he said softly.

"Thanks guys," Jeb said as he grabbed Xenia's hand and followed the group of munchkins back to their barricade. Another explosion rocked the ground.

The dragon's spirit is stronger in you now. You can call on it when you need it or use my strength...

DG closed her eyes and reached out with her light to Wyatt, feeling his strength merge with hers, the strength of a man, the strength of the dragon.

Along with the strength she felt another sensation...intense pain, her heart beating faster with fear. Her mate was injured. She started to climb.

I have to stop this now!


As she was about to recite the spell to open the lock to the dark underworld she could hear a faint voice singing.

"Two little princesses dancing in a row
Spinning fast and free on their little toes
Where the light will take you no one ever knows
Two little princesses dancing in a row..."

DG climbed back onto the balcony and looked up at the witch, seeking out her sister's light with her own fueled by love, calling to her again. She could see Archie lying on the balcony unconscious. He seemed familiar but she couldn't place him.

"Do you remember that time at the cave and you remembered what all those symbols meant?" she
asked through her tears. "You were so smart."

It's the picture language of the ancients...

From inside the prison the witch created for her Azkadellia could hear her own childhood voice calling to her along with her sister's. She pushed with her own light against the lock but it still wasn't strong enough due to her grief over the love she now believed dead.

"Your adventures have a way of getting me into trouble. That's what you said. You said your adventures have a way of getting me into trouble..." DG sobbed. "And do you remember my spinning doll and how we made it fly together? Concentrate!"

Azkadellia closed her own eyes and could see the two of them together, hands joined, the light flowing between them.

"And do you remember the bear?" DG went on. "How scary it was and you stood up. You were so brave and it made me brave!"

Just hold my hand Deege! Nothing can hurt us if we stay together!

Azkadellia pushed again, this time her light was stronger. She could feel the witch's hold weakening.

DG held out her hand. "Hold my hand. Nothing can hurt us if we're together," she said softly. "Take it. Take it!" she pleaded. "Take my hand!"

Help me Deege, I'm trying so hard and she keeps pushing me back...stay strong for me and for Archie. It's the only way you can save us.

"I can't lose him again...I can't lose you... I'm scared..." DG suddenly heard her sister's childlike voice repeat the very same words she'd uttered years before that got them all into this mess and she'd be damned if she was going to be afraid again.

"I'm here and I'll never run away again. Take my hand!"

"No! You're talking to the wind girl!" the witch snarled.

Come back to me Az. Come back to us. We love you. She can't hurt you anymore.

"Take my hand," DG begged again.

Azkadellia pushed with her light once more. The lock on her prison shattered. She could feel the witch reaching for her but her soul was soaring higher as the love her sister had for her flowed through it along with another, more fragile one...her child. Their precious Ambrosia reborn.

Make his strength your own and make your strength his. You are one heart, one body one soul! Fight for us, Mother!

"Take my hand," DG pleaded one last time.

I'm coming Deege...wait for me. Hold on Archie. I'm coming home darling.

The gloved hand, now Azkadellia's, reached out through the emerald light and clasped her sister's, the light flowing through them. The witch screamed, reaching for Azkadellia again but DG held on tight, pulling her forward and off the platform leaving the witch trapped inside.
"Have the little bitch. I care not for the heavens do my bidding," she sneered. "The emerald. Give me the emerald!"

Azkadellia shook her head.

The emerald is once again my possession and it will only obey my commands, not yours!

"Give me the emerald!" the witch howled and grew in size.

"Hold on," Azkadellia said softly.

"I'm not going anywhere," DG said firmly.

"Emerald of the north gate, hear your mistress's call
Form around us your protective wall!" Azkadellia cried.

"Chalice of the south gate, hear your mistress's call
Form around us your protective wall!" DG chanted.

"Bound heart, body and soul are we
I share my power with thee!" Az chanted, the amber ring on her finger beneath her glove glowing and burning through the fabric.

The amber pendant around Archie's neck began to glow, infusing him with magic and healing his wounds. He rose to his feet. "I told you I would get you out of her and today I'm following through on that promise." Archie clasped Azkadellia's free hand in his, their shield glowing brighter. Bastinda howled and began to fire at their shield.

"Bound heart, body and soul are we
I share my power with thee!" Archie chanted, the pendant around his neck glowing brighter. "It's over, bitch. I'm taking my wife back and you can FINALLY got to Ephesis and rot! Don't you dare break the chain Dorothia!"

"I'm not going anywhere," DG said firmly. She had no idea how Az had a husband but she was starting to like him already.

Hearing the voices calling out from the tower Jeb suddenly froze and took his staff out of its place on his belt. He thrust the point of the staff into the ground. The red eyes of the dragon began to glow.

"Staff of the east gate, hear your master's call
Form around them your protective wall!

"Xenia, my father's sword and the chalice...put them together!"

"Only your father can unlock the west gate but he doesn't remember how!" she cried as she took the chalice out of her pack and laid Wyatt's sword beside it while Jeb drew his own to use in battle. Wyatt's sword rose in the air and the blade locked in the chalice's center. "Ozma's ghost...he's unlocking it now...but how?" she pondered.

Wyatt had regained consciousness. His shoulder hurt like hell and he felt like he'd stuck his finger
in a light switch but he knew he had to do something before that damned machine made their world dark. He took out the only weapon he had left at his disposal...his razor. Not much but it would have to do. He threw it at the nearest Longcoat. Ambrose called on his inner dragon and began to attack the other Longcoat before the alchemist zapped him with the prod.

Raw howled with blind rage and charged toward his tormentor. "Leave him alone!" he snarled as the alchemist buried the prod in his chest.

"You never understood. All you people needed was encouragement," the alchemist declared. Raw snatched the prod out of his hands.

"Raw just need courage," he hissed and zapped the alchemist until he fell to the floor dead. Raw embraced Kalm while Wyatt slowly got to his feet. He could hear DG and Azkadellia chanting on the balcony above them along with another voice, the one of Azkadellia's bonded.

Open the gate, Wyatt, he heard the Mystic Man's voice saying in his head.

What?

You are the Dragon Grand Master now. You have to open the west gate to give DG, Archie and Azkadellia a stronger shield against the witch. They can't hold her alone. The East gate is already open. You are the only one left. Concentrate! They need you.

She needs me.

As he concentrated he saw a memory of him standing in the middle of what looked like a drawing of a compass. He stood in the western position, the blade of his sword thrust into the ground and heard himself chanting.

"Blade of the west gate, hear your master's call
Form around them your protective wall!!" he cried.

The light pulsing between DG, Archie and Azkadellia's hands glowed brighter and burned stronger now. The witch shot energy bolts at the dome that failed to penetrate it.

"Your shield won't hold for long. Your bonds are not complete." the witch sneered.

"Ours is and you are never going to break it!" Archie sand angrily,

"We are bound in love. It will hold you long enough for us to complete all the bonds that will send you and your mistress to your prison forever!" Az cried triumphantly

She screamed and fired at them again. Az could feel Archie's strength depleting again along with her own.

"Dammit Ambrose, get that thing shut down!"Archie yelled.

Wyatt rushed over to Ambrose's side to try to rouse him but he wouldn't wake up. He slapped him.

"Do I know you?" Ambrose asked him, glitching again.

"Good morning sweetheart." Wrong person though.

"Cain!"
"We need that last number to reverse the beam now think!" Wyatt ordered as he pulled the other man to his feet and took him back over to his brain. "The number Ambrose, the number!" he pressed.

"Is it my locker combination, my parents anniversary...I can't think!" Ambrose cried frantically.

"Come on, dammit! We have a shield protecting DG and Azkadellia and it won't hold much longer!"

"Azkadellia? She's...she's back?"

"if you want to help them you've got to think!"

The witch pushed harder with her energy against the shield. Azkadellia, Archie and DG held on tighter.

"I won't let go," DG vowed.

"The shield can't hold much longer," Azkadellia said worriedly. "We have to try to open the prison."

"The seal won't be strong enough!" DG protested. "There's only three of us!"

"It's our only choice," Archie insisted.

"In this prison the darkness do we bind
Lock it away forever for no soul to find!" he and Az chanted.

"In this prison the darkness do we bind
Lock it away forever for no soul to find!" DG cried. hoping it would work.

In the brain room Ambrose was distraught. No matter how hard he tried, he couldn't think.

"You can do this!" Wyatt encouraged as did Raw and Kalm but Ambrose could remember nothing. "I know what to do," Wyatt said grimly as he bent down to pick up his pistol and looked at his friend with regret. I'm sorry. It's the only way. I have to save DG and her sister. The shield is about to wear off. You would do the same.

"Hold on!" Azkadellia encouraged her sister and they continued to chant.

"Dellia," Archie murmured, leaning against her as he felt himself growing faint.

"Archie, hold on! In this prison the darkness do we bind
Lock it away forever for no soul to find!"

"Have to...shut...that...damn machine down...Hurry the hell up Ambrose!" Archie mumbled.

They could feel the prison opening but the witch pushed out again with the darkness, slamming another, more powerful energy burst against the shield that was wearing down quickly as long as the machine acted as a conductor for the dark energy to combat it.

"If you can't reverse the number, I've got to shut it down." Wyatt pulled back the trigger on the gun. "I'm sorry Ambrose," he said as he pointed the barrel of the gun at his friend's brain.
"No, no wait!" Raw cried. He and Kalm reached out and touched Ambrose together. Ambrose closed his eyes and a wave of relief washed over him as he finally recalled the last number.

"1208, the queen's birthday of course!" he cried. "Commence the reverse pulsing!" he ordered ecstatically.

Wyatt bowed his head, feeling his own sense of relief. He knew he would have been killing a part of his friend, or possibly killing Ambrose himself had he fired that bullet.

To save one, I would have sacrificed the other...

He typed the number using his good arm and pulled the lever, sending a silent prayer to Lurline that it worked.

The witch screamed in agony as the prison unlocked, pulling her essence inside, the only trace of her left on the platform a puddle of black oil. The shield around them dissolved and they released each other's hands. The sisters stared down at the puddle their mouths agape.

"She melted." DG said softly.

Archie glared down at the puddle and kicked at it with his foot. "Go to Ephesis and rot, bitch!"

DG turned to her sister and they embraced. "Az, I've missed you so much!" she sobbed.

"I've missed you," Azkadellia whispered. With their arms around each other, they stared up at the eclipse, now a sight of beauty than terror. "Mother and Daddy are waiting for you."

"They've waited a long time. For both of us." DG said. "And I'm sorry but we haven't been properly introduced." She held out her hand to an exhausted Archie. "I'm DG, Az's sister."

Az chuckled. "DG, it's Jiminy! You remember him now, don't you?"

"I...ahhh..I'm a lot older since I last saw you. Archie is my cursed name."

DG grinned at her sister. "I knew you two would end up together and it's DG by the way." She drew him into their embrace. "What do we do with that now? It can't still destroy the OZ, can it?"

"No," Az removed the necklace and waved her hand over it. "The emerald obeys my commands now...and I've sent it back where it belongs...to the Grey Gale."

"We should go to your parents," Archie advised, linking his arm through Az's.

Wyatt slumped against the control panel, panting from exhaustion. "Thank Lurline," he murmured. He felt someone touch his injured shoulder and glanced over at Raw.

"Tin Man get shot again. Soothe wound til bullet can come out," Raw said as he pressed his hand down to stop the bleeding.

"Thanks Raw. You okay, Ambrose?"

"I want my brain back," he said sadly as he touched the glass box where his brain was still confined.

"I know buddy. We'll figure it out."

Lavinia and Tyler tensed as the door opened and Azkadellia entered the room. She no longer wore
the emerald around her neck and the mobat tattoos had vanished. She gazed up at her parents, smiling timidly.

"My Azkadellia," Lavinia whispered with hope. "Is it really you?"

"Mother," her daughter said softly, lovingly.

Tyler gently kissed his daughter on her forehead.

"The witch is gone...it's over for now..."

"DG!" Lavinia exclaimed when she saw her other daughter standing in the doorway. "I was so afraid I'd never see you again." She was a beautiful girl as her mother hoped she would be. DG ran to her mother and threw her arms around her.

"Welcome home," Tyler whispered to Azkadellia and led her over to where her mother and sister waited. Lavinia and Tyler embraced the young women together, sobbing quietly, unaware that they now had company.

Archie clenched his hand into a fist and pressed it against his shoulder, kneeling.

"Jiminy! Oh thank the stars! You've done it...you've freed her!" Lavinia sobbed joyfully. "We are in your debt."

"The only repayment I ask is for your blessing for your daughter's hand in marriage."

"You have it!" Tyler said happily. "And there's no one else I would trust my daughter with than you."

"But...Archie...everyone thinks I'm her..." Az said worriedly.

"But we know the truth darling," Lavinia said softly. "And you and Jiminy have waited so long."

"Archie, Mother. He uses his cursed name now but it doesn't matter. I've been married to him in my heart for years."

DG smirked, recalling many moments when her older sister's crush on her former bodyguard was so obvious that anyone was blind not see it.

"My name is Archie Jiminy Ozopov Hopper," Archie murmured. "I know we can't marry right away...there's so much rebuilding to do."

Glitch opened the doors and led his friends inside, Raw soothing Wyatt's aching shoulder. When DG spotted them, she ran over to them. Wyatt removed his hat and his companions bowed.

"Thank you," DG said softly to them and hugged each of them, taking special care with Wyatt when she noticed his shoulder was bleeding and joined her parents, sister and Archie out on the balcony, all of them overwhelmed with joy as the suns emerged from behind the moon and the sky was full of light again. "That's the OZ I remember. I'm so glad to be home." she said.

Lavinia and Tyler approached DG's three companions while Toto stood off to the side. "We owe all of you more than we can ever repay," Lavinia said softly.

Ambrose bowed respectfully to his queen. "I will always faithfully serve the House of Ozopov, Majesty."
Lavinia patted his hand gently. "We will find a way to restore your brain to its proper place," she assured him and then turned her eyes to Wyatt and to his surprise, she curtseyed. "Jeb Mysticos couldn't have chosen a more honorable man to succeed him as the Grand Master of the Talons of the Dragon."

Wyatt went down on one knee before the queen and removed his hat. "I give you my word that I will faithfully serve and protect the House of Ozopov. For my word as a Talon is my bond."

"I know you will." She then approached Raw. He bowed.

"Raw and Kalm serve queen and DG too."

"Thank you, Raw. Your nephew shows great promise. He will learn much from you."

"No! Az! Archie!" DG cried out in horror, the others turning their heads to see what was amiss. Archie and Az lay on the balcony in each other's arms, unconscious. "Mother, what's wrong with them?"

"Archie is suffering from severe magical drain and Az is affected as well because of their bond. They must rest to recover their strength my angel."

"Commander Ozopov? Thank the goddess!" Ambrose exclaimed. "Where was he?"

"He was on the other side;" they heard Elmer say when he walked into the room.

"Gulch? What the hell are YOU doing here?" DG demanded of her nemesis.

"I'm from here, DG but I was sent to the other side to protect you, not that you made it easy for me,' he replied sarcastically. "Your Majesty, the Tower is secure and the remaining Longcoats are in custody."

"Have a medical unit set up for the wounded and we must take my daughter and her husband to their chamber to rest."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

As her father went to pry Az from Archie's arms, DG shook her head. "I've got this."

She gestured and the gold dome that was once Lavinia's prison appeared in the room.

"Oh DG, don't put them in there! It's so cold and full of unpleasant memories for both of you."

Inside was a miniaturized version of the Northern Island palace.

"They were so happy there. It's where they are in their dreams." DG smiled softly and clapped her hands together, sending them into the palace. She closed the lid. "I can see it. I can feel it...their love."

If only Wyatt would love me that much, she thought sadly.
I have dreamt of a place for you and I
No one knows who we are there
All I want is to give my life only to you
I've dreamt so long I cannot dream anymore
Let's run away, I'll take you there

Evanescence – Anywhere (Bae and Emma’s Love Theme)

Portland, Oregon
Eleven years earlier

Bae had been driving for hours but pulled over when he’d started falling asleep at the wheel, wanting to get as far away from Phoenix as he could, at least until the heat from his latest heist died down. Twenty grand worth of watches had been his biggest score yet and one that would at least get him on his feet when he finally decided to lay down his roots somewhere. If the police couldn’t find him, he was hoping his bastard of a father couldn’t either. He shrugged off his coat and crawled into the backseat to get a few hours’ sleep before he went on the road again. A short time later he heard something banging and looked up to see a young blond girl pounding at the ignition and inserting a screwdriver into the switch. That was a new one. He’d been able to steal the car because the owner made the mistake of leaving the keys in the ignition while he went into a convenience store for a pack of smokes. He could also see a slim jim in her bag. A girl after his own heart. He smiled and lay back down while she started the engine and pulled out.

“Impressive. But really, you could’ve just asked me for the keys.” he said when he rose up from behind the seat, terrify-ing her.

“Holy shit! I just stole your car. Your life could be in danger now that you’ve sacred the shit out of me!”

“Neal Cassidy.”

“Yeah, I’m not telling you my name,” Emma said, trying to concentrate on the road but her hands were shaking and she could barely hold the wheel straight.

“No, I don’t need it to have you arrested when the robbery’s in progress.”

“Emma. Swan.”

“Good name.”

“So, do you just live in here, or are you just waiting for the car to be stolen?” Probably lived in it, judging by the smell of dirty laundry and rotting food coming from the backseat.

“Why don’t I tell you over drinks?”

“Excuse me?” The nerve of the guy!

“Hey. Eyes on the road and quit screwing with the wheel!” Neal scolded when she ran a stop sign. “You even know how to drive?”
“Yeah I know how to drive and I am not having drinks with you. You might be a pervert.”

“I might be a pervert, but you’re definitely a car thief.”

“I said I was sorry.”

“You didn’t, actually.”

“Whatever.”

Bae could see the flashing lights of a squad car in the rearview mirror followed by the siren as it creeped up behind them.

“Shit!”

“Damn it,” Emma groaned.

“That’s why I said ‘eyes on the road’! Pull it over I got this. Screwdriver.” He pulled it out and replaced it with the keys. “Now be quiet and let me do the talkin’, okay?”

She glared at him.

“License and registration,” the cop ordered when he approached the car.

“Hi,” Emma said with a nervous smile. Okay Cassidy, let’s see how good you try to talk us outta this one!

“Terribly sorry officer, but this is actually my car. I’m… I’m trying to, uh, teach my girlfriend how to drive stick.” Neal lied swiftly.

Thanks a lot Cassidy! Emma thought angrily. Jerk!

“She’s got a lot to learn.”

“I know. But, you know… Women.”

Emma shook her head.

“Alright, I hear you. It’s a warning…this time.”

“Yeah. Thank you so much.”

“What are you, some sort of a misogynist?” she demanded after the cop left and Neal climbed into the passenger seat.

“You’re welcome. Go. We got lucky.”

Emma raised an eyebrow.

“We? This isn’t your car either, is it? I stole a stolen car?”

“Yeah. Now, how about that drink?”

“Get me a fake ID and I’ll think about it,” she proposed.

He reached into his bag and took out a stack of licenses. “Take your pick and we’ll fix it up.”
She snatched the first one. “Okay, you pick the place.”

From that day on they were almost inseparable. Emma had been living in and out motel rooms since her eighteenth birthday, stealing items from the occupied ones while she slept in the vacant ones. She’d almost gotten caught by housekeeping a few times, but luck seemed to be on her side and realized jobs were much easier now that she had a partner. They split everything they took equally, and Emma was quick to learn that Neal Cassidy was an okay guy for a thief. They would always sleep in separate beds once they found a room for the night and he would sleep in front seat and let her use the backseat when they were forced to sleep in the car. When they needed food and supplies convenience stores were always their favorite targets and they’d developed a routine. Bae would distract the clerk by asking for directions while Emma browsed the aisles and stashed whatever she could. Bae would also try to swipe a thing or two, but it was not so easy at the counter.

“I think this little guy is hungry. Go ahead and get whatever you want, sweetie. I’m going to get directions,” Bae said when they walked into one of those stores, her shirt stuffed with padding to make her appear pregnant. It was one of their best scams and the one that got them the biggest hauls. No one would dare suspect a pregnant girl of thievery.

“I will,” she said and headed for the cooler, grabbing several bottles of soda and shoving them into her purse while Bae walked up to the counter to distract the cashier.

“Hey, man.”

“How are you?”

He grabbed a map and opened it, placing himself in front of the clerk while Emma went down the snack aisle and started stuffing some cakes, small bags of chips and candy bars in the pouch under her shirt.

“I’ve been better. Listen, my wife and I are really lost. I’m trying to get to Eugene, and I think we’ve been going the wrong way. Can you show me what’s going on here? Where are we, first of all?”

“Okay, wait. Do I look like a tour guide? Why don’t you buy the map, then I can help you!” the cashier snapped impatiently.

“Okay.” He tossed some money onto the counter.

“Okay. Now, your problem is…”

Bae spotted a keychain with the image of a swan on it. He smiled, thinking it would be perfect for Emma and tucked it into the pocket of his jeans while the cashier was pointing to something on the map.

“Is you’re way up here. You see that?”

“Oh my God. That is a problem.”

“Yeah. Now what you have to do, is you have to take five all the way south towards Salem. That’s right down there. You see that?”

Bae snatched a candy bar off one of the displays and put it in his pocket unaware that another customer had just walked in and seen him do it.
“Hey!”

“That’s where you’re going. You got it?”

“Hey, mister, that guy’s stealing that-“

Neal, you freakin idiot! This time I got this. Emma doubled over clutching her pouch now filled with enough food to keep them going for a day or two.

“Oh God! Oh God…”

“Honey?”

“I think… I think it’s time.”

“He’s ready?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“You didn’t see him take the-“ the customer began.

“Oh, it hurts really bad!”

“Do you guys need help?” the cashier asked.

“No, no I got this!” Bae said.

“Mister, you didn’t see him take-“

“It hurts really bad!” Emma cried, wishing that meddling customer would shut up!

“Okay, okay.”

Move your ass Cassidy!

“You want me to call an ambulance?”

“No, it’s fine! My car’s out front. I know, I know. Breathe, baby.”

“Oh God.”

“Breathe! Let’s go! Come on.”

“Oh! Oh!”

Emma waddled out of the store, clutching her pouch and leaning on Bae for support.

“You know they were stealing.”

“The little guy saved us,” Bae said once they were in the car.

“He sure did. The miracle of birth!” She tossed him the pouch.

“Wow. Good haul,” he praised.
“Thanks.”

“I got you a key chain. Do you like it?” he asked and held up the swan keychain.

“Yeah,” she said softly and kissed him.

“Okay. We got to go.” He started the car and sped away back to the motel where they’d been hiding out for the last week, seeing a family checking out of one of the rooms and waited until they left before they went inside.

“Twenty minutes till housekeeping. You want to shower first?”

“Oh, look. The granola family left this.” Emma held up a dreamcatcher.

“What is that?”

“It’s a Native American dream catcher. It’s supposed to keep all the nightmares out, and only let the good dreams in to protect your home.”

“It’s flypaper for nightmares?”

“Mm hmm.”

“Let’s keep it.”

“Yeah, hang it where? The car?” Emma inquired.

“It’s not much of a home. Maybe it’s time we get a real place.”

“Are you saying…” it was what she’d been hoping to hear for weeks, that they would finally stop running, settle down.

“Why not? We’ve been on the road long enough, baby. It’s time we retire the Bonnie and Clyde act. So, I think… I think it’s time.”

“Together?”

“Don’t you want to?”

“Like where? Neverland?”

Bae winced. He never wanted to see that hellhole and its demented master if he could help it. “I’m serious. We could do this.”

“Where?”

He grabbed a map of the other locations of the motel they were staying at and laid it on the bed.

“Where? I’ll tell you where. Close your eyes and point. Whatever spot you pick, that’s our home.” She closed her eyes and pointed then opened them.

“Tallahassee,” she announced.

“We got a winner.”

“Is it near a beach?”

“Yeah, it’s Florida. Everything’s near a beach.”
“Okay then, Tallahassee it is.”

“Tallahassee it is.”

“Are you sure? Is this… What you really want?”

“What I really want, is you.”

It all seemed too good to be true and it was. They finally managed to scrape up enough money to live in another motel for at least a week before they would begin the drive to Tallahassee. They weren’t sure whether the Bug would make it, but they were willing to try, and Emma had grown attached to the car along with the thief she’d picked up in it. Bae was out shopping for their trip and went to the post office to pick up a package when he spotted a poster on the wall that chilled his blood. That theft was in Phoenix, he never thought it would catch up to him there. If it followed him there it would follow him to Tallahassee too. As much as he loved Emma, it was no life for her, always on the run. He folded the poster up and tucked it into his pocket when he walked back to the park where she was waiting with their lunch from the doughnut shop.

“I got doughnuts. I got jelly. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“No, no. Hey. What’s wrong?”

Bae took the poster out of his pocket and handed it to her. “This was on the wall at the post office. I didn’t even know they did that still.”

“When did this happen?”

“I was a janitor in Phoenix – this high-end jewelry place. The manager was a drunk. He would forget to lock the case to the expensive watches.”

“Neal…”

“I resisted – twice! The third time, this guy’s just asking to get took. So I… I grabbed a couple cases of watches, and I hopped on a train to Portland. The store’s got insurance. Anyway, I stashed ‘em in a locker at the train station. They’re still there. It’s not… It’s hardly stealing.”

“So, you got away clean.”

“I didn’t get away clean. The manager may have been a drunk, but the security cameras are stone sober. I thought this heat had died down, but it hasn’t. I’m sorry. Tallahassee’s out. I got to go to Canada.”

“That’s fine. I like maple syrup.”

“I got to go to Canada alone.”

“Why?”

“If I get caught and you’re with me, you’re in trouble with me and I can’t do that to you.”

“You’re not going to get caught.”

“How can you say that? You think crossing the border’s easy?”
“We get fake IDs and passports.”

“Those cost money. We have a stolen car,” he reminded her.

“We make it legit. We take a VIN number off of another car.”

“Emma, I’m not going to have you in the seat next to me with twenty thousand…”

“Wait, wait! Seriously. Wait, wait, wait. What if I go and get the watches out of the locker? No one’s looking for me. We can… We can fence them, and then we have the money. We can do whatever we want. We can go wherever we want, right? We could change our identities and go to Tallahassee,” she said hopefully.

“So you… You want to steal the watches, to help me with get away with stealing the watches?”

“Yes. That is exactly what I want to do.”

“I can’t let you risk everything, not for me. I’m not worth throwing your life away.”

“I love you and you ARE worth it to me. We’re not throwing our lives away. We’re making an investment on a better one. In Tallahassee.”

“I love you, too. You think you can do it?”

“I know I can. Just tell me where they are.”

He grabbed a pen out of her purse and scribbled the locker’s number on the doughnut shop bag she was holding. “I’m ready. Let’s go!” she cried excitedly. They reached the station a few minutes later. Emma went inside alone while Bae waited in the car listening to a CD on the new player he’d installed.

“Everybody said that you'd better watch out
Man, she's gonna turn you in
And me, you know that I thought that I looked out
Now look at the trouble that I'm in
You know, you'd better
Watch out for Charley’s Girl…” Lou Reed sang.

He kept glancing over at the front entrance praying he wouldn’t see Emma being escorted out by police officers. Instead he saw her running to the car with the bag in her hand.

“Oh, thank God!” he cried and kissed her when she handed him the bag.

“Let’s see ’em.”

Bae opened the case.

“That’s not as many as I thought.”

“Yeah, but they’re super pricey. This is twenty thousand dollars, easy.”

“Twenty thousand?! Tallahassee…”

“Listen, I’m going to go meet the fence. I’ll meet you with the money. Remember where? The parking structure by the tracks.”
“Yes.”

“Nine o’clock, sharp. This is so there’s no mix-ups…” He took one of the watches out of the box and put around her wrist.

“So, I guess we’re keeping this one?”

“How can we not? Look how good it looks on you,” he said and kissed her again. “Tallahassee, baby. We’re almost home.”

“Home…” Emma said dreamily.

Later that night Bae was walking to their meeting place after meeting the fence who was able to offer them the twenty thousand he’d asked for when he realized he was being shadowed. He kept walking for a few blocks until he broke into a run, the man in pursuit. He turned down the alley and started to climb the fence when hands seized him and pulled him down.

“You got the wrong guy, officer! I wasn’t even jaywalking!”

“It’s not like that. You want to protect Emma? Come with me.”

“What?”

“Get up.”

“How do you know Emma?”

“Name’s August. And it’s a long story, but trust me – you want to hear it.”

“Alright, August. If you’re not a cop, who are you? You got two minutes.”

“Think of me as Emma’s guardian angel.”

“Guardian angel? I’d say you’ve been doing a pretty crap job and don’t count on getting your wings from me Clarence.”

“Very funny. I’ve been looking for her for the past two years. Now I finally find her, and she’s robbing convenience stores with some deadbeat. Tell me again who’s doing the crap job.”

“Let me tell you something. I’m the best thing that’s ever happened to her. Two years? Where were you the rest of her life?” Bae asked angrily. The nerve of this little shit, he thought.

“I’m not perfect. This world? Full of temptations. Turns out I’m not that great at saying no. I’m not built that way. But, I’m here now.” Jiminy would kick my ass if he knew how I turned out, August thought. The cricket was mild mannered but had quite a temper on him when something upset him.

“So who are you?”

“We were in the same home as kids, and I thought she’d be safe inside the system. But now that she’s out? Back then, I promised I would take care of her.”

“Well, we promised to take care of each other. Unlike you, I am going to take care of her.”

“You love her. Good. That means you have to do right by her.”

“That’s all I’m trying to do.”
“Then leave her.”

“Never,” he said firmly. “Hell would have to freeze over first.”

“She has a destiny. And you? This life? You’re going to keep her from it. Okay? You believe in magic?”

“I take it you do.” This had to be a trick of his bastard father’s. Well, the old man wasn’t going to get him this time.

“So will you. Trust me. I’m going to show you something… Something that’s going to make you look at everything differently. And, when you see what I have in here, you’re going to listen. You’re going to believe every word I say.”

“Yeah, right.” Bae said skeptically as they walked back to August’s box. There was a box on the back of it. August opened the lid. Bae gazed into the box to see a typewriter with the words I KNOW YOU’RE BAELFIRE written on the sheet inserted in it.

“Okay, I’m listening.”

“There’s a curse… And it needs to be broken. Emma, is the key. I was tasked with keeping her on track and you, my friend, just got caught in the crossfire. Now, I’m going to tell you a story. And, at the end of it, you’re going to have to make a decision. Will you do the right thing, or not? So… Are you ready?”

“Not really but I don’t have a choice, do I?” Bae asked bitterly and took out his phone, feeling his heart breaking into a million pieces.

“Portland PD,” an officer answered.

“I’d like to report a burglary,” he said, his voice shaking and the bile rising in his throat. Oh God Emma, I am so sorry!

Emma glanced down at her watch. Neal was late. Worried he might have gotten into trouble with the fence she called him on his cell phone but all she kept getting was an out of service error.

“Damn right it’s an error,” she muttered.

“Unless he set you up. Hands above your head please, miss,” an officer asked, his gun pointed at her.


“Possession of stolen goods. Left you holding.”

“I have nothing.”

Cop: Sorry to tell you, but your boy took off. Probably in Canada by now. He called in a tip…told us to take a look at the surveillance footage at the train station. Give me the watch. Now!”

She unfastened the band, tears brimming in the corners of her eyes. Neal, you son of a bitch! You lied to me. You USED me! I loved you goddammit, I loved you!

“You know your rights?”

“Yeah.” She handed him the watch.
“Good girl. Turn around. Where’s the rest of the watches?” the officer demanded as he handcuffed her.

“They’re gone. They’re not coming back.”

“Let’s go.”

Vancouver, Canada
Two months later

For years his father abandoning him in that pit in the Enchanted Forest had been the scene of his nightmares but now it had been replaced with another one; a terrified Emma being led away by a police officer while he snuck away like a coward. He’d abandoned her just like his father abandoned him. He’d promised himself that he would never turn out like the bastard that spawned him, but it seemed that he’d done just that by letting the woman he loved take the rap for him. One day when he got home from work a postcard was waiting for him in his mailbox with an address written on it. He snorted. It had to be from August.

“ Been a while. Where’d you go?” August asked him when he arrived at the meeting place.

“Tried to lose myself. It didn’t work. I want to talk to you about Emma.”

“I hope you’re not trying to reach out.”

“I just… I feel like… If… If I knew that she was okay, then I could move on. Is she?”

“She will be. She got eleven months.”

“That should be me! I should be doing that time.”

“No. We went over this. It’s good.”

“How’s it good?”

“It’s a minimum security place in Phoenix. And no, I am not going to tell you which one. She’ll get out of there, and she’ll be fine. You keep your promise and steer clear, and she can have a good life. She can do what she’s supposed to do.”

“And if I can’t be there for her, man, you got to promise me that you will be.”

“I promise.”

“Then you should do something for me. I was able to fence the watches. Don’t judge me. I’m giving it all to her. And the car – I got a clean VIN number for it, so it’s legit. I just… It’ll feel like I’m there with her, you know?”

“Money is not what she needs. Not for what’s ahead.”

“Can you just see that she gets it?”

“Sure.”

“And one more thing – if anything changes, and she does her job, this insanity ends, and she’s free…”

“I’ll send you a postcard…from a place called Storybrooke and it will only have one word on it…”
New York City
Eleven years later

“….Neal…..Neal! Haven’t you heard a bloody word I’ve said?” Zelena demanded impatiently. They were in a penthouse that they were in the process of redecorating, but Neal seemed to be having trouble focusing and kept looking at a postcard he held in his hand. He’d been having a lot of trouble with it for the past few days. “We’re taking a break!”

She turned off the music they’d been listening to and sat down on the sofa.

“Now, what’s troubling you. You’ve been distracted for the last two days. Is it something with Tamara? You haven’t had a fight, have you?”

“No, she’s on her way home from San Francisco.” Bae sighed deeply while he paced the floor. “I’m calling off the wedding.”

“Why would you do that, caro? Have you met someone else?”

“It’s kind of hard to explain.”

“Try,” Zelena urged.

“I don’t know where to start.”

They heard the sound of a car backfiring. Zelena gasped, a green energy bolt shooting out of her fingertips and shattering the glass coffee table. Bae jumped up his eyes wide with shock and fear.

“You have magic!” he cried. “Who are you? Did my father send you!?”

“Bloody hell! You weren’t supposed to see that!” Zelena moaned. “Wait….how did you know it was magic?”

“Because I’ve seen enough of it in my life and I never wanted to see it again! Now who are you!”

“You know who I am Neal. My name is Zelena Strogoff Sabitini. I’m an interior designer.”

“And a witch,” Bae sneered. “You’re from the Enchanted Forest, now who are you?”

“No, I am from Russia and Italy…but if you know of the Enchanted Forest then I believe you may have the answer I’ve been looking for.”

Bae backed away from her. “You’ll take me back to my father over my dead body.”

“Neal, calm down, caro. All I want is for you to answer a question for me. What is your real name?”

“Baelfire. Why?”

“And your father’s name?”

“Rumplestiltskin,” he spat.

Zelena smiled. “Your father’s real name is Rumplestiltskin Strogoff and you caro, are my cousin on my father’s side.”
“W…What?” He stared at her.

Zelena reached into her purse and brought out an old leather-bound book. “Our ancestor’s name was Ivan Strogoff,” she began.

Ivan was a powerful sorcerer in the court of Ivan the Terrible along with his apprentice and lover, Irina Fedorova. Ivan was a kindhearted man who only wanted to use his gift to help others while Irina only wanted to learn how to use magic to help herself. The two had a falling out and Irina was accused of using her powers to murder her rivals in the Russian court. She was to be burned at the stake only she escaped and vowed revenge against her lover and his family. He, his sister Ekaterina and her daughter Mischa were all that was left of his family. He sent his precious sister to Italy to hide her among friends there, bound their magic and cast a protection spell over them so that his former apprentice could not locate them and began to learn more about light and dark magic so that he could find a way to defeat her. Through his studies he learned how to create a talisman that would remove the magic of another sorcerer temporarily or permanently if placed over the victim's heart and the talisman could only be used by those of his bloodline.

Ivan began a long and perilous journey into the Ural Mountains to defeat Irina but before he could reach the castle the dark sorceress made her home, his talisman opened a portal and he fell through it into a world known as Oz and met and fell in love with its goddess, Lurline. She gave him the name Aramon, which in her language meant 'wise man'.

Irina's devotion to the dark arts began to take its toll on her physical appearance. She was no longer a great beauty and required the souls of the young to maintain the glamour she used to keep herself as young and beautiful as she once was. Over the centuries many wandered into her lair, but none survived. Soon word spread throughout the country about an old witch named Baba Yaga who captured and killed the young, devouring their flesh to restore her lost youth and people dared not venture into the part of the Ural Mountains where she made her home in fear of being captured by her and eaten. By taking the life forces of the innocent, Baba Yaga had discovered the key to immortality but her ultimate goal was to find and exterminate the surviving members of the Strogoff family and destroy the talisman that could destroy her. Centuries she waited impatiently for one of them to return to the motherland.

Baba Yaga traced the current Strogoff descendant to Moscow, a young woman named Zelena Strogoff Sabitini, descended from Ivan's sister Ekaterina. The girl was in Moscow researching her family's history along with her husband Angelo. She could have killed the girl outright but decided to make her suffer first by taking the thing she loved most; her husband. She would use the husband as a bargaining chip. Unless the girl found the talisman and brought it to her, she would never her precious Angelo again.

“How did you get Angelo back?” Bae asked her once she was finished.

“By studying the texts my family had hidden and learning the magic of Ivan’s new land,” Zelena explained. “I went back to Siberia to face Baba Yaga alone knowing I would probably die in the process, but I didn’t care. All I cared about was getting Angelo back but before I left, this suddenly appeared in my hotel room in Russia.” She gestured, and Artemis’s Bow appeared in her hands.

“I’ve seen that before!” Bae exclaimed. “My father had it. It’s the bow used by the Greek goddess Artemis! Any arrow fired from it always hits its target.”

“By the time I reached Baba Yaga’s fortress she’d already consumed enough of Angelo’s soul that he was blinded. And she transferred all the souls she’d taken into him.” Zelena’s eyes filled with tears. “I had to release all the souls to defeat her and I was given a choice…. shoot her or shoot my husband.”
“Oh God….Zee….I’m so sorry.”

“I had to shoot my husband to release all the souls. It killed her and saved his life, but I couldn’t restore his eyesight,” she sobbed. “Twenty-eight years I’ve been searching for Ivan’s descendants hoping one of them could help me make Angelo see again and…. my family is gone…. your half and Angelo are all I have left.”

“I don’t know if my father can help you or not Zee…he and I…we’re estranged.”

Zelena reached out and took his hand in hers. “Then it’s time to try to mend the wounds. La famiglia è per sempre, Baelfire. Not just because your father may be able to help me. Do it for yourself too. You’ve been alone too long, caro. Now tell me. Why are you calling off your wedding?”

“Tamara’s having an affair.”

“What?! With whom?”

“Greg Mendell.”

“Greg? She’s been sleeping with her boss? Putana! So, THAT’s why they’ve been spending so much time in San Francisco, is it? Well I think a wicked curse is in order.” She rubbed her hands together.

“No, Zee. No magic. I got this.”

“How did you find out?”

“One of her coworkers emailed me all their office chats and a few pictures. And I saw them together at the airport when I went to pick her up. I was gonna surprise her. Then she called me and told me her flight was delayed. It was all crap. And I was fooling myself. The only woman I’ve ever really loved is Emma Swan and now that she’s done what tore us apart in the first place I’m gonna go back to her…and this time I’m staying. I don’t know if she’ll forgive me or not but I gotta try.”

“I’m coming with you. We’re coming with you.”

“Zee, you don’t have to.”

“Ah but I am caro. Try and stop me.”

“Fat chance I have of doing that. You’ll just come after me anyway.”

“You’re right, I would. But I still want to curse that putana that broke your heart.”

“Forget her, Zee. She’s not worth it.”

“We can go this weekend after we finish the dining room,” she said.

“Thanks Zee.”

And if Rumplestiltskin didn’t do right by his son, Zelena was determined to show him just how wicked she could be and lay a curse on him he would never be able to break, cousin or not. Her battle with Baba Yaga in Siberia had destroyed her chances of bearing a child of her own and though they were actually close in age, she loved Bae like a son and would protect him with everything she had.
“Well done cousin.” Rumple praised, waving his hand over the seeing globe. “Now rest, recover your strength and then you must come to me.”

“Are you sure she’s all right, Rumple?” Belle asked worriedly.

“Oh, she will be sweetheart…and so will the child.”

“She’s pregnant?”

“Yes…with the child she lost before. Ozmalita has been kind and sent their daughter back to them and they must come here, or they will lose her again.” He looked away. “I can’t let them endure that pain again.” He glanced down at the basket she was holding. “You’ve brought lunch.”

“I thought I would pack something to take with us since we’ll be gone all day.”

He gestured, and her dress was transformed into her Guardian robes. “I’m not as skilled with the sword as Archie so I will be teaching you magical defenses today sweetheart. You know where we need to go. Take us there,” he commanded softly. She waved her hand and they vanished in a puff of blue smoke, reappearing in the field at MacDonald’s farm.

Rumple conjured an energy ball in his hand and threw it her, pleased when a shield appeared over her.

“Now focus Belle!” he called out as he blasted at the shield. “The shield will only hold if you focus on it and nothing else!”

“I am,” she murmured.

“Now lower it.”

The dome vanished.

“Hold out your hands.”

She obeyed.

“I am going to blast you as hard as I can. Now make your hands your shield and hold them back. Good, sweetheart, good!” he praised. Beads of sweat formed on Belle’s brows as she concentrated. “Now throw it back at me!”

“But I’ll hurt you!” she cried.

“Do it!” he commanded. “You must not hesitate! I am your enemy and you must defend yourself…now throw them back!”
She pushed as hard as she could, sending the energy bolts back at their host with such force that it knocked him off his feet.

“Rumple!”

“I’m all right, sweetheart,” he reassured her when he got up and dusted himself off. “But you can’t be reacting like that when you’re in battle. Nor can you hesitate. Your opponent will be looking for any opening they can seize and use them against you. Now, for your next lesson. Hearts. There are three things you can do with a heart. Crush it, use it to control an enemy or divide its essence. I will be teaching you only one of these lessons. The third I’ve never been able to do successfully.”

“But isn’t that…dark magic?”

“Yes, but a light mage can use two of the three forms of magic with hearts in times of emergency. I will be teaching you how to use a heart to control an enemy.”

“Rumple, I don’t think I like this. I can’t control you like…like the dagger does.”

“It won’t be for long and you need to learn.” He reached into his chest and pulled out his heart, handing it to her. “You now have complete power over me and I must obey your commands, even cursed.”

Her hands were shaking. “I don’t like this.”

“I know. But command me to do something. Anything.”

She sighed. “All right Rumple but I hope I will NEVER have to use this line of defense. I don’t like it.” Then she smiled. “I want you to change into the leather outfit you wore when we first met.”

He giggled. “As you wish, dearie!” He gestured and now wore his amber satin shirt and leather breeches. She handed his heart back to him and he slammed it back into his chest. “Now dinna be getting any thoughts of forgetting your lessons in your head.”

“I can’t help it!” she protested.

“What am I gonna do with you?”

“Put up with me,” she retorted. “Because after we get married you are going to wear those leathers a lot and I’m going to take my time taking them off you.”

“The way you talk you would think we’ve….”

“But we haven’t…yet,” she reminded him. “And isn’t our bond one of the three that needs to be consummated before the next eclipse?”

He nodded. “But it needs to be at the right time, Belle. I have too much respect for you to simple take you when I wish to. Let’s take a break and have lunch. Now what did you make for us.”

“Hamburgers.”

“How did I know?” He chuckled.

“And I cooked them your way without burning down the kitchen while you were in the shop. Did you find the spell you were looking for? The one that could recreate the globe Cora took that was meant for you?”
“Yes, but it is going to take a lot of magic to do it. I’m going to work on it tonight while you’re at the library.”

“I hid the map like you asked. No one is getting that dagger from you Rumple. Not if I can help it.”

They ate their lunch and Rumple continued their lessons for another hour until he had to take her to the library to start her shift. She loved the books, they opened doors to this new land they lived in and allowed her to go to exotic places for a few hours even while she was helping the children from the school find the research materials they needed for essays and term papers. She was also making new friends much to his delight. Ruby would often stop by and bring her free snacks from Granny’s. She still saw her father around town and he was as hostile as ever, calling her the ‘Beast’s Whore.’ His words stung but she refused to give him the satisfaction of seeing it. She was getting ready to close for the night when she heard footsteps behind one of the stacks.

“Hello?”

“I’m sorry but this is for your own good,” she heard her father’s voice say and felt something hard strike her on the back of the head.

Rumple had just finished the globe when he felt a sharp pain on the back of his head and glanced down at the ring on his finger. It was glowing.

“Belle!” he cried and summoned a hand mirror to him. “Show me Belle!” he commanded it.

He could see her laying in a cart deep inside the mines unconscious, her arm handcuffed to it. Moe stood in front of it and pushed it forward.

“Oh, you bastard,” Rumple whispered. “Trying to send her over the town line to forget me, are you, dearie? Ah you are in for a very nasty surprise!”

He vanished in a puff of smoke.

Belle opened her eyes to discover that she was in a cart in the miles rolling down the tracks, her arm handcuffed to the side of it. She closed her eyes and concentrated, unlocking the cuff and flicked her wrist, bringing the cart to an abrupt stop. “Papa!” she yelled and teleported out.

Moe stood at the entrance to the mine waiting for Smee to return with his daughter once she crossed the town line, her memories of the Beast erased as he’d hoped the clerics would do years ago. Suddenly a puff of blue smoke appeared before the entrance revealing his very furious daughter. She flicked her wrist again and lifted him off his feet.

“Belle….”

“You never think do you?” she demanded coldly.

“Beast! Where is my daughter?”

“It’s not Rumple, Papa, it’s ME. I’m doing this.” Her eyes filled with tears. “Why can’t you just accept that I love him and I’m happy? Why?”

“He’s a monster!”

“No, he’s not. You are. You had me tortured, Papa. You tried to send me over the town line to make me forget who I was, but you can never take Rumple out of my heart. He’s there and he’s always going to be there whether you like it or not!”
She released her hold and he dropped to the ground. “I loved you Papa but if you cannot accept me or Rumple for what we are then you will leave us alone!”

“I…”

“You will!” she yelled.

“Belle, please….he’s not for you…”

“I will decide who is right for me or not. I’m a grown woman, Papa. Now get out of here before Rumple comes.”

“I’m already here.”

Moe’s blood ran cold at the sound of the beast’s voice. Rumple walked over to where he lay, his cane in his hands. “You don’t know how much I’d like to take this and beat you within an inch of your life again for what you’ve done to your daughter, but I’ll let her decide what should be done with you.”

“I just want him to leave us alone until he accepts things as they are.”

“I will NEVER accept that you want to live with that beast!”

“Then you will spend the rest of your life alone,” Belle declared. “Come on Rumple. Let’s go home.”

She took his hand in hers and they vanished, leaving Moe on the ground lost in his own thoughts. There had to be another way to break that beast’s hold on his daughter and he would find it no matter what price he had to pay.

The Enchanted Forest
Sixteen days prior to the Final Eclipse
One day after the First Eclipse

The four women gazed up at the beanstalk, reaching high into the clouds. Emma sucked in a breath.

“It’s a little freakier than I remember from the story,” Emma said.

“Reminds me of death,” Mulan added.

“Encouraging.” Snow shook her head.

“Well, your compass awaits. Shall we?” Hook said with a smiled.

“Wait. If these beans create…portals, why not just pick one and go home? Why the compass?” Emma asked skeptically.

“Because there aren’t any more beans. Whatever story you think you know, my dear, is most certainly wrong.” He smiled at Emma.

“There was a guy named Jack, and a cow, and something about evil giant with a treasure and a golden goose. …Or harp. What else is there to know?”

“Sounds like a lovely tale. But the truth’s a little bit more gruesome. The giants grew the beans, but, rather than use them for good, they used them to plunder all the lands. Jack, was a man who
fought a terrible war, defeating all but one of the evil giants. The beans were destroyed by the giants as they died. If they couldn’t have their magic, then nobody could. It’s really very bad form.”

Says the man who plunders for a living. Snow glared at him. The pirate’s interest in her daughter was all too obvious and a suit she would do her best to discourage. Their time in the Enchanted Forest had given the two women a chance to bond and Emma had finally opened to her about her life; more specifically about the only man she’d ever loved; a man named Neal Cassidy, Henry’s real father.

“I can’t tell Henry his dad was a thief that took off on me. I just told him he was fireman that died. It’s better that way.”

“Is there any chance he might come back?”

“No,” Emma said bitterly. “He just took his twenty thousand and split. Probably living the good life with another woman since I took the rap for him in the watch heist.”

“Evil giants, who made magic portal beans? Why doesn’t anyone just go up and grow some more?” she heard Emma asking the pirate.

“Because one giant survived. The strongest and most terrible of them all. And we’ll have to get past him to-“

“The magic compass,” Snow interrupted.

“Indeed. The treasure remains, and amongst it is the compass. Now it will guide us to your land. Cora has the means to open a portal with the wardrobe ashes, but she can’t find your land without the compass. Once we get it, steal the ashes from her and we’re on our way.”

No, we’re on our way. YOU are staying here.

“How do we know you’re not just using us to get the compass for Cora?” Mulan demanded.

“Because you four are far safer company. All I need is a ride back. I’ll swear allegiance to whomever gets me there first.”

You’re not going anywhere. You get me to the compass and after that you’re on your own Guyliner, Emma thought nastily.

“Then we’d better start climbing.”

“Right, so… I failed to mention that the giant enchanted the beanstalk to repel intruders.”

“Sure, you did. Wanna tell me how we plan on getting up there?”

“I’ve got a counter spell from Cora. If you’d be so kind.” He held his bound wrists out to them. Snow untied them and he held up his arm, a glowing cuff on it.

“Thank you, milady. I’ve got one more of these. Cora was to accompany me. So… Which one of you four lovelies shall take her place? Hm? Go on, fight it out. Don’t be afraid to, you know, really get into it.”

“Okay, listen you pervert: get whatever sick fantasies you’ve got out of your mind. I’m going up there and I’m keeping an eye on you. You screw with me and you’re gonna find out what free
“All due respect, I’m the best equipped to go. How many wars have you been through?” Mulan asked her and Snow.

“‘My share.’ Snow replied.

“It should be me,” Aurora insisted.

“You? You haven’t fought in a battle.” Mulan reminded her.

“Nor am I just going to sit around and do nothing. I do know how to climb. Phillip taught me.”

“This is about us getting home to our loved ones. Why would you…?”

“For Rose. If something happens to me I want your word that you will find her and make certain she’s safe. And find Jasper. He would be human again in the land without magic and you already know what he looks like since his twin lives in your town. He will be the comfort to her when no one else can.”

“It’s me. I’m going, and I’m not going to fail,” Emma insisted.

“You’re new here,” Snow reminded her. “You don’t know all the dangers of this realm. I do.”

“It’s about getting back to Henry. I don’t care what I have to face. You’re not going to argue with me?”

“Would it do any good?”

“No. Anything in that bag that’s going to help me with a giant?”

“A hook?” Mulan suggested.

“Hey!” Hook was incensed.

“Come with me.”

Mulan pulled Emma aside and took a bag out of her satchel. “This was powder made from poppies. Ozian poppies. He has to inhale it and it will put him to sleep.”

“And your sword, how strong is it?”

“The most powerful blade in all the realms. My former master had it. He stole it from the Dark One but I’m not sure how he managed it. It is one of the swords owned by the Greek goddess Athena, made by the god Hephaestus. My master said it has the power to deflect magic and cut through anything, even that beanstalk if you are suggesting what I think you are.”

“Give me ten hours. If I’m not back, you cut it down and keep going. I do NOT want that pervert anywhere near you. Or that giant.”

“Snow won’t like that.”

“That’s why I’m asking you. If I don’t get back, you get her home.”

“I will.”
“Ladies. In this world, we are slaves to time. And ours is running out. In other words, tick tock,”
Hook taunted.

“I was hoping it’d be you,” he said when Emma approached him.

“Just get on with it. Give me the cuff. You try anything else and your balls will get kicked up into
your throat.” He winced. “Good. You get the point.”

“Put your hand right here.” He gestured to his shoulder with his good hand placed the second cuff
around her wrist. “That’s a good girl. This will allow you to climb. There are other dangers.
Thankfully, you’ve got me to protect you. I can’t climb one-handed, can I?”

“I can protect myself, dick,” she growled. Don’t think I’m taking my eyes off you for a second.”
She handed him his hook.

“I would despair if you did.”

“Just shut up and let’s go,” she said angrily and started to climb with him on the other side.

Mulan began drawing a sundial in the sand with a stick.

“What is that?” Aurora asked her

“It keeps the time.”

“You have somewhere to be?” Snow inquired curiously.

“We can mark watches – take turns sleeping. We’ll most likely have to walk through the night
again, so we should rest while we can.”

“I’ll take first shift,” Snow offered.

“I’ll stay up with you.”

“I’ll go see about dinner,” Mulan said and picked up her sword while Snow and Aurora got a fire
going.

“When’s the last time you slept?” Snow asked her companion.

“I don’t really sleep now. Not after what I’ve been through,” Aurora replied.

“Sleeping curse.”

“Yes. I was given the curse before the dark curse was cast just as my mother was. We didn’t find
out until after our daughter was born that it was a generational curse. All the females in my line
will fall victim to the curse on their sixteenth birthdays. That’s another reason why I need to find
Rose. If she has a daughter….my granddaughter will inherit the curse unless Rose has found some
other way to break it than true love’s kiss. The one time I did sleep, I had horrible nightmares.”

“It’s a side effect. Same thing happened to me.”

“It did?”

“I had them for months. Charming – my husband – he used to wake me. When I cried out, he’d
light a candle. He said it would capture the nightmares. He’d watch over me as I fell back to sleep.”
“Sounds like he lives up to his name,” she smiled wistfully. “So did Phillip. He searched for me all this time and just when we finally found each other…the wraith…”

“Aurora, I am so sorry. We didn’t know…why don’t you try… To sleep? I’ll watch over you. You’ll be safe.”

“Thank you.” She lay down and closed her eyes.

San Francisco, California

“No….No….not again!” Beth Molk screamed, huddled in a corner, smelling the smoke and feeling the heat from the flames as they blazed toward her. “David!”

David was at his desk at the station typing up his report on his latest case when he heard his wife’s terrified voice screaming out his name in his mind.

“No….Navarro….Beth….nightmare…” he mumbled and passed out. Edgar jumped out his chair and caught his partner before he fell out of his and laid him on the floor.

“Navarro, what’s wrong with Molky?” Inspector Terry English asked from his desk.

“Beth. She’s dreaming again and he’s going in.”

Terry nodded.

“He needs help, WE’RE going in too,” spoke up Terry’s partner Hildy Mulligan. “I’ll tell Koto.” She rose from her desk and headed for the office of their superior, Lt. Jim Koto. Now that the dark curse had been broken, David and Edgar had been in for a shock to discover that their boss and two of their closest friends were also cursed fairy tale characters from the land known as the ‘Wish Realm’ and its version of Wonderland. Hildy was Alice, Terry the Cheshire cat and Koto the White King.

David opened his eyes to find himself in the burning room that had been the scene of Beth’s nightmares in all the years they’d been together.

“Beth, sweetheart, it’s all right. It’s gonna be all right,” he soothed and kneeled beside her. “Look at me Sleeping Beauty.”

She raised her head and reached out to caress his cheek. “It is now that you’re here.”

The Netherworld

Aurora was terrified yet found it strangely comforting that she wasn’t alone in the room. She could see a woman huddled in the corner while a man kneeled beside her, appearing to be comforting her.

“Hello!” she called out. “Please…help me!”

“Mama!” the woman cried and jumped to her feet. “David, it’s Mama!”

The man stood up and turned around. “Your Highness! Oh, thank God!”

“Jasper! Rose!” Aurora sobbed joyfully and ran into her daughter’s outstretched arms. Her daughter had aged during the curse and was now a woman much older than her, but it didn’t matter. “Oh, look at you! You’re grown up!”
The flames vanished the moment she was in her daughter’s arms.

“And you’re as beautiful as I remember you,” Beth sobbed, holding her tightly. “But…I go by my cursed name now Mama…Elizabeth.”

Aurora smiled faintly. “Your grandmother’s name. Philip would be so proud. And Jasper, you’re human again and looking after my daughter as you always have. I am in your debt.”

“Ummm….Aurora….ahhh….I’m not just doing that now…” David stammered, fearing how his mother-in-law would react to the change in his relationship with his former charge.

“We’re married Mama,” Beth declared. “And he goes by his cursed name, David.”

“Married!? But…how…how did this happen?”

“We were separated by the curse,” David explained. “Beth was sent to Pennsylvania and raised by foster parents. I didn’t meet her again until she was already grown up and divorced from her first husband. We’ve been married two years, even cursed.”

“The sleeping curse…did you…?”

Beth nodded. “I’ve had it for years, but the doctors diagnosed it as a sleep disorder.” She glanced up at her husband, smiling lovingly. “And David broke it with true love’s kiss. Mama, where is Papa? Did he break your curse?”

Aurora nodded sadly. “He’s gone darling.”

“What?” Beth croaked. “No…Mama…please…”

“He was killed by an Ephesian wraith not long after he woke me,” Aurora sobbed. Beth burst into tears and hugged her mother tighter.

David stood back and allowed them their time to grieve, grieving in his own way for the boy he’d helped raise into a man. “Who the hell unleashed an Ephesian wraith and why?” he demanded through gritted teeth.

“I don’t know,” Aurora confessed. “It came through a portal from the land without magic along with Princess Snow and her daughter and they said the Dark One summoned it to kill the Queen, but she sent it here. Your father was innocent, and he didn’t deserve to die. She did and when I get to that other land I am going to drive a sword through her heart as she drove one through mine when she killed your papa!”

“No! Mama, she’ll kill you!”

“Maybe there is a way to get him back,” David said.

“He’s dead, David! You can’t come back from that!” Beth cried.

“It’s been done before.”

“How?”

“I don’t know how but my brother does.”

“We need a portal to cross worlds and right now Emma is trying to find one by going to the Giant’s castle with Captain Hook.”
“You don’t need one in dreams. All you need is a link to the person you’re seeking. Archie and I have always had a telepathic link to each other that was broken during the curse, but it’s been restored. Archie knows more about dark magic than we do.”

“Archie?”

“His cursed name, Mama,” Beth supplied. “David, do you really think he might know a way to get Papa back?”

“If they can do it for his sister-in-law, they can do it for my father-in-law. Aurora, I know this… that I’m probably not who you expected Rose to marry but…but I love her.”

“And I love him,” Beth said firmly.

“That’s all that matters darling.”

“Where is he David?”

David closed his eyes, seeing a palace by a lake surrounded by snow covered mountains. “Oz. He’s in Oz.” He took her hand and gazed into her eyes. “See as I see, Sleeping Beauty. This is where we need to be.”

Beth reached for her mother’s hand. “Hold on Mama. We’re going to Oz.”

The trio vanished.

The Enchanted Forest

They were now near the top of the beanstalk and Emma’s patience with her travelling companion was wearing thin.

“First beanstalk? Well, you never forget your first. You know, most men would take your silence as off-putting, but I love a challenge,” Hook flirted.

So does every man until they get what they want.

Emma ignored him and continued climbing.

“I’m concentrating.”

“No, you’re afraid. Afraid to talk – to reveal yourself. Trust me – things’ll be a lot smoother if you do.”

“You should be used to people not trusting you.”

“Ah, the pirate thing. Well, I don’t need you to share. You’re something of an open book.”

“Am I?”

“Quite. Let’s see – you volunteered to come up here because you were the most motivated. You need to get back to a child.”

“That’s not perception. That’s eavesdropping.”

“Ah, but you don’t want to abandon him the way you were abandoned.”
“Was I?”

“Like I said, an open book.”

“How would you know that?”

“I spent many years in Neverland – home of the Lost Boys. They all share the same look in their eyes… The look you get when you’ve been left alone.”

“Yeah, well, my world ain’t Neverland.”

“But an orphan’s an orphan. Love has been all too rare in your life, hasn’t it? You ever even been in love?”

“No. I have never been in love,” Emma lied. “And falling in love with someone like you isn’t in the plans so you might as well turn off the charm. It’s making me sick.”

He wanted to slam his fist against the stalk. This wasn’t working out at all. He preferred getting his revenge by hitching a ride with her and having her as a bonus, but some man was responsible for that wall around her heart and he wanted to choke the life out of whomever he was.

“Just trying to make conversation.”

“Sure, you are. Look buddy, I’ve heard every line before and could probably fill a book with them. You think just because you’re good looking you can get any girl to drop her panties, pantaloons or whatever you call underwear in this world for you. Well guess what? You just met one who won’t. I’ve got Everlast iron underwear on and it’s gonna take someone with a lot more than you’ve got to make me want to take ‘em off again for longer than a night.”

“Are you always this crude?” he muttered.

“When someone’s getting on my nerves, yes. Now shut up and keep climbing!”

He shook his head. Killing the crocodile would be worth putting up with her foul mouth for a while longer but when he got back down he was going to rip that heart of hers out with his enchanted hook and make her more compliant whether she liked it or not. He was relieved when they finally reached the top and discovered the battle worn castle.

“What happened here?”

“It’s where the final battle was. Give me your hand.”

“What?”

“Your hand, it’s cut. Let me help you.”

“No, no. It’s fine.”

“No, it’s not.”

“So, now you’re going to be a gentleman?”

“Giants can smell blood. And I’m always a gentleman.”

She rolled her eyes. “And I’m Lady Godiva.” He took a bottle out of his pocket and poured it over her hand. She hissed in pain and drew her hand back.
“Ow! What the hell is that?”

“It’s rum. A bloody waste of it.”

“Of course, you would have rum on you,” she muttered while he wrapped her hand with a piece torn from his shirt.

“Now here’s the plan – we wait for the giant to fall asleep. And when he does, we’ll sneak past him into his cave. It’s where the treasures are – where the compass lies.”

“And then?”

“And then we run like hell.”

“I don’t have time to wait for a giant to fall asleep. The powder Mulan gave me, we need to use it. We got to knock him out.”

“Well, that’s riskier.”

“Than waiting for a giant to fall asleep when we need him to?”

“Point taken. Oh, you’re a tough lass. You’d make a hell of a pirate.”

“Never had that fantasy and you’re just NOW figuring out I’m more than talk. The rum must be wearing off. Who’s Milah on the tattoo? Your mistress.”

“Someone from long ago.”

“Where is she?”

“She’s gone.”

“Gold. Rumpelstiltskin. He took more than your hand from you, didn’t he? That’s why you want to kill him.”

“For someone who’s never been in love, you’re quite perceptive, aren’t you? She was his wife before he became the Dark One. She left him for me.”

“Well that explains a few things…and maybe I was in love once. What did you do? Kidnap her?”

“She came to me willingly.”

“Then she wasn’t much of a wife, was she?”

“You watch what you…” He lunged for her but backed away when he saw her dagger pointed at his groin.

“I’ll cut it off if you take one step closer. Don’t think I can’t do it. A woman who leaves her husband for a pirate isn’t much of a wife. You two deserved each other,” she said angrily and stormed off.

“You ready?” he asked when he rejoined her, holding a bone. He began banging on a shield with it while Emma was crouched atop a statue, the bag of poppy powder in her hand. If it worked on Dorothy, it would work on a giant.

“Yeah.”
They heard thunderous footsteps and the giant emerged from his chamber, but he was far taller than the statue she was standing on. She needed to go for higher ground if she stood any chance of dosing him.

“Oh, damn it.”

“Hey! You big git! Yeah, you. Huh? You want to kill a human? Huh? You want to kill a human? Well, I’m the worst human around. Come on. Come on, then! Come on, then!” Hook taunted. As the giant reached out to grab him, Emma seized the opportunity and threw the power in his face. The giant fell to the floor and began snoring loudly.

“Hook? Hook!”

He stepped out from behind the giant, grinning.

“He’s out cold. I don’t mean to upset you, Emma, but I think we make quite the team.”

“Let’s go steal a compass,” she said, wanting to be rid of him as quickly as possible.

Oz (The Outer Zone)
The Northern Island

“This is colder than a winter in Bellefonte,” Beth shivered when they appeared outside the closed double doors of one of the palaces of the Ozopov royal family. She closed her eyes and they were now wearing winter clothing.

“How...how...how did you do that?” Aurora asked her. David smiled.

“Beth’s able to have some control over her dreams,” he replied.

“I learned it watching Nightmare on Elm Street movies,” Beth added. “I used to have nightmares all the time when I was younger but there was a character in one of them that controlled her dreams, so I kept watching until I learned how to do it myself.”

“So could your father,” Aurora murmured. “You inherited it from him, darling. How do we get in? Do we knock on the door?”

As she raised her hand the double doors swung open. The trio went inside, hearing music echoing through the halls.

“Tell it to me slowly
I really want to know
It's the time of the season for loving…”

“What is that?” Aurora asked.

“Music, Mama.” Beth said, and they followed the sound down the hall until they came to an archway with a beaded curtain hanging over it. David sniffed the air.


“What’s a hippie?” Aurora asked, puzzled. Beth giggled.

“You’ll see Mama. You’ll see.”

The Queen of the OZ would have been outraged to see what her throne room had been transformed
into. Peace signs and flowers had been painted on the walls in psychedelic colors along with MAKE LOVE, NOT WAR; PEACE, LOVE and GROOVY. There was also a drawing of a VW bus on one of the walls with makeshift bed in front of it made with a mattress that had been taken out of one of the bedrooms upstairs. Archie and Az were dancing in the center of the room, Az wearing a tie dyed dress with a flower wreath in her hair while Archie wore a pair of ripped jeans, a tie dyed shirt, indigo sunglasses, a forest green suede vest and a bandana around his head.

“Umm, Archie, what the hell…?” David asked. The couple stopped dancing.

“Oh, come and join us! We’re having a hippie party!” Az said excitedly.

“Archie, you’re not…ahhh…stoned, are you?”

“Now you know me better than that!” Archie glowered at his twin over the rims of his glasses. “The only thing I’m stoned on is love, right, darling?” he asked and picked Az up, spun her around and kissed her before he set her back on her feet.

“Are they under some kind of spell, Rose?”

“I don’t know Mama.”

“No, we’re not under a spell Beth. Dellia and I have always loved the Sixties and when we wake up, it’s how we’re gonna live; a Bohemian, hippie lifestyle,” Archie declared. “And before you start, David, no we are not gonna start smoking weed or shoving coke up our noses.” He gestured and three large bean chairs appeared on the floor beside the two that were already there. “Have a seat.”

Az turned the music down and climbed onto the bean bag chair beside his.

“Archie, we need your help. Phillip was killed by a wraith,” David announced.

The couple gasped.

“An Ephesian wraith?”

They nodded.

Archie’s eye narrowed to slits. “The wraith can only be summoned by Alemedia or one of her vessels. I know Rumple unleashed him to go after Regina and it went through a portal. Are you saying it ended up in the Enchanted Forest and killed Phillip?”

“Yes. Phillip touched the amulet and had the mark branded onto him,” Aurora said. “Jasper… David…said the dead can be brought back to life and that it’s been done before.”

“It has, with my sister DG. But bringing back the dead requires the person doing it to surrender part of their life force and it can only be done before the soul leaves the body. Phillip’s already has,” Az answered. “The wraith has it.”

“And he shouldn’t because it wasn’t the soul he was commanded to take,” Archie added. “Since Phillip was a pure heart, his soul should’ve gone to Ozmalita.”

“Who?”

“Ozmalita Diosa, the keeper of souls. We need to find out if she has it.”

“How?”
"The Heart of the North Guardian summons thee
Ozmalita Diosa, appear now before me!" Archie called out.

Adora appeared in the room, smiling when she saw Archie and Az.

"You don’t know how happy I am to see you free and reunited with your love, Azkadellia," she said softly. "Why have you summoned me?"

"Adora, when Rumple summoned the wraith to take Regina’s soul she sent it through a portal back to the Enchanted Forest and it took an innocent man’s in her place. We need to know if you have it."

"I’m afraid I don’t."

Aurora burst into tears.

"But if an innocent was murdered than his soul must be returned to his body. That I can do if I have the amulet it is trapped in."

"I have it!" Aurora cried and held up the bag she carried. Adora summoned the bag to her and reached inside, taking out the amulet. Adora waved her hand over the amulet and began to chant, a blue mist emitting from it, the ghostly image of Phillip appearing in the room in front of them. He glanced over at his wife, his face a mask of heartbreak and grief. Seconds later he vanished.

"He will be waiting for you when you awaken," she explained to them.

"Thank you, Adora."

"Thank you," Aurora sniffled.

Adora smiled again and vanished. Beth threw her arms around her mother, sobbing joyfully.

"You should wake up now," Archie advised.

"Yeah. I fell asleep at my desk and Beth needs to be awake if the baby needs her."

"Baby? I have a grandchild? Why didn’t you tell me?" Aurora demanded of her daughter.

"I…I was going to," Beth protested. "His name is Jasper Phillip…after his daddy and Papa only we didn’t know we were naming him after them because we were still cursed when he was born."

Az held out her hand, a silver disk in it. "Use this. It will get you home."

"But…Emma is trying to find a magic compass…"

"She won’t need it. All you need is that. Get into an open field and toss it but hold on tight! The travel storm will take you where you need to go."

"Thank you again."

"I’ll see you soon Mama," Beth said softly.

"Take care of my daughter and grandchild, David."

"I will."
Moments later Az and Archie were alone in the throne room. Archie grabbed the seeing globe on the table beside their bed and waved his hand over it, an image of Emma appearing in it.

“Emma, what the hell are you doing with him?” he exclaimed and handed the globe to Az. She could feel her anger rising as the image of the man that nearly raped her years earlier appeared in the glass.

“We have to warn them!” she cried and collapsed on the mattress exhausted.

“Still…not…recovered yet,” Archie murmured and passed out beside her, the globe falling out of his hands and shattering.

The Enchanted Forest

Mulan glanced down at the sundial, her brow creased with worry. Time was running out and Emma still hadn’t returned. Aurora was still asleep but thankfully she appeared to be sleeping peacefully. Moments later she awoke with a gasp.

“Hey. Aurora? It was just a dream. It was just a dream,” Snow soothed.

“My daughter. I saw my daughter!” she cried happily. “S…She was in the burning room like I was and oh….she’s all grown up with a baby!”

“That’s wonderful!”

“And Jasper…Jasper is her husband!”

“He is?”

“Yes. We went to see his brother and found out we can get Phillip back.”

“You already have,” they heard a voice say and Phillip stepped out from behind a tree. Mulan dropped the stick she was holding and stared at him in shock. Aurora got up and ran into his arms, kissing him passionately.

“But…we….we saw the wraith kill you!”

“And he did but Ozmalita Diosa returned my soul to me,” Phillip explained. “And now I want to go to this new land and see my daughter…and granddaughter!”

Snow held out her hand. “I’m Snow White.”

Phillip took it and bowed. “Your Highness.”

“We’re almost out of time.” Mulan moved toward the beanstalk with her sword drawn.

“What are you doing!” Snow cried out in horror.

“What Emma asked me to. Getting you home.”

“But we don’t have the compass and I AM NOT leaving without my daughter!”

“We don’t need the compass anymore. We have this.” Aurora reached into her bag and took out the travel storm token.

“That’s an Ozian travel storm token! Where did you get that?” Mulan asked. “Did you have it the
whole time?"

“No. I was given it by one of the Ozopov princesses in my dream.”

“That’s not possible. You can’t carry something out of a dream!” Snow protested.

“If one of the Guardians gave it to her, yes she can,” explained Mulan. “And the Princesses Dorothia and Azkadellia Ozopov are two of the eight Guardians of the Balance. How did you get in contact with one of them through the dream realm?”

Aurora smiled. “I suppose you could say they’re family now through my daughter. Azkadellia Ozopov is her sister-in-law.”

Snow’s eyes widened. “One of the Ozian princesses is Archie’s wife?!”

“And this Archie, if he is married to Azkadellia Ozopov, is also one of the eight Guardians of the Balance,” Mulan said. “They are the most powerful mages in all the realms.”

“Archie doesn’t have magic,” Snow insisted. “And we are not cutting down that beanstalk. We’re waiting for Emma! We leave together.”

“Please, Mulan. Give her more time,” Aurora pleaded.

“Another hour. That’s all I can give but then I have to keep my word and get you home.”

In the giant’s castle Hook and Emma now found themselves in a treasure room.

“They hoarded all of their greatest stolen treasures in here. Piles of jewels, and every room filled with coins,” Hook started stuffing his pockets.

“Let’s get to it. The compass.”

“What’s your rush?”

“How long do you think magic knockout powder lasts?”

“I have no clue.”

“That’s my rush.”

“Too right, lass. Come. Everything we need is right in front of us.”

“They kill all the giant housekeepers, too? How we going to find a compass in this mess?”

“By looking. Start searching. I wonder how much treasure we could carry down the beanstalk. … In addition to the compass, of course.”

They discovered a skeleton in the mess holding a sword with name ‘Jack’ engraved on the blade.

“What the hell?”

“That… would be Jack.”

“As in Jack…”

“The giant killer.”
“With that toothpick?”

“Well, it packs quite a wallop. You’d be surprised. It’s one of the two swords once owned by a goddess named Athena. Plundered from the Dark Castle of course.”

“I’m surprised anyone stole from Rumple and lived to tell about it. The last guy that did in Storybrooke got the shit beat out of him and Rumple wasn’t even cursed when he did it.”

“Oh, so the crocodile got brave under the curse, did he?”

“Yeah so I really think you’d better write your will if you think you’re gonna win trying to go up against him again.” She smirked. “He has his magic back. Let’s find the compass and go home. After you.”

I don’t need to find a bloody compass. I need to find that bloody dagger!

While they were searching the treasure room the giant awoke again and part of the ceiling started to collapse where Hook was standing and a terrified Emma found herself in the giant’s fist.

“I’m not what you think!”

“You’re a thief, and you poisoned me. So yeah, I’m pretty sure you’re exactly what I think.”

“No. Look, you have a compass. I need it.”

“I don’t care what you need.”

“No, for my son! To save my son! Don’t you have a family?” Emma gasped, his grip feeling iron.

“No. Because humans killed them all.”

“I am not like the others.”

“Liar!” He squeezed tighter.

“Please, listen to me! If you had a chance to be with your family again, you’d do it, wouldn’t you?”

“Yes.” His grip loosened. This little human was different from the others. They came to kill, not talk.

“All I want is to go back to my son. He’s in another realm and I need your compass to get there. Nothing else.”

“And the pirate?”

“He just brought me here….and I think he’s wrong about all of you. You just wanted to live in peace, didn’t you until they came?”

The giant nodded his head. “The winners always like to tell the story their way. They came, destroyed all the beans and killed my family.”

Emma noticed a bean hanging on a chain around his neck.

“Can this make a portal?”

“Not anymore. It was destroyed like the rest of them. I wear it as a reminder… A reminder that
you’re all killers.”

“I’m not a killer. All I want is the compass and to go home. Please.”

He lowered his hand and set her down on the ground where Jack’s sword lay. “If you’re not a killer, prove it. Pick up that sword.”

“I…”

“PICK IT UP!” he roared and sat down on the floor.

Emma picked up the sword and held it out.

“That sword is what killed my family. It’s poisoned. Just a small prick from the blade and it spreads the poison through our bodies until we fall down dead. Prove to me you’re like the others and kill me. Then you can have your compass,” he said bitterly.

“No.”

She dropped the sword.

“I won’t kill you to get the compass. I am asking you to give it to me,” she said calmly. “And then we’ll go and leave you in peace.”

“The pirate…”

“He’ll do it if he knows what’s good for him.”

He took the compass out of his pocket and dropped it on the floor at her feet. “You’re a strange one, little human. Why didn’t you kill me when you had the chance?”

“Because I’m not like that. I won’t kill to get what I need. I’ll find another way.”

He raised his fist and punched a hole in the wall behind him. “You’re free to go, little human.”

“May I ask another favor…ummm…what’s your name?”

“Anton.”

“Hello Anton…I’m Emma.”

“Emma….Where have I heard that named before….surely you’re not HER?”

“Who?”

“Before the dark curse was cast there was talk of a savior, a girl child named Emma.”

“I don’t really feel like a savior…but I did break the curse.”

“Then you are that person, Emma and today you’ve saved me.”

“I was only doing what’s right. You have a right to your life as much as anyone else. Who am I to take it from you?”

“You should go if you want to get back to your son, Emma.”

“Thank Anton. Ummm….can I ask one more favor of you?”
“Yes.”

“Can you keep him here? I don’t trust him.”

“Nor should you. He’s a pirate. They are not to be trusted. I’ll keep him here.”

“Thank you, Anton.”

“Have a safe journey Emma and perhaps we’ll meet again.”

“Maybe,” Emma said with a smile and walked out of the hole to begin her climb down the beanstalk unaware that her time was almost up.

After she was gone Anton recovered the unconscious pirate from the debris and took him over to the table, trapping him in one of the cages he still kept around. The pirate awoke an hour later, furious and cursing.

“That bitch! That double crossing bitch! She left me here to die.”

“Oh, stop your blubbering pirate. I’m not going to kill you…yet. You’re just staying here until I’m certain Emma’s gotten home safely.” The giant lowered his head and glared at Hook. “And whatever intentions you had, you can forget. She would never give herself to the likes of you!”

“Says the giant who has no one.”

“Oh, but I do. I’ve made a friend. A friend I hope to see again.” He picked up the cage and hung it on a hook on the wall and started preparing his supper.

The makeshift sundial had at last reached the tenth hour. Mulan drew her sword and walked over to the beanstalk ready to honor the promise she’d made to Emma and cut it down.

“What are you doing?” Snow cried.

“Just stay back. Emma gave me ten hours.”

“No, no, no!”

“What, you’re just going to leave her to die? Phillip, stop her!”

“Mulan, think about this,” Phillip pleaded.

“Ten hours. She may already be dead.”

“Stop!” Phillip ordered as she swung the sword and struck the beanstalk, the ground trembling from the magical shockwave that surged through it.

“No!” Snow screamed and ran to Mulan, knocking her to the ground, the sword falling out of her hand. Phillip picked it up.

“This was your daughter’s wish!”

“I don’t care what you say! You do not put my daughter in danger!”

“Stop it!” Emma jumped down from the beanstalk. Snow released Mulan.
“Emma! You okay?”

“Two earthquakes and a jump from a beanstalk. I think my brain’s still rattling around a little.”

“I did what you ordered, nothing more than that. Did you get it?”

“Yep.” Emma reached into her jacket and took out the compass.

“Where’s Hook?” Aurora asked.

“He’s detained. Let’s go. Get your stuff before he finds a way to get away from that giant and follow us. Who’s this?”

“My husband,” Aurora replied softly.

“What? How?”

“My soul was returned to me. It’s a long story and I’ll tell you on the way.”

“You told her to cut it down?” Snow demanded of her daughter while they were walking.

Yes. I couldn’t risk…”

“We go back together. That is the only way. Do you understand?” Snow threw her arms around Emma.

“Yeah…”

“Good. Now, let’s go get that dust from Cora.”

“Yeah, and go home.”

She’d had enough of Fairy Tale Land. It was time to get back to the real world and her son.
Storybrooke
Fifteen days prior to the Final Eclipse

Charming was quick to learn that maintaining law and order in their little town was not as easy as he thought now that everyone had their memories back and old grudges were resurrected, the most dangerous one being King George’s against him and Snow. The king, now the DA Albert Spencer, felt he should oversee the town now that Regina seemed to be more interested in turning over a new leaf for her son and decided it was time to knock the shepherd prince off his pedestal. He found the perfect weapon in their resident shapeshifting diner waitress with a penchant for skimpy clothing. She was now the prime suspect in the murder of a mechanic named Billy since she was the last person to see him alive and it appeared that he had been attacked by an animal and there had been a full moon the night before and the red cloak that kept Ruby from turning had somehow gone missing. Fortunately he was able to prove Ruby’s innocent and the town returned to normal, or at least as normal as it could be.

He was also struggling to take care of Henry and oversee the work in the mines that he hoped would finally help him bring Snow and Emma home. Henry was now having terrible nightmares, a side effect of the sleeping curse. He lit candles as he’d done with Snow, but nothing seemed to be helping and now he was getting burns from the fiery room he visited. Having no other choice, he’d decided to call Regina.

“You were quite right to call me.”

“So, you can help? It was just a dream.”

“Well, what you're describing's certainly not a dream.”

“Then what was it?”

“A side effect.”

“You know, it's remarkable you'd cast a curse you know so little about.”

“My victims are not supposed to wake up. That's why I certainly never cared what happened to them after. Until now. We may need to talk to Gold. He might know more about this.”

Rumple and Belle had just finished their magic lessons for the day when Regina, Charming and Henry arrived at the shop.

“We need your help Gold,” Regina announced. Belle looked up from the book she was reading and glared at her nemesis.

“What have you done now?” she demanded angrily.

“Quiet bookworm!” she snapped.

“You might want to watch your tongue dearie. or you might lose it.”

“Mr. Gold, please!” Henry pleaded and held out his burned arm. “How is this happening to me?”
Rumple gasped. “Where did you get that? Did you do this?” he demanded of Regina.

“No! He says…he says he got it in his nightmares. A burning room.”

“Ah, I see. When people fall under a sleeping curse, the soul travels to a netherworld where it resides until awoken. Now this world is between life and death, and it’s very real. However even when the curse is broken, sometimes in sleep, the victims find their way back to that world. Victims like you, Henry.”

“This other world is tormenting my son every time he sleeps. I want you to give him something that will keep him from going there.”

“Well, I'm afraid that's not possible. I can, however, provide you with something that will allow him to control his actions whilst in that world. And once one controls something, one no longer need fear it. I’m afraid your son did not inherit Prince Phillip’s ability to control his dreams, but I suspect his daughter has. You may encounter her in this world Henry and others like her and they may offer you some comfort. But until then, you must wear this.” Rumple held out his hand and a pendant appeared in it.

“A necklace?”

“You wear this while you're sleeping. Once you control the journey, the fear will stop. And then you can come and go as you please.”

“Everything comes at a price with you. What do you want for this?” Regina demanded.

“For a house call? You couldn't afford it. But this is for Henry. This one is on me.”

“Thank you, Mr. Gold.”

“Call me Rumple, Henry.”

In time he hoped the boy would learn to call him by another name, Grandpa.

Once Henry and the others left the shop Belle closed the book she was reading and glanced up at Rumple. “You told him he’d meet other victims of the curse in the Netherworld for a reason, didn’t you?”

“Once again that intelligent mind of yours serves you well. Yes. As I said the daughter of Prince Phillip and Princess Aurora may have inherited her father’s ability to control his dreams. Also, Aurora and Rose were both victims of the sleeping curse, but it has been broken. If Henry sees one of them in the Netherworld they may be able to tell him where Emma and Snow are and perhaps carry messages to them from this side.” He picked up the book she was reading and placed it in a bag. “Once Emma returns we can begin our search for my son.”

Belle placed her hand over his. “And Henry will meet his father.”

The Enchanted Forest
Fifteen days prior to the Final Eclipse

After the group made camp Aurora took the travel storm token out of her bag and held it out. “We don’t need the ashes from the wardrobe now. We can use this.”

“We can’t be certain it works,” Emma argued.
“If she got it from an Ozian Guardian, it works.” Mulan said.

“Then use it to find your daughter,” Snow suggested. “Emma and I can get the wardrobe ashes from Cora and use them to get home.”

“Aurora’s right. We should use the token. Getting the ashes from Cora is far too risky. Look what she did to the people at the Haven,” Phillip reminded them. “Do you know how these work, Mulan?”

“You need to be in an open field to throw it because it produces a storm that allows you to cross realms. The emperor used to barter for them from the Ozian royal family because he wanted to use them to come here and steal powerful magical items from the Dark One’s castle.”

“We can’t let Cora get to Storybrooke,” Snow said. “She gets to Storybrooke, she’ll go after everyone there and you know Regina will side with her. If we take the ashes she can’t go through. Please. We have to stop her.”

“She’s right,” Emma said. “We can try the token to get home, but we have to get those ashes off Cora, so SHE can’t follow us. And I can’t figure out how people manage to steal from Gold without being torn to pieces. He beat the crap out of a guy for stealing a cup. A cup!”

“The emperor could, and I think I know where Cora might be hiding,” Mulan added.

Alright. We’ll start looking in the morning.”

“Aurora, if you see Henry you might be able to get a message to someone who could help us. Gold,” Emma suggested.

“Gold! Emma, he double crossed you the last time you asked for his help,” Snow protested.

“Well he’d better not this time. We can’t count on Regina, but I think Gold doesn’t want this woman in Storybrooke anymore than we do.”

“He wouldn’t,” Snow murmured. “I used to hear Regina and Cora talking about him when Cora was still in the Enchanted Forest. It seems that she and Gold had something of a history and they fought a battle that Cora claims she won against him but I’m not so sure.”

Aurora looked forward to her dreams now that she knew she would not be in it alone, but her fear returned when she found herself alone among the flames. Suddenly a young boy appeared, and the flames vanished.

“Hello?” she called out.

“It’s okay. It’s okay,” he said softly when he approached her, a pendant around his neck. “Are you…Princess Aurora or Rose?”

“I am Aurora. Who are you and how do you know my daughter?”

“My name is Henry and Mr. Gold…ahhh Rumplestiltskin told me about you.”

“Henry! Are you Emma’s son?”

“Emma! My mom! Have you seen her? Have you seen Snow? Are they okay?” Henry asked frantically.

“They’re fine. We have a way to get them back to you but there is someone we are trying to stop
from following us. Her name is Cora and she’s Regina’s mother. Henry, we need you to talk to Rumplestiltskin…ask him if he knows a way we can use here to defeat her.”

“I will. Can you give my mom and Mary Margaret a message from me?”

“I will sweetie. What would you like to tell them?”

“Tell them I can’t wait for them to come home.”

“I will. Thank you so much Henry.”

Phillip watched his wife sleep, relieved when he didn’t hear her crying out in fear. She awoke an hour later smiling.

“Aurora, my love, what is it? Have you seen Rose again?” he asked hopefully. She shook her head.

“No, but I did see Henry. He is going to talk to Rumplestiltskin for us, Emma and he can’t wait for you to come home.”

“Thank God. Hopefully he won’t double cross us again.”

“I don’t think he will this time,” Aurora said confidently and lay back down to sleep in Phillip’s arms but this time instead of being trapped in the burning room, they found themselves in a remote corner of the forest, reliving their wonderful first meeting when she thought she was just a peasant girl being raised by three 

Storybrooke
Fourteen days prior to the Final Eclipse

“Cora,” A chill crept down Charming’s spine at the mention of that name. He’d heard Snow speak of Regina’s domineering mother and describe her as a woman far worse than her daughter. Having her in their town was the last thing any of them needed right now, especially Henry. Charming had no doubt Regina would ally with her mother if Cora promised her assistance in getting Henry back.

“I hope Mr. Gold can help keep her out of here because Mom doesn’t need her trying to run her life again,” Henry muttered. “She’s trying so hard to be better for me and Cora’s just gonna come in and try to turn her back into what SHE is but we gotta tell her.”

“Let’s talk to Gold first before we go to Regina,” Charming suggested and pulled into the lot behind Rumple’s shop and shut off the engine. When they walked in Rumple was behind the counter reading off a list of items from a ledger while Belle stood in front of one of the shelves looking at the items and confirming whether he had them on hand or not.

“Ah, Henry! It’s good to see you lad. Is the necklace helping?”

“It is Gold but now we have another problem. Emma and Snow are trying to get back from the Enchanted Forest, but they’ve got someone coming after them, someone you know well.”

“Oh, and who might that be, dearie?”

“Cora.”

Rumple and Belle exchanged nervous glances.

“She’s supposed to be dead!” Belle cried. “Didn’t you tell me she was dead, Rumple?”
“I thought she was but if Emma and Snow White have seen her, she isn’t. And trust me, you do not want that woman in this town or anywhere near Regina or your grandson. Unfortunately, I would be of little help to them from here. What they need is an Ozian Guardian and it just so happens there are two that would be able to intercept her before she reaches Storybrooke.”

“What’s an Ozian Guardian?” Henry inquired.

What you will one day become, Rumple thought. “Ozian Guardians are the most powerful mages in all the realms because they are the direct descendants of the Greek gods Hades and Persephone and the Ozian gods Lurline and Aramon, or they are bound to one by blood or marriage. They are responsible for maintaining the balance between darkness and light in all the realms and one of them was right under our noses in Storybrooke.”

“Let me guess: you!” Charming said smartly.

“No, Archie.”

“Archie?! Archie doesn’t have magic!”

“Oh, but he does dearie, and Regina knows it. They had quite the battle at the town hall when she came for Henry. You do not anger an Ozian Guardian unless you want to and, please excuse my French Henry, have your ass handed to you on a platter. Archie could’ve killed Regina without breaking a sweat, but Henry is the only reason why he stayed his hand. I warned both her and Cora about not crossing paths with Ozian Guardians, but I would enjoy seeing that arrogant bitch Cora try to go up against Archie. Even though he is only married to a descendant of Hades and Persephone, he now has powers equal to hers and since Azkadellia Ozopov is no longer under a witch’s control, she is once again the North Guardian.” Rumple smiled at Henry. “Archie was like a father to you lad, so you forged a bond with him and now that you can control your dreams, you will be able to contact him through them.”


“Nor would it be yet.”

“Wait a minute! Archie’s in Storybrooke! I just saw him down at the diner. Cut the crap, Gold!” Charming growled.

“What you’re seeing is a lifelike construct he created to take his place while he was in Oz freeing his wife from a witch’s control. He will swap places with it when he’s ready to come back, but he will have access to its memories as it has access to his. If you cannot reach him in the dream realm, have his construct deliver your message for you. Archie and Azkadellia Ozopov are our only chance of preventing Cora from coming here.” Rumple frowned. “But if he is still suffering from magical drain we will have to find another way.”

“My mom…she needs to know about Cora.”

“Rumple is that a good idea?” Belle asked. “I don’t think so. What if she sides with her?”

“Let me handle your mother Henry,” Rumple suggested. “When you go to sleep tonight try to think about Archie and the pendant should help you find him. In the meantime, if you see Aurora instruct her to tell Emma and Snow White to go back to Snow’s palace and look for my old cell. I have something in it that I saved for a rainy day. It’s only a temporary solution but it may buy them time.”

“Thank you, Mr. Gold.”
“It’s the least I can do, dearie.”

Once they left the shop Belle turned to him, frowning. “What are you leaving out?”

“You know me too well, my sweetheart. Cora must come here. That is the will of the OZ.”

“Why?”

“Because this is Regina’s test to prove she is worthy of being Henry’s guardian. She must resist the temptations her mother offers her.”

“And if she can’t?”

“Then I will do what must be done to save her soul. Had the fates decided differently, she would’ve been my child, not Prince Henry’s and I have loved her like she was my child, Belle. I want my children back. One I fear may be lost to me forever, but I cannot lose both.”

“What will you have to do?”

“Cora has to die, and she will die by my hand but not until she tells me what I’ve wanted to know for centuries, and please forgive me for this Belle.”

“You need to know if she loved you.”

He nodded.

“She may have broken your heart Rumple, but I will be the one to heal it. Ask her your question but I wouldn’t expect an honest answer.”

“Oh, I’m not sweetheart but I will lay out a trap for her that will make it impossible for her to lie. She will speak the truth before I take her black heart and crush it.”

“…Grandpa, I’ll be okay. You can go sleep in your room,” Henry insisted. Charming had a candle ready to light on the nightstand the moment his grandson awoke, fearing his dreams would once again take him back to the burning room. Thankfully he’d been spared that terror the night before, but the former prince was taking no chances.

Archie, Henry thought before he closed his eyes to sleep.

Oz (The Outer Zone)
The Northern Island
The Dream Realm

Az looked up from the clay she was sculpting and scowled at her husband. “Quit moving the sheet! You’re breaking my concentration!”

“So, take a break and come to bed,” he said huskily. He lay bare chested on their makeshift bed with his amber pendant around his neck while the lower half of his body was covered only with a sheet that he kept moving while she worked to tempt her to do just that.

“I will…when I’m done and not before.”
“Dellia,” he groaned.

“It’s not like I’m drawing you like one of those French girls! Sculpting requires more focus.”

“I’m gonna get knots in my joints if I stay like this all day but then I’ll just have you work them out for me.”

Az giggled. “Oh, if Daddy, Mother and DG knew how we were spending our resting time…”

“Your mother would want to hang me in Central City square if she saw how we decorated this room. I can’t promise it looks normal in the real world. And your father, well he did teach you how to sculpt clay. He didn’t specify what you should make out of it.” He glanced over at a table in the corner of the room showcasing the figures she’d already completed over the years, all of them in sensual poses inspired by the works of the famous artist Rodin.

Suddenly he tensed.

“Archie, what is it?”

“Someone’s trying to contact me but it’s not my construct or David.” He got up and wrapped the sheet around him and grabbed the seeing globe but it kept sliding off while he tried to hold the globe to activate it.

“Need a little help, honey?” she cooed.

He smirked. “Maybe I’ll just leave it off. Damn! Nothing! I can’t think of anyone else I’ve formed a bond with that would try to contact me here…”

“Archie?!”

The seeing globe slipped out of his hand and shattered at the familiar voice behind him. Az stared at their unexpected guest.

“H…Henry!?”

Archie grabbed the sheet and wrapped it around him again, his face crimson before he turned around to face the boy that had been like a son to him. “Henry…what…what…are you doing here?”

When he first saw the image of where Archie was living in Oz Henry expected to find him sitting in front of a roaring fire reading a book, not standing stark naked in a room that looked like it belonged in old Haight-Ashbury with a beautiful woman clad only in a dress shirt and panties.

“So, it’s true. You do have magic.”

“Umm….yes…but how did you find out? Did your mother tell you?”

“No, Mr. Gold did. He sent me here to find you.”

“He could’ve waited until I was decent! My God! Henry, I am so sorry! Goddess knows you’ve seen enough in your tender years to be scarred for life!”

“Ummm…I got here myself with this and I’m really sorry if I was ahhh…interrupting anything.” Henry held up the pendant, blushing.

“Morpheus’s pendant,” Az murmured. “It gives the wearer the ability to control dreams. What’s
wrong, Henry? My cousin wouldn’t have sent you unless there was something terribly wrong.”

“We’d better get dressed first,” Archie suggested. “Rumple would have my head and so would Regina if they found out we were talking to him running around half naked, or naked in my case! Umm…Henry, can you wait out in the hall while we make ourselves decent, please?”

“Okay.” He stepped out into the hall, a beaded curtain the only door separating them.

Archie yanked on a pair of jeans and one of his dress shirts while Az put on a pair of his shorts. “Okay, you can come in now,” he called out. “Henry, again I am so sorry you had to see me like that!”

“I walked in on Mom once by accident too so it’s okay.”

“Well, we don’t want to make a habit of it.” He gestured to one of the bean bag chairs. Once Henry sat down a hot cup of cocoa with cinnamon appeared in his hand.

“Cool! Did you do that?”

“I know its your favorite and it is cold here at the Northern Island.”

“I don’t understand…how do you have magic? Did you always have it?”

“It’s a long story Henry and it started before the Dark Curse was cast…”

Henry was fascinated by this new story of the man that had been a father figure to him all his life, hearing how the former cricket conscience had been transformed into a powerful magical warrior that spent most of the curse in the OZ fighting to free the woman he loved from the possession of the Wicked Witch of the West until he was sent back to Storybrooke just before he was adopted by Regina.

“So, you were sent here to protect her, but you fell in love with her and married her?” he asked when he finished his cup.

“We’re not married yet,” Az clarified. “But I’ve been married to Archie in my heart for years and ten years ago, I sent him to Storybrooke to protect someone equally special.”

“Who?”

“You Henry,” Archie said softly. “She sent me to Storybrooke to protect you.”

“Why? What’s so special about me that you had to be separated from your true love for ten years?”

“You already have the answer, you just don’t remember it. Look in your heart’s memories. That’s where the truth lies,” Archie instructed.

“I don’t know how!”

Az reached out and took his hands in hers. “Focus, honey. Go back to the day you went under the sleeping curse. You saw a woman…and she trusted you with some truths that were meant to be revealed at the proper time. That time is now. Remember who you are….”

He closed his eyes and concentrated and in his mind’s eye he could see a beautiful woman with silvery blond hair standing before him.

You are the east guardian, the staff that summons the winds of change.
You are the son of Baelfire, grandson of Rumplestiltskin. The last of the Strogoff bloodline.

He opened his eyes to find a silver staff with a dragon’s head hovering in front of him. He reached out his hand and grasped the handle.

“I am the East Guardian, keeper of the staff of air,” he murmured. “I am the last of the Strogoff bloodline.”

“Seeing this day finally come was worth the sacrifice we made,” Archie said proudly and hugged him. “And now the will of the OZ will be spoken to you as it is to us.”

“I have to find my father. He is the last missing piece of my grandfather’s heart and only when we’re united, will he be able to free himself from the Dark One. Archie, he sent me here because Storybrooke is in danger from Cora, Mom’s mother. Emma and Mary Margaret are trying to stop her from getting there but we need your help.”

“Oh, and I’d love to. We have a score to settle with that woman ourselves,” Archie muttered. “But unfortunately, Henry, Dellia and I drained ourselves and each other fighting the witch and we’re not fully recovered yet. We’re in what you would call a magically induced coma. If you go to the Tower, you’ll find us in one of our old prison domes shrunked to the size of ants and still asleep. We won’t wake up until we’re fully recovered, and we’ve already been asleep two days.”

“Can’t I help them?”

“Not until you’re trained,” Az said. “They will have to try to stop her themselves, but Rumple may be able to lock her out of Storybrooke from the other side.”

“How?”

“By destroying the only possible portal she could come through, the wishing well because its opening in this world is Lake Nostos in the Enchanted Forest, Henry. Its waters come from the lake here at Finaqua, waters that have the power to return something that was lost,” Az explained. “The lakes at Finaqua and Nostos went dry in the years that my sister had no knowledge of her identity because she is the South Guardian and the keeper of the chalice filled with the waters of rebirth. Now both lakes are restored and if Cora has something, even dead, that can make a portal, the lake will restore it.”

“But they won’t need to use beans, our travel storm tokens or anything else to make a portal once you’re trained Henry. You will have the ability to make them at will,” Archie added. “And they can take you anywhere you want to go. Tell Emma and Snow to use the travel storm token we gave them. It will get them home but in a safer location. MacDonald’s farm. Snow knows where it is.”

“I don’t want Cora in Storybrooke. Mom’s trying so hard to be good and she’ll just undo it!”

“That’s why Emma and Snow have to succeed here. If not, that portal in Storybrooke has to be destroyed and Regina will have to help him do it.”

“Mr. Gold….Grampa said he had something in his old cell that might help but it was only temporary. Do you know what he meant?”

“I don’t but if that’s where he told you to send them then do so but be warned Henry. There are times when the dark goddess Alemedia takes control and it might not be him speaking. It’s easier for me to tell when the darkness is in control of a vessel because I had years of experience with it. Eventually you and Belle will be able to tell the difference too. Right now, he is in control but the
closer he comes to breaking his curse, the more determined Alemedia will be to hold him. And she will strike out at the ones he loves most. That’s why the one you’re bonded to needs to get her act together!”

“I have a bondmate like you are to Az?”

“Yours is a little different Henry. Dellia and I are bound as lovers, but your bond is that of a parent to a child, the strongest bond there is.”

“Its Emma isn’t it?”

“No.”

He smiled. “Mom!”

“You are the only person that can help her defeat the darkness within her so that she can earn the right to be your guardian. If she fails, the boy that was your decoy will be given his powers back and you’ll no longer have yours since he already has a bondmate. The same will happen with Rumple but his decoy still has his powers because he’s bound to my sister-in-law.”

“Who was my decoy?”

“Jeb Cain,” Archie and Az answered in unison.

“Rumple’s is his father, Wyatt Cain, the human counterpart of the Tin Man,” Az explained. “You should be going Henry. You’re running out of time, but it was wonderful to finally meet you.” She hugged him.

“You too Az.”

Henry hugged Archie again. “Ummm…next time I come to see you, try not to be naked, okay?”

“Then warn me before you drop in!” he cried.

Henry laughed as he vanished from sight.

Archie walked over to the bed and sat down, sighing heavily. Az sat down beside him and laid her head on his shoulder. “Hell’s breaking loose everywhere but we can’t leave here. Not yet.”

He lay down and took her in his arms, laying his hand on her belly. “And part of me doesn’t want to. We can’t lose her again, Dellia. We just can’t. It nearly killed us the last time. This time it would.”

“We won’t,” she vowed. “We’ve fought our battle against the darkness. It’s their turn now and it’s the will of the OZ that we only guide them toward the right paths to take.”

The Enchanted Forest
The Dream Realm

It was a scene right out of Disney’s Sleeping Beauty. Two lovers sat on a fallen tree stump at the top of a hill watching the sun rise, her head on his shoulder. Henry approached them slowly, not wanting to interrupt their special moment any sooner than he needed to, but he suddenly stepped on a twig and it snapped, alerting the man’s attention.

“Stay here,” he heard a voice similar to Archie’s command the woman. She nodded.
“Please, I… I don’t mean you any… Archie?” Henry gasped when he approached, a holster with a firearm clipped to his Dallas Cowboy pajama pants. “But… but I just left you back in Oz.”

“You did. I’m his brother, Jasper but you can call me by my cursed name, David Molk.” David held out his hand to the boy. “Beth… umm… Rose… it’s fine. It’s just Henry, Emma’s son.”

“Oh, I was looking for Rose or her mom. I need to get a message to my mom and Snow White.”

“Mama and Papa are out for a walk, but you can tell me,” Beth said softly. “How are you able to stop from going to the burning room like the rest of us? Can you control dreams too?”

“I can now. Beth, you have to tell your mom and mine that a way to stop Cora is in Rumplestiltskin’s cell and they need to hurry. She’s trying to get to Storybrooke.”

“I’ll tell her. Come on David!” The pair ran to a horse that was grazing by the lake. David climbed on and reached for Beth, pulling her onto the horse in front of him. “Henry, you should come with us too.”

“Umm, I don’t have a ride,” he said sheepishly. I wish I had my bike, he thought.

Seconds later his bicycle appeared before him. He jumped on and raced after the pair on horseback. David and Beth were only riding a short distance when they spotted Aurora and Phillip walking back up the hill. The pair jumped off their horse and waited while Henry caught up to them in his bicycle.

“Aurora, tell Emma what you’re looking for is in Rumplestiltskin’s cell! Mary Margaret will know where to find it!” he said breathlessly.

“I will! Thank you, Henry. You are a very brave boy coming here like this.”

“I’m running outta time. I gotta tell Mr. Gold another message but Archie suggested you use the token and have it take you to MacDonald’s farm. Mary Margaret will know where it is.”

Beth hugged her mother. “And that’s where David and I will be waiting for you.”

“And tell them again, I can’t wait for them to come home.”

“I will. Thank you again Henry.”

The group waved at the boy as he vanished from sight.

Storybrooke
Fourteen days prior to the Final Eclipse

Rumple brushed tears from his eyes as he gazed down at the dragon’s head staff Henry now held in his arms, the final proof that another piece of his broken heart would at last be restored to him; his precious Bae’s son.

“He brought that out from his dream?” Charming inquired incredulously.

“He did indeed.”

“But what does it mean?”

“What it means is that you and I share a grandson now, Charming. Henry is my son’s child, the last of my bloodline.”
Charming glared at him. “And how long were you gonna wait before you told us this?”

“I didn’t know until recently but if you doubt me, ask Archie’s construct. Archie’s known the truth all along but only regained his memory of it when the curse was broken. Oh, stop looking like that Charming! Life in the OZ wasn’t singing ‘Over The Rainbow’ or ‘Follow The Yellow Brick Road’. It made him into the man he was meant to be, the Heart of the North Guardian and he’s done his job well. Now it’s our turn.”

Henry awoke a few minutes later. “Grandpa! You’re here!”

“You know I was Henry…” Charming began.

“He wasn’t talking to you,” Belle said softly and reached for Rumple’s hand.

Henry reached out and took Rumple’s other hand. “I am the East Guardian, keeper of the staff of air and we are going to find my father after we stop Cora from coming to Storybrooke! The portal is at the wishing well, Grandpa. Archie and Az said you need to destroy it and Emma and Mary Margaret will come out safely at MacDonald’s farm.”

“Henry, we will begin your magical training after I’ve had a chat with your mother and taken care of that portal. Charming, do not let our grandson out of your sight for one moment or you will be finding out what losing your charm feels like quickly. Do we understand each other, dearie?”

“You don’t have to tell me how to protect MY grandson. I’m already doing it!” Charming snapped.

“No fighting you two!” Belle scolded.

“I would suggest going to MacDonald’s farm and waiting there. I own it now that he’s passed on and no one will bother you.”

“Aurora and Phillip’s daughter is supposed to be coming there too to wait for her parents,” Henry informed Rumple. He grinned.

“Well Charming, you might want to hand the reins of law enforcement over to someone who actually has the experience now,” he giggled.

“Now what are you talking about!” Charming grouched. Rumple now being part of his extended family was worse than having to deal with Regina. He hoped Snow didn’t plan on inviting them over for Thanksgiving dinner because it would be like putting lions in a cage with a piece of a steak.

“Why Princess Rose’s husband of course! The white knight in blue just like I Saw he would become. Archie’s twin is a homicide inspector with the San Francisco police department. And I suspect he won’t be traveling to Storybrooke alone. He’ll bring his entire crew with him.”

“I could use the help, especially now that Albert’s determined to undermine me at every turn.”

“Oh, don’t worry. I’ll take care of him,” Rumple growled. “Anything that poses a threat to my grandson will be taken care of…quickly. Now if you’ll excuse me, it’s time I had a chat with Regina.” Rumple flicked his wrist and he and Belle vanished.
The battle was over, but it would take more than a few days to repair the broken realm. Lavinia had been restored to her throne and the former members of the royal council returned to their positions yet the distrust the Resistance fighters still had for the nobles remained in place and once again talk of secession spread like wildfire among their ranks. They wanted to form their own government with Wyatt and Jeb Cain as their leaders, but Jeb was in no condition to lead anyone. He spent most of his time in the makeshift medical ward that Toto’s long-lost wife Otille set up on the seventh floor in the Tower.

The sight that first met DG and her parents’ eyes was heartbreaking. There were dozens of injured men and women in the room and the dead were covered with sheets. Wyatt found his son sitting beside Xenia's bed tears streaming down his cheeks. DG, her parents, and Raw started helping Otille with the rest of the wounded.

"What happened, son?" Wyatt asked him.

"We broke through the first floor and we thought it was clear. A Longcoat came toward us and Xenia...she threw herself right in the bullet's path before I had a chance to stop her!" Jeb moaned. "They got the bullet out and said she's gonna be okay but Dad...any closer and she..."

Wyatt put his arm around his son's shoulders. "She is going to be fine. She better be if she's going to be the mother of my first grandbaby."

"Ummm...Dad...isn't it a little too soon for you to be thinking about grandkids?"

"Hell no! You just make sure you marry her first, you hear?"

"Might have trouble getting permission from her folks."

"And why is that?" Wyatt demanded. "Are they like your mother’s."

"Worse. They're Temple of Lurline guardians."

"Temple of Lurline guardians!" He looked at Ambrose. "Your parents are Temple guardians?"

"Yeah."

"They're your great grandma’s protectors and now yours since you're the last of her line," Wyatt said to Jeb.

"I know."

"Jeb..." they heard Xenia murmur as she opened her eyes. Jeb leaned down at kissed her.

"You scared the shit out of me!" he cried. "Don't ever do that again!"
"I couldn't let them kill you..."

"If you're going to be having my grandchildren I don't want you taking risks like that again," Wyatt warned her.

"What makes you think I'm going to be the one making you a grandfather?" Xenia asked with a small smile on her lips.

"Well, do you love my son or not?"

"Yes," Xenia said softly. "But...my parents..."

Wyatt frowned. "You get better and then we'll figure out how we can talk some sense into your folks because you'll be a good wife for my boy."

"You're more interested in the grandchildren," Xenia teased.

"I didn't get to see Jeb grow up, but I do want to see some of my grandchildren grow up."

"My parents are pretty stubborn, Cain," Ambrose warned. "Probably more stubborn than you are."

"I don't see why they should have a problem with your sister marrying my boy when they're happy together," Wyatt said angrily.

"They always put duty first," Ambrose said sadly.

"Well then they need to change their priorities a bit. What are their names, so I know who to yell at if I have to go to the Temple of Lurline?"

"Medira and Callux," Xenia answered.

"Oh shit...those two!" Wyatt moaned. "That damned father of yours threatened to behead me one-time Adora went there after we had a big fight! And your mother...well she threatened to cut something else off..."

"I don't remember Mother taking off on you after you fought," Jeb said.

"It was before we had you and I don't even remember what the fight was about. Something stupid probably. Anyway, Adora was so pissed at me she went to the Temple of Lurline since Alana was the only member of her family speaking to her after we got married. I went out there and asked to talk to her and ended up being shoved against a wall with Callux holding his sword on my neck while his wife was pointing hers somewhere else. Had your mother not decided to let me have my say the Cain line would've ended that day one way or the other. Needless to say, those two scare the shit outta me."

"They won't scare me," Jeb said confidently.

"Try saying that if Callux has his sword on your neck and Medira has hers on your manhood and see how far you get."

Jeb paled and squirmed in his chair. "You mean she wanted to..."

"And she would have too."

"Now I know where you get that from!" Jeb cried as he looked at Xenia. "Xenia here threatened to cut Demillo's off if he didn't tell us everything he knew about when you showed up in Central
Wyatt laughed. "As much as I hate that pissant, I never would wish that on any man."

"This is a welcome sight," DG said as she walked over to them. She had removed her jacket and was wearing an apron over her shirt. The apron was stained with blood. The mood around Xenia's bedside suddenly turned grim as everyone remembered there were other souls in the room who were not as lucky as Xenia.

"You look tired Princess," Wyatt observed. "Why don't you sit down, and I'll take over for a while?"

"I can't, Wyatt." she said. "There's more of them coming in every minute and we...we just can't keep up."

"Why don't you all go help out? I'll be fine," Xenia suggested to her brother and the Cains. Jeb kissed Xenia on the lips and they followed DG to where the wounded needed them.

He'd been more concerned with helping the rest of the wounded as much as he could that Wyatt had given little thought to his own injury until Otille forced him to lie down so that she could treat the gunshot wound he'd sustained in the brain room. She removed the bullet carefully and bandaged his shoulder.

"Now I want you to get some rest too. I don't want any trouble like I had with the Princess," she commanded.

"But, I..."

"Do I have to have some of our men restrain you while I give you a sleeping potion?" she threatened, hands on her hips.

"Ummm...no."

"Then go!"

He ran into his son when he was walking out of the infirmary.

"I smell cigar smoke," he said with a frown. "Jeb?"

"Dad!" he cried and dropped the cigar, crushing it with his foot.

"Well, I don't like smoking any more than I do drinking. Dealt with enough drunks in my life. Where've you been?"

"I was just out for a walk. Needed to clear my head. How is Xen?"

"Sleeping. Ambrose is sitting with her. Do you have a recreation room in here?"

"On the fifth floor, why?"

"Good. I'll need at least a week to prepare. Use the time to prepare yourself."

"For what, Dad?"

"Ambrose is ready for the trials and I need to brush you up on your own skills."
"Then you'll need this," Jeb said and handed his father his sword. "I'll have your robes brought from our camp."

"My robes? But...I left them back at our cottage." Wyatt said, feeling a twinge of energy when he grasped the handle of his old katana.

"Not those ones, Dad. You're the Grand Master now. Your robes are blue. Mother had a set made for you years ago and kept them at the Temple of Lurline. Xenia brought them with her. Have you told Ambrose?"

"I will in the morning. I'll let both of you know when I'll be ready. I'm under orders to get some sleep or the pooch's wife is gonna make me take a sleeping potion. Where's DG? I want to check in on her before I turn in."

"She's in the Sorc….Az’s room. It's one floor up, the last set of doors at the end of the hall. You can't miss it."

"Thank you," he said as he walked away.

When he opened the door to Azkadellia's bedroom he saw DG asleep on the bed, the blankets in a pile on the floor. He picked one of them up and covered her with it, laying down on the sofa.

I'll just lay here for a little bit, he thought as he pulled his fedora down over his eyes. After a few minutes he was asleep and dreaming he was back at the Mystic Man's old house. They were standing in his training room, both now wearing the blue silk robes of the Talon of the Dragon Grand Master.

"DG isn't the only one who needs to unlock memories, Wyatt," the Mystic Man advised his former apprentice.

"I'm remembering most of my Talon training," Wyatt said.

"You'll need to remember it all now. This battle against the witch was only the beginning. The day for the final battle approaches and you must be prepared. You both must be prepared. You will have to meet the darkness at its heart and destroy it."

The Mystic Man waved his hand and his training room transformed into a repair shop. Wyatt recognized Nick Chopper, the first Tin Man. He lay on a table, badly rusted. At his side were his two best friends, the Scarecrow and the Lion. The Scarecrow was holding the Tin Man's rusted hand.

"Isn't there anything you can do?" the Scarecrow pleaded as he glanced over at the wizard.

He shook his head. "He is dying from a broken heart. We can repair his other parts, but I cannot repair a broken heart."

"What could've broken his heart beyond repair?" the Lion asked.

"I wish I knew old friend, but he won't speak of it. He hasn't spoken at all."

"D...Dorothy..." they heard the Tin Man's raspy voice through his rusted lips.

"We've sent word to her, but she and Prince Nicolai are on their honeymoon. She'll be here soon," the Scarecrow said gently.
"No!" he cried and to Wyatt's shock, the Tin Man's voice sounded exactly like his. "She...can't... see me like this."

"But she'll want to be here with you."

"I don't want her here! I want her last memory of me to be as I was, not this rusted down wreck, do you hear me?!!"

"I..."

"Promise me!"

"All right, all right...I promise I'll make sure she doesn't come here but why you want to keep her away, I don't understand."

"It's better this way." The Tin Man closed his eyes. "When I'm gone, I want you to have my axe and my remains melted down to be made into a sword and a pistol and give them to Dorothy's personal guard. At least...part of me will still be able to protect her and her descendants from those who might harm her. Will you do this for me, old friend?"

The Scarecrow nodded through his tears. "I will."

"Thank you," The Tin Man closed his eyes and lay motionless on the table. The wizard placed a hand on his rusted chest.

"He's gone," he said sadly. "And now we have to honor his final wishes."

The repair shop vanished, and Wyatt and the Mystic Man were once again back in the training room. The Mystic Man was holding a satin pillow and on it were Wyatt's sword and his silver pistol.

"I now bequeath to you that which is rightfully yours," he said and handed the pillow to Wyatt. "You've been given a second chance and you cannot fail again."

"What do you mean?"

"Lurline will only give second chances to those who prove themselves worthy of it and Nick's actions proved his worth. He was given a second life."

"A...Are you saying...I'm him?" Wyatt asked.

"Yes. But different. You have more abilities than he did. Some of them you were born with, others have been given to you. You now have all the abilities of the Talon Grand Master...among other things."

"Magic," Wyatt moaned. "You know how much I hate that stuff..."

"Yet it has proven useful as you've seen with the Princess. Without it you never would have been able to open the west gate and free her sister from the darkness's control. You must also regain control over your signature element, fire."

"How?"

"Remember your training my apprentice..." he heard the Mystic Man say as he faded away.

DG found herself standing once again in front of the locked double doors of Dorothy Gale's crypt.
She raised her palm and called on her magic, forcing the doors to open. When she entered this time, she did not see her old farmhouse. Instead she found herself standing in front of the Northern Island palace as it was in the past with green grasses, warm crystal blue lake waters. She opened the door and went inside, making her way up the long marble staircase and opened the double doors to the room that was once hers and found a dark-haired woman standing in front of the bed, her back to her. When she turned around DG felt as if she were staring into a mirror. Instead of the customary black bomber jacket, sneakers and blue shirt, this version of her was wearing a white lace and satin negligee that was soaked and had spots of mud on it. Her blue eyes were filled with tears.

"Why didn't you tell me about Nick when I came to you before?" DG asked the woman whom she now knew was Dorothy as an adult.

"It wasn't the right time," Dorothy said hoarsely. "Your sister had to be freed from the darkness's grip first. She and her bondmate and you and yours must create the final seal together along with your Strogoff cousins."

"My bondmate is going to hate the sight of me when he gets his memory back, thanks to you!" DG said bitterly. "Now I want the full truth, what happened between you and Nick?"

Dorothy waved her hand and DG was standing out on the gazebo, the rain pouring down around it and thunder rumbling. They heard footsteps and Nick, still a tin man was walking past them, his head lowered, his trusty axe clutched tightly in his hand.

"Tin Man!"

DG could see Dorothy running toward him in only her negligee and bare feet, mud from the ground splashing onto the frail white garment.

"You shouldn't be out here," he said as he turned to face her. DG wasn't surprised that he sounded exactly like Wyatt and beneath the tin that was now his body, she had no doubts that he would look like Wyatt too.

"Neither should you...you'll rust yourself so badly," she said softly. "Come back inside."

"I can't Dorothy. It's time for me to go," he said sadly.

"Go? What do you mean?"

"I'm not needed here anymore."

"But...but you'll always be needed here!" Dorothy protested.

"You have Nicolai and you should go back to him."

"He knows how important my friends are to me. He wouldn't want you to leave either."

"Don't make this any harder for me than it already is," he pleaded.

"But I don't understand why you feel you have to go!"

"It's better this way. You need to devote your time to being a good wife to your husband and the children you'll have one day."

"I haven't decided whether I want to accept his proposal yet."

"Yes, you have."
"I just don't understand. Scarecrow and the Lion are not leaving. They've promised to stay no matter what. I'm beginning to think they're better friends to me than you are!" she said angrily.

"They don't feel the same way about you that I do!" he yelled.

"W...What do you mean, Tin Man?"

"My name is Nick! Before I lost every damned body part I had, including my real heart, I had a name, and I had a real life...a life as a man! But you forget that. You've all forgotten that, and you treat me like I'm another Tik Tok, just another machine and I'm not. There's still part of the man left in me."

"Tin...Nick, what are you saying?"

They were now standing face to face. Nick reached out with his mechanical arm and touched Dorothy's cheek. "When I lost my Nimmie I never thought I'd find anyone who could ever replace her in my heart and I was so overwhelmed by my grief that I stood out in the rain all day and rusted myself to the point where I could no longer move. I wanted to die. Until...until you came and freed me. At first all I wanted to be was your friend and then when I knew the witch was after you I made it my duty to protect you. When you decided to return home, I missed the little girl who brought the sunshine back into my life with her smile. So, I kept that memory with me to brighten my days while you were gone."

She opened her mouth to speak but he shook his head.

"I thought that was all I would ever want you to be, a friend. But the little girl I knew was gone and in her place was a woman...the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen. She still had that same smile I remembered but I couldn't think of her as that little girl anymore. I began to love her the same way I loved my Nimmie."

"But...you can't we...can't..." Dorothy said sadly.

"And that is why I wish you would've just let me go!" he cried. "Do you know the agony I'm going through being this close to you knowing I can never love you the way a real man can?"

You deserve so much better than to be with someone with only half an existence. DG heard Wyatt saying to her in her mind, the words he'd spoken in anguish while he was still a shadow in her dreams.

You were just a shadow when you first came to me, Wyatt but I didn't give up on you and before she tore us apart that last time I made you human again. My love made you human again.

"I...I don't know what to say..."

"You've said enough," Nick mumbled as he pulled his hand away and turned around. "Go to Nicolai. Accept his proposal and be a good wife to him, a good mother to his children. It's the last thing I'll ever ask of you."

"Nick," Dorothy sobbed. He ignored her and started to walk away. In a few minutes he was out of sight.

The image faded, and Dorothy and DG were back in the Northern Island palace bedroom.

"I'm not repeating your mistake," DG said angrily. "Wyatt may try to hold back his emotions but I won't let him do it forever. He loves me, and I love him. Had you loved Nick enough you could've
broken his curse!"

"By the time I knew the truth it was already too late," Dorothy confessed sadly. "He was so badly rusted by the time he reached the Emerald City that there was nothing that could be done to save him."

She waved her hand again and this time they were inside another palace. Dorothy was speaking to the Scarecrow, the Wizard, the Lion and another woman whom DG remembered from her history lessons was Glinda, the sorceress of the Northern Realm. The Scarecrow held a large satin pillow and two weapons lay on it. DG recognized one of them as the pistol Wyatt carried and the other was a Katana sword.

"His final wish was that his remains be melted down into these two weapons that you must give to your most trusted protector," the Scarecrow said. "That way, a part of him would always watch over you and your descendants."

"It's more than I deserve for the pain I caused him," Dorothy said through her tears.

You did more than that, Dorothy. You killed him, DG thought. When you looked at him and told him you could never be lovers it was as if you stabbed him in the heart. You robbed him of his reason for living.

Dorothy glanced over at Glinda, hope shining in her blue eyes.

"No, my dear child. I cannot bring him back. You have pledged yourself to another man and I cannot tear asunder a union blessed by Lurline herself."

"That will not be necessary," they all heard another female voice say and turned to face a tall woman with white blond hair wearing a silver gown. They all bowed to the goddess.

"What is thy will, my mistress," Galinda asked.

"Bring the weapons," she commanded the Scarecrow. He walked over to where the goddess stood and knelted. Lurline touched them with her hand and they were now suspended in the air.

"Dorothy, remove the silver slippers, please."

Dorothy stepped out of the slippers. Lurline waved her hand and the slippers floated over to her. A red mist surrounded them, and they began to take the shape of a silver chalice. The chalice drifted down to the floor. While the pistol remained suspended in the air, the sword plummeted until the blade struck the inside of the chalice and held there.

"Despite the true loving words he said
You took another into your bed
A second chance and one only I will now give
Another life will you and he live
For the darkness longs to be free
Conquered forever must it be by the combined forces of the heart and soul of the OZ
For you the final battle will never be done
Until the blade and chalice are at last joined as one."

She glanced over at the scarecrow, lion, and the wizard, smiled and began to speak again.

"Once there were three and their charge was to defend her
Another three will come to the last of her kin, one to be her protector and lover
Armed will he be with the weapons forged from the first protector made of tin
He must lead her into the heart of darkness for the final battle to begin."

"The sword and pistol must be kept here," she instructed the wizard. "Your descendant will know to whom they will belong for he will bear this mark upon him." She formed the image of an axe's blade in the air.

"Yes, my mistress." the wizard said.

Lurline turned to Glinda. "The chalice must be kept at my temple. My high priestess will know to whom it will belong."

"It will be done, my mistress." Glinda replied.

Lurline vanished. Dorothy waved her hand and she and DG were now back at the Northern Island.

"You are already proving to be stronger of heart than I was, Dorothisa. You cannot fail this time," Dorothy said softly. "Or your fate will be the same as mine. A broken heart shall be your death…and his."

"I won't," DG vowed.

Wyatt's eyes fluttered open and he sat up, his fedora falling to the floor. He could see DG a few feet away from him still asleep. As if she sensed another person in the room, she also sat up, breathing a sigh of relief when she saw him.

"Are you okay?" she asked, indicating his injured shoulder.

"I'll live. It's not the first time someone's taken a shot at me."

She frowned. "Don't remind me. One of those bullets almost had your name on it."

"How are your sister and Archie?"

DG glanced over at the dome she’d moved into her bedroom and shook her head sadly. "No change and there’s nothing I can do! I really should get back to helping down in the infirmary."

"No, you're staying put till you get a good night's sleep," he insisted when she got out of bed.

She crossed her arms over her breasts. "You gonna make me, Tin Man?"

"If I have to."

She jumped out of bed and started toward the door. As she was about to turn the knob, he was out of his chair and picking her up, slinging her over his uninjured shoulder. She felt her body temperature rise and her breath catch in her throat as he started carrying her over to the bed. He dumped her on the mattress.

"You get up and I'll do it again," he threatened.

I would! I would do it because that had to be the sexiest thing you've done since we met but if you carry me to bed like that again sleep is going to be the last thing I have on my mind.

Not that it wasn't already, and she quickly scolded herself. They were in the middle of a war zone and she couldn't be thinking about how much she wanted him to make love to her and what it would be like when he finally did.
"You okay kiddo? Your face is beet red," he observed.

"Ummm...yeah...I guess I'm more tired than I thought." Liar. You want him and it's taking every ounce of self-control you have not to drag him onto this bed with you. After all, hasn't everyone been telling you that's what you have to do to break the curse?

I don't want to rush it...he'll think I'm a slut...I want our first time to be special and because we love each other.

What is this, the Dark Ages? You'll be a virgin the rest of your life if you wait for him to make the first move. Why put off tomorrow what you can do today?

No!

"Deege, what's wrong?" Wyatt asked worriedly. Her face was crimson, she was breathing heavily, and her body was drenched in sweat. He lightly touched her arm. "Ozma's ghost you're burning up!" he cried. He ran into the bathroom and grabbed a washcloth, soaking it with cold water. He ran back into the bedroom and pressed the cold cloth to her forehead. "Talk to me...what's wrong?"

"I...I'm okay."

You know what you want. Take it. Take him.

"Bullshit, you're as hot as a furnace!" he cried.

And you're the spark that makes her burn. Take him, Deege. It is the only way to end your agony.

It's the darkness. It can take any form it wants to Wyatt. It is feeding from her negative emotions. If it becomes too strong the seal on its prison will open again.

"Deege, I need you to listen to me," Wyatt said gently. "Put whatever bad thoughts you have out of your mind and only think of something good. Can you do that for me?"

"L...Like what?" she moaned.

Her element is water. Make her focus on a memory having to do with water.

"Remember when you found that heart shaped stone and skipped it across the dirt in Finaqua?"

"Yeah."

"It made the lake come back, didn't it? You used to love skipping stones across that crystal blue lake with your sister, didn't you?"

"Uh-huh." Her voice sounded childlike now.

"Imagine you're swimming in the lake now and it's not so hot anymore...good girl," he said softly as he pressed his hand to her forehead. It felt cooler to the touch and her breathing started to return to normal. A few minutes later she was asleep again. As he gazed down at her, he began to see images of himself as a younger man being trained to use defensive magic by the Mystic Man.

"You mean we're not safe when we're asleep either?" Wyatt asked.

"Not always. There are some forces that can use dreams to launch attacks and we even have to be prepared for them during sleep. If you think you will be susceptible to an attack in dreams its best to have another sorcerer you absolutely trust perform a dream protection spell on you."
Wyatt took DG's hand in his, concentrated and began to chant.

"With all the powers of the light I cast this spell
In her dreams, guard her well."

He staggered over to the sofa and collapsed on it, falling into an exhausted sleep himself.

When DG awoke again she could see Wyatt asleep on the sofa and as she remembered what happened earlier, she was mortified.

I was acting like a slut and scared the shit out of him but...he used some kind of magic on me! Oh darling, does this mean your memories are coming back?

She walked over to the sofa and kneeled beside him, taking his right hand and turning it over so that she could look at her palm. To her dismay the skin was still unmarked, the House of Gale symbol no longer visible yet she felt light radiating from him...his tutor's light.

Oh, thank you Mystic Man. At least now when the darkness tries to come for us, he won't feel so defenseless. He felt so guilty that he wasn't strong enough the first time we fought it but now...now with your light guiding him that bitch will run screaming from him in terror.

You'll run screaming from both of us, bitch. Love is the strongest magic of all and ours will not only lock in your prison so you can never get out, I'd like to blast your evil ass into oblivion.

She heard him stir and his eyes opened.

Those eyes...I could drown in them...

"You okay?" he asked sleepily.

"Thanks to you. That protection spell you did was pretty powerful."

"I never did like magic but if I can use it to keep you safe, I'll do it." he said. "I just wasn't that good at controlling it or fire."

"You can control fire?" she asked, trying her best to appear surprised. Hopefully he won't be able to sense I already know. Like it or not, I have to let him come to me of his own free will so that I can restore our bond with a pure and honest heart.

"You've probably figured out by now I wasn't just a Tin Man."

"Yeah. How do you know martial arts?"

"It, sword fighting, and magic were the skills I was taught so that I could succeed the Mystic Man as the Talon of the Dragon Grand Master. They were the original protectors of the OZ and once the Ozopov took power, they made a vow to protect the royal heirs themselves. I didn't know that was the purpose the Mystic Man had in mind for me when I joined his protection detail. As you've probably already guessed Ambrose is one of them and so are Az and Archie. My son is the other one. We are the last of the order."

"Was your wife one too?"

"I promoted her to the rank of master the night before Zero came for me. Knowing what I can do, don't you find it strange that he was able to capture me so easily?"

"Yeah. But I also have a sneaking suspicion that time loop would have showed you trying to kick
his ass before I shut it off," she said with a smile. "I know even that asshole couldn't have taken you down easily. He still can't. He can't escape from the tin suit you put him in, can he?"

"Oddly enough, I sealed it with magic. Only another person with magic can open it. It's the same type of seal the bitch put on my suit. I should've realized you were the lost princess then. I was half dead when you found me but when you knocked on that suit I felt some kind of energy burst that woke me up and made me determined to get the hell out of there."

It wasn't an ordinary energy burst Wyatt. It was my light, the light of my love. My brain didn't remember you, but my heart always has and that's where my light comes from...my heart. And you still had a little bit of yours left that it called me back here to release you because you complete me as I complete you.

"You were pretty scary when you first came out, but you had damned good reasons to be scary and pissed off."

"My temper is even worse when I call on the dragon."

"Uhh...does that mean what I think it does?" Oh, I do hate having to act so ignorant about all this! Dammit, if I didn't think it would be harmful to our bond I would just tell him the truth, but he has to come to me by choice, not force.

He chuckled. "No Deege, I don't actually turn into a dragon. I do, however have a dragon's strength and its senses are much stronger than those of a regular human. If my eyes are red, you might want to keep a safe distance."

"Your eyes got red when we ran into those bikers and then you unleashed hell on them. Had you been using a sword you probably would have cut them to pieces."

"No. The Mystic Man was teaching me how to control my rage and Adora did before that. Deege, had you met me years ago, you would've wanted to get as far away from me as you can get."

"You were an abused child and that's where the rage comes from," DG said softly. "You wanted to hurt everyone that hurt you."

"How...how did you know?" he whispered.

"The way you try to avoid being touched...the way you try to stop people from getting close. It was how I was before I came here. Not because of Hank and Emily. They loved me as much as any parents could but...something happened to me two years ago."

Tell him. You can tell him part of it and maybe it will unlock something in his memory.

"What?" She could hear the anger rising in his voice and hesitated, fearing it could do more harm than good but the desire to keep a close connection to him made her push her fears aside.

"We have something on the other side called Prom Night. it's a night where kids from school get together. It's probably like a ball here. My date, or escort as you would call him was a boy named Mike. I liked him so when he asked me to the Prom I was happy about it. We had a good time there until we left and went to a place called Porter's Glen..."

She saw his eyes narrow to slits and realized it was the exact same look he had on his face when she told him what happened the first time.

"Who touched you?"
"Some boy I went to the prom with. Calm down, dragon man. I held him off."

"The dragon's spirit is stronger in you now. You can call on it when you need it or use my strength, but I warn you, I won't be as lenient with your enemies as you are."

"He raped you!" Wyatt growled, his blue eyes now fire red. "Take me back to the Other Side. I'll kill him, but I won't just kill him. I'll tear his worthless hide into so many small pieces his own mama won't know where to find 'em!"

DG's eyes were wide with horror. She'd seen Wyatt lose his temper a few times but it was mild compared to this. The blood red eyes were disturbing enough but his voice was changing too, sounding almost demonic.

"I'll flay him alive and make a bonfire with his innards then pick my teeth with his bones or I'll feast on his entrails..."

I have to calm him down, she thought. "Wyatt, listen to me. He didn't actually rape me. I stopped him. C'mon, you've got to snap out of it. You're scaring me!" He raised his hands and she gasped when she saw his fingernails turning black and growing outward so that they were shaped like talons and his skin was turning blue. A blue mist surrounded him, concealing him from her view but inside it she could hear what sounded like an animal snarling. She heard a crash behind her and turned to face Wyatt, now a large blue scaled dragon trying to maneuver his way around the bedroom that was getting smaller with every inch he grew.

"Oh my God," she screamed. "You...you really are a dragon! Az! Jeb! Somebody! Anybody! Help me!" She ran to the door and started pounding on it, her fear paralyzing her ability to wield her magic.

"Oh shit, oh shit...oh shit! What the hell did I do? I didn't mean to piss him off that much and now he's gonna wreck the place or worse...mistake me for his next snack! Someone, get me out of here!"
"Az! Jeb! Somebody, anybody! Help me!"

Archie and Az were awake in an instant and a puff of green smoke surrounded them, teleporting them out of their prison dome and into the hall outside Az’s bedroom where Jeb, Lavinia, Ambrose and Ahamo were already trying to get in.

"Az! Oh thank the stars! Please, help your sister!"

"What the hell is going on?" Archie demanded. They were now fully recovered and he suspected his sister-in-law had something to do with it.

DG reached out to open the door, but Wyatt's tail was blocking it.

"It's Wyatt...oh my God Az, Archie he's turned into a dragon right in front of me!"

"Ha ha...good one Deege," she heard Ambrose say.

"Do I sound like I'm joking!" she yelled.

Wyatt snarled behind her and used his tail to push her out of the way, shooting a blast of fire out of his mouth at the door that incinerated it.

"What the hell was that!" she heard Ambrose yell and glanced out into the hallway and saw him, Jeb, Archie and Az lying on the floor.

"I don't think she's kidding," Az said and screamed when she looked up. "She's not kidding! There...there's a dragon in there with her but...it can't be Wyatt."

“Oh, yes it is...and I’m responsible for it,” Archie mumbled.

They got to their feet and ran into the room. Wyatt was curled up on the broken pieces of Az’s bed, his snout resting on his front claws. DG was sitting beside him stroking his back gently. The only familiar part of him she saw were his blue eyes only now they were enormous.

"I'm so sorry," she sobbed. "It's my fault."

"Dad...how did you turn into a dragon?" Jeb asked.

I don't know, they all heard him answer in their heads. Find the pooch. See if he knows how I can change back because I have no idea and I can barely move in here! Not to mention that I'm only half the size of a normal dragon and I'm still growing!

"It's my fault. I got you so mad and..."

It's okay kiddo. I just never expected to actually turn into a dragon. No one in the order ever has as far as I know. Where the hell is that pooch? It's getting cramped in here and I don't want to crush
anybody.

Toto entered the room. "Amazing!" he cried. "There hasn't been a dragon shapeshifter since the time of Dorothy and Nicolai."

I'm not finding it amazing, dog man. How the hell am I supposed to change back?

"What happened just before you turned?" Toto inquired.

"I told him about something that happened to me on the other side and it made him so mad he turned into...into this!" DG cried.

What the hell is going on here?

"We're getting to that, Wyatt," Az said gently.

Well you'd better talk fast because if I stay in here much longer while I'm still growing I'll end up crushing all of you and probably the tower along with it.

"We'll go outside. Can you get out through the balcony?"

Not without busting it up. My neck and head will get through but not the rest of me. I'm sorry.

"I'd rather have the balcony destroyed than for you to be uncomfortable. We'll meet you downstairs. Degee?" Az glanced back at her sister. She wasn't moving only watching as Wyatt broke the balcony and hovered above the bedroom window with his wings flapping when he noticed she was still in the room. She was grinning.

Don't even think about it kiddo!

"It would be just like riding a horse," she said playfully. "Come on."

I won't risk your safety. Walk down with your sister. DG! Dammit, what did I just say? Get off me! Get off me right now!

DG hopped onto his back and wrapped her arms around his long neck, as much of it as she could reach anyway and held on tight. "Let's go for a moonlight flight, dragon man," she murmured.

You, crazy stupid girl! If you slip I might not be able to catch you!

"DG, this is no time to be playing around!" Az scolded.

"I'll be fine Az," she said as she patted Wyatt's neck.

Az rolled her eyes and shook her head before she left her room.

“Oh, and where does she get that stubbornness from I wonder?" Archie teased.

“Not me!"

Well I'm not. I'm not fine with any of this.

"I'm not getting off, so you may as well fly, dragon man."

I swear your purpose in life is to drive me crazy and you can forget about me taking you anywhere other than back on the ground, so we can find out what the hell's going on here.
"Fine...but you will take me on a moonlight flight."

He snorted. Although he was scared to death that she'd slip and fall, he kept his balance enough so that they landed on the ground safely. DG climbed off Wyatt's back and sat down beside him. The others were sitting on rocks. Lavinia and Tyler now joined the group, both terrified by Wyatt's change in appearance.

Okay, talk! How the hell did I get like this?

“I’m afraid I’m responsible for it. I and the Mystic Man,” Archie spoke up.

“What?” Lavinia demanded.

“Almost a century ago, before I became Jiminy Cricket, Rumple had me steal two vials of dragon’s blood from one of the dukes in our land. Blue for male, red for female. He didn’t tell me what he wanted with them, just that he needed it. Years later, before Bastinda killed DG, the Mystic Man traded a seeing globe with him for the dragon’s blood. He injected Wyatt and DG with it before she was sent to the other side with Elmer.”

“Wait…so I’m part dragon too?” DG gasped.

“Yes. But more specifically, you are his mate,” Az answered.

What? I'm her bondmate? But that's...that's...impossible!

"No, it isn't Wyatt. You were bound to each other just before DG left for the other side. Once that happened it unlocked your magic and the Mystic Man was tutoring you so that you would be able to use it to protect DG until she grew into womanhood and could complete your bond. And since you're now the Talon of the Dragon Grand Master you inherited the Mystic Man's magic too."

Ozma's ghost, this isn't happening. Wyatt raised his snout and looked up at DG. She didn't seem bothered by it at all and that disturbed him. Didn't she realize what a bond like theirs meant? What was involved in it?

So, if we were bound before, why don't I remember it?

"You severed your bond the night Bastinda attacked DG. You were there with DG trying to fight her off, but your powers weren't strong enough. Since your life forces were bound the Mystic Man told you the only way you would live was if you broke it."

Wyatt suddenly saw himself back in his old room at the Mystic Man's mansion. The older man was talking to him, begging him to live for Jeb and Adora and he heard himself chanting a spell.

With a severed heart comes a severed memory...I was punished by losing my magic, my memories and my family for defying the will of the OZ.

"I'm still here, Dad," Jeb said.

You and your mother suffered because of me.

"No, it was because of me," DG croaked. "I'm the one who gave Bastinda the power to escape her prison. All of this is my fault. You gave up everything you had to try to save my life. All of you did. I wasn't worth it! You should've just let me die!"

Wyatt slammed his claw down on the ground with such force that it nearly knocked the others off
their rock seats.

Dammit, I am sick and tired of listening to you wallowing in self-pity. When the hell are you gonna grow up?

"Don't you talk like that to me! Wait...I forgot, you can't talk."

He raised his head, glowered at her and let out a loud roar that made her back away in terror.

I may not be able to talk out loud, but you can still hear me in that thick head of yours, so I suggest you listen. You may not think you're worth anything but we all do, or we never would've made the sacrifices we did. But I have to tell you little girl, when you act like this you sure make it easy for us to regret it. You're a woman now for Ozma's sake so act like one!

"And that my angel, is why he was chosen to be your bondmate," Lavinia informed her daughter. "Balance must be kept between youth and innocence and age and experience."

"That's why I'm the older one and Dellia is the younger one in our bond," Archie said.

"Is everything coming back now, Cain?" Ambrose asked him.

The more I hear, the more I remember. Most of it the Mystic Man told me, the rest I heard from Adora since she was Alana Kantrine's granddaughter. I guess she was trying in her own way to tell me what I really was, but she was probably bound to the same oath of silence you are all taking a huge risk to break.

"Most of my memories came back the day Bastinda locked me in the Gale Crypt. I'm sorry I didn't tell you Wyatt. I thought...I had to make your memories come back another way but...it wouldn't have worked anyway," DG confessed sadly.

And we lapse into self-pity again. Were you even listening to me at all?

"It's not self-pity this time. It's the truth."

Then forget about it. We have bigger issues to deal with right now. If Almedea gets to you, me or both of us she has a way to breach Lurline's fortress and kill her. Believe me, the reign of terror Bastinda waged in your sister's body would be nothing compared to the terror the Dark One will unleash. It took Dorothy, Nicolai, Alexander and Glinda six months to draw enough of her powers out of her that they could lock her back in Ephesis.

"So, turning Wyatt into a dragon was one of her attacks?" DG asked Az.

"Possibly. You experienced one of your own just before that. She feeds on negative emotions Dege and she'll want ours as much as an addict wants the vapors, so we have to be very careful. Since Rumplestiltskin, her current vessel, is restoring the missing pieces of his heart, her control on him is weakening and Archie and I suspected years ago you and Wyatt are the intended vessels for the other two daggers."

"You mean she gets off on them? That's disgusting!" DG cried.

What does that mean?

"Ummm..." she blushed. "Getting excited, only in a perverted way but please don't make me go into detail."
No, you don't need to elaborate. What was going on when you were attacked? I know you were burning up but what were you thinking that caused it?

"You don't want to know."

Maybe if you talked about it...

"Trust me you don't want to know."

It had something to do with us, didn't it?

"I really think we should have this talk in private..."

There really isn't much that it is private anymore. You know what kind of bond ours is now and so does everyone else here.

But your wife...you've barely had time to grieve for her.

I've been grieving for her for eight years, Dottie. Seeing her grave...just made it more real for me that she's gone. And Jeb told me something I didn't give much thought to till now. She already knew there would be someone there for me when I was ready to move on.

D..Did you just call me Dottie?

He felt her teardrops falling on his claws. As he looked at her again, he saw them together in his mind only she looked two years younger. They were living in his cottage in Elba like a married couple only he was a shadow.

You said no one was allowed to call you that but me, my dragonswan. Dragonswan...you got that out of some book you read, right?

"Oh, Wyatt!" she cried and embraced his neck.

The others watched with smiles on their faces. "I think we should leave them alone for a few minutes," Lavinia suggested softly. They stood up and concealed themselves behind the south wall of the tower.

"Mother, do you think her kiss will break the enchantment?" Az asked hopefully.

"If she loves him enough to kiss him in his present form, yes. I don't think this was Alemedia's doing. It was his, or should I say Nick's. They heard thunder overhead and it began to rain. "Now I know it is. My angel, please don't fail this time. Look beyond the dragon and remember the man within..."

"You remember everything now," DG whispered.

A lot of good it does me. Look at me. What if I can't change back? What kind of a life would we have? It would be as lonely as it was two years ago. As it was when I was him.

"It wasn't so lonely for me, Wyatt. In my heart I felt like we were already married. We weren't able to touch until the day Bastinda came for you, but we made our feelings for each other quite clear without needing to. We were doing it right in this life."

But...this is worse than being a shadow...or a rust covered wreck. I still can't love you the way I want to! You're better off without me.
"So, you're just going to give up and hide in corners? Where is my brave Tin Man?"

Obviously, he's not here anymore. I'm a monster. People see me, and they run away screaming and I destroy everything I touch. Look at the tower.

"Oh, damn that tower. It needs torn down anyway!"

He raised himself up and started to walk away, the ground shaking beneath him, his tail swatting at everything inanimate in its path as he vented his anger out on them.

"You're not leaving me again!" DG hissed and felt her magic flare up; changing her clothes to the same white negligee Dorothy wore. She raced after him, mud splattering onto the skirt of her gown. "Wyatt Cain, don't you dare run away from me!" she screamed over the thunder. "I promised you we would be together again, and we will!"

He stopped and turned his head. Dottie, what are you doing?

"You think there's no hope for you, for us? Well I have news for you, I don't. You told me you want me to act like a woman. Well I am and right now the only thing this woman wants is you! You think you can't change back. I think you can."

Got a dragon enchantment removal spell, do you?

He lowered his head so that he could look directly into her eyes.

"The best one," she whispered. "And even if it doesn't work I love you and I'll still love you no matter what you are." She placed her small hands on both sides of his snout and lowered her head so that her lips were just above the tip of his nose. She pressed her lips to it and kissed it softly. A beam of bright white light surrounded them, knocking her on her backside. She looked up with tears in her eyes as she saw the dragon vanish and in its place stood the old Wyatt Cain, complete with his grey fedora hat and duster. He gazed down at her, a sorrowful expression on his handsome face.

"It was against my will that I have spoken
The words that made our bond broken
A chance I took that one day you would return
And your forgiveness I must now earn."

She rose to her feet, took his face in her hands and gazed deeply into his blue eyes.

"You, the other half of my heart I at last reclaim
And through my love I release you from your pain
With my kiss I now restore
The bond of light between us forever more."

She gently moved one of her hands down his chest and pressed it against his heart as she kissed him on the lips. Her palm began to glow as her magic shattered the final locks on his memories and his magic and restored them.

"Dottie," he murmured as he wrapped his arms around her and held her against him. "You've freed me at last."

"I told you I would," she said through her tears.

"I love you."
"And I love you," she whispered as he kissed her. "I've waited so long for this…"

The sensations she'd experienced from the kisses they'd shared in her dreams was nothing compared to the ones she was feeling now. Her body was a blazing inferno that no amount of water could ever put out, her limbs so weak she could barely stand on them. She pressed her body closer to his as he deepened the kiss.

"I think we better tell them the rest of what's going on before they start doing things they'll need to get a room for," Ambrose said. Several pairs of eyes turned in his direction, all of them angry. "What?"

"I'd like to give them a little more time alone before we throw more bad news on them," Az said angrily.

"Ummm…Az…I think maybe he's right," Jeb said. "My dad has that look on his face."

"What look?"

"The 'we're going to bed and not coming out for the rest of the day' look."

"How do you know that's what it means? You were just a child the last time you saw them together."

"Because every time he had the look on his face he and my mom went in the bedroom and didn't come out till later. I always thought it meant they were tired but as I got older I heard from the other fighters what it really meant."

“And how often have we given each other those looks, darling?” Archie murmured.

Now it was Az's turn to blush. "They can't consummate their bond now." She took a deep breath. "Be prepared because we may just make Wyatt mad enough to turn into a dragon again and roast us alive for interrupting them."

DG didn't want to think about anything else except that after years of waiting and hoping she was finally in the arms of the man she loved but when she saw their friends and family trying without success to hide behind the south wall of the tower she growled in frustration.

"I really hate voyeurs," she mumbled.

"What?" Wyatt asked as he broke their kiss.

She nodded in the direction of the south wall. "People who have nothing better to do than spy on a couple's private time!" she said loud enough for them to hear. "If we wanted to...we could give them something worth looking at," she added seductively.

"Behave!" he scolded with a smile.

"I will...for now but I promise you Tin Man when we're alone I am not going to make much of an effort to keep that promise. We have a lot of lost time to make up."

Although he loved her it didn't feel right to him to rush that part of the relationship. He didn't with Adora either. They both agreed it was better to wait until they were married, and he wanted to at least try to wait with DG, but he suspected she would put up more of a fuss about it due to being raised on the Other Side. From what he heard, a lot of women on the Other Side refused to wait until they were married and had children when they were barely out of childhood themselves.
Thankfully his son hadn't chomped at the bits when he asked him to wait to have children with Xenia before they were married. He could only hope the boy had enough sense not to bed her before then either.

"Dottie, I really think we should wait a bit for that," he said and braced himself for the verbal assault that would likely follow. "I know it sounds old fashioned, but..."

She pressed her fingertips to his lips to silence him. "No, it just means that you love and respect me enough to want to do this right," she said softly. "And we have a curse to break."

"That damned curse," he muttered. "It's going to bring out the worst in us until we break it," he reminded her. "We'll get in fights, say and do things we don't mean..."

"Name one couple who hasn't gone through life without having fights. I know you and Adora had to have your battles."

"One of them was so bad she left me and went to Lurline's temple where Ambrose and Xenia's parents threatened me with bodily harm if I hurt her again."

"Our Glitch's parents? Bloodthirsty people? I find that hard to believe."

"His mother is the worst of the two and from what Jeb tells me so is Xenia. I am not looking forward to facing those two when Jeb and Xenia ask for their blessing to get married."

"I'm terrified of when any daughter of ours brings a man home! You'd use the poor boy for target practice. That is...if you want to have more children or would just prefer being a grandparent."

"I'd love to have a little girl who looks just like you," he said softly.

"And I want a little boy who looks like his father." She smirked. "That settles it. We have to have at least two."

"We have to get married first."

"Don't you think you should ask me?" she teased.

"I don't have a ring...yet."

"I don't need one," DG insisted.

"I want you to have one." He closed his eyes and held up his right palm, moving his left one over it. A small beam of light formed between his hands and when he opened them a gold band rested between them. There was a miniature image of their dragon tattoo on the top of the ring that was usually reserved for the stone. He held the ring out to her and gazed deeply into her eyes as he spoke.

"For what seems like an eternity we have been made to wait. I stand before you now to ask you, will you be my lifemate?"

"Yes!" she cried and threw her arms around him, kissing him again as he slid the ring onto her finger.

"I love you, Dottie."

"You know I love you, Tin Man."
"You may not say that when I start training you."

"Training me?" Her eyes lit up. "You mean you're going to train me to be a Talon again?"

"You haven't used your abilities in a few centuries, so you need a refresher course. I'm not going to be easy on you either."

"When are you?" she retorted with a smirk.

"As soon as I give Glitch and Jeb their tests it'll be your turn. You'll need a new sword though."

"I never felt safer than I did when I carried yours...and your pistol." She looked up at him. "It saved my life when Nicolai tried to kill me for wanting to be with you instead of him..."

"I know."

"I should never have let Alexander take the blame, but he insisted. This is so weird Wyatt, having both sets of memories."

"It's part of the curse too, don't forget that," he reminded her.

"I won't. When should I expect the drill sergeant to show up?"

"I told Glitch and Jeb I need a week to get ready for their trials. That should give us enough time to get you a sword and your training clothes ready."

"I already have an idea of where we can find some of the materials for my sword."

"Where?"

"I want to melt down that damned tin suit she had you in. Yours was made from your tin suit in your first life. It seems fitting that mine should be made from the tin suit you were kept in in this life."

"We have to get your chalice back from Xenia too. Jeb, do you have still have Dottie's chalice with you?" he called out.

"It's in Xenia's bag. I'll get it." his son said as he hurried off.

"Az, can you tell him to meet us in the training room? You and Archie come too, and I need you to bring the emerald."

"All right," she said softly.

"Wyatt, what are you doing?"

"Starting some of your training," he explained as he led her back into the tower.

Although she would have preferred to be doing other things with him, he left no room for argument and she'd been eager to learn how to fight like he did from the moment she first saw him do it. It would give her the chance to relearn the skills The Mystic Man's ancestor taught her centuries earlier. She was a strong woman in this life but not strong enough yet. That would come with time and practice.

Jeb, Archie and Az were waiting for them in the training room. Az was wearing the emerald around her neck while Jeb a duplicate of his staff in his hands. DG's chalice was on the floor in
"Why are you standing like that?" DG asked them.

"Because it’s how we're supposed to stand," Az explained as she used her magic to draw a makeshift compass on the floor. "I'm the North Gate so I always stand in the northern position. My element is Earth and my symbol is the emerald."

"I'm the temporary East Gate so I always stand over here. My element is air and my symbol is the staff. Since I'm also the dragon's son, my staff has a dragon on it," Jeb said. "I'll lose my powers once the real East Gate, Henry Strogoff, begins his training."

"You're the South Gate so you'll always stand here, Dottie," Wyatt said as he moved her to her correct position. "Your element is water and your symbol is your chalice. That's why sometimes when you use your magic you always have an image of water in your mind." He moved over to his spot. "I'm the West Gate. My element is fire as you already know, and my sword is my symbol." He took it out and it flew out of his hand, locking inside the chalice.

"Oh, that's not sexual in nature at all," DG giggled. "Why do they do that?"

"We honestly don't know," Az answered. "Do you remember that chant we did out on the balcony?"

"Yeah."

"It's the spell we use to protect each other when one or all of us are under attack from a strong magic user," Wyatt explained. "Had the Mystic Man not passed his powers onto to me when he died your shield against Bastinda wouldn't have held as long as it did when she was attacking you. You needed Jeb and me to complete it."

"And your sword and my chalice have to be like that for it to work?"

"Yes."

"I kinda like that idea."

"Get your mind out of the gutter and pay attention," he scolded as they all joined hands. "Az, start the chant," he instructed.

"Emerald of the North Gate, hear your mistress's call. Form around us the protective wall."

"Dottie, it's your turn."

"Chalice of the South Gate, hear your mistress's call. Form around us the protective wall."

"Jeb?"

"Staff of the East Gate, hear your master's call. Form around us the protective wall."

"Blade of the West Gate, hear your master's call. Form around us the protective wall."

DG watched fascinated as a dome shield formed over them and each of their symbols began to
"We don't always have to be standing in the circle together for this to work, Deege," Az said. "Because of the bond we all share, we can send distress calls to each other across time and distance. "As soon as you and I started chanting up on the balcony it sent a distress call to Jeb and Wyatt that we needed them, and they answered it. Although Wyatt didn't have his sword on him and you didn't have your chalice, Jeb did, and he put them together. All Wyatt had to do was complete the spell."

"I still don't know how I figured out how to open my gate."

"You have Dorothy's memories. She always knew how to do it. Hearing me open mine triggered that memory."

"That other chant we did, it's to lock the Dark One up, isn't it?"

"Yes, but it will take all four of us to weaken her enough that she can't get out of Ephesis again and that can't happen until our bond is consummated," Wyatt spoke up.

“All eight. Rumple, Henry and Regina complete our circle, Wyatt,” Archie corrected. “If they fail, you have to take Rumple’s place and Jeb will take Henry’s with Xenia as his heart."

"We have to go to the Northern Island to do that," DG murmured. "I hate that place."

"It's the curse's point of origin. We don't have any other choice, Dottie."

"Still, having to make love in the same bed where I died is kinda...creepy."

They released each other’s hands and the shield vanished. Wyatt returned his sword to its scabbard and DG kneeled down to pick up the chalice. It shrunk down to the size of a pendant. She fastened it around her neck.

"I didn't know it could do that," Jeb spoke up.

"You wouldn't. It only does that for me so that I can always carry it with me," DG explained as Dorothy's memories still continued to come back to her. "I kept it, Wyatt's sword and pistol with me until I died as Dorothy. Then I gave my chalice to Glinda and the weapons to the Mystic Man's ancestor, so he could hide them."

"But...but if you had Wyatt's pistol how...?" Az asked.

"I was the one who killed Nicolai Az, not Alexander. I didn't want him to take the blame, but he insisted. He was afraid the people would lose faith in me if they found out I killed my husband no matter what he did to me. She gasped. "Wait a minute...oh God." She glanced over at Wyatt. "I never understood why Zero hated you so much. Now I know why. He made a pact with Alemedia. She brought him back so that he could have his revenge against Wyatt."

“Wait a minute! Zero, that son of a bitch is Nicolai!?” Archie exclaimed.

"Please tell me he doesn't have his magic," DG moaned.

"No. Lurline took it from him but that doesn't make him any less dangerous," Wyatt reminded her. "We don't know what Alemedia gave him."

"Nothing you and Deege said makes any sense to me...why?" Jeb asked his father.
"Because Dottie and I have two sets of memories...ours in this life and our previous lives. When we were born, your mother merged the hearts and souls from our bodies when we died as Nick and Dorothy into these ones."

"You mean you have two hearts?"

"Not the physical body part, no, but the essence of two of them like they have two souls," Az explained. "So do Glitch and Raw because they’ve all be reborn to complete the task they failed the first time. The first time Dorothy and Nick were the West and South gates while Alexander and Glinda were the North and East. Dorothy was the only one of them who consummated a bond with the wrong man and after they imprisoned Alemedia."

"Yeah, well if I could go back, I would have told him to take a hike and took my Tin Man to bed. And I’d really like to do that now."

"Dottie, you could try the patience of a saint," Wyatt said with a sigh. "It's not the right time."

She'll be ready soon enough, Wyatt, he heard Az say to him in his mind.

You sure I'm still capable of...?

I gained enough control to make certain she never tortured you to the point where you could never father a child. As soon as your bond is consummated, and your child is in her womb, your light will be at its full strength.

"I know but that doesn't stop me from wanting you..."

"Be careful Deege. You remember what happened to Nicolai..."

"How can I forget when I dealt with it every night?" DG grumbled. "My only consolation was seeing you even though you were a shadow." she said to Wyatt. “Nicolai was an obsessed bastard who tried to rape Wyatt out of my mind and heart, but he never could.”

“We need to do something about him before he gets loose,” Jeb reminded his father.

“We need to find the other two Dark One daggers and destroy them. Bastinda was looking for them along with the emerald since Alemedia told her she hid them here,” Archie spoke up. “Alemedia can control more than one vessel at the same time and now that Rumple wants rid of her and she can’t take me or Dellia, you and DG are the ones she wants. And the Final Eclipse is coming.”

Everyone in the room shuddered.

“I see you all have heard it.”

“Who hasn’t!” DG exclaimed. “Aramon’s prophecy, the destruction of this world! Wyatt, that settles it. We have to move up our timetable. The final eclipse is in fourteen days! I know you didn’t want to rush but there is more at stake now. What of Rumple and his bondmate?”

“Their bond isn’t consummated either,” Archie confessed.

“Then DG and I will go to the Northern Island and search for those daggers.” Wyatt said.

“And we will go back to Storybrooke,” Archie said.

“Az, no! I just got you back!” DG cried.
“We can’t stay here DG. People still think I’m the Sorceress and will kill me and Archie on sight. And I can’t lose my baby again!”

“You’re pregnant?” DG hugged her sister.

“So, it was true,” Wyatt whispered. “You and Archie did have a child all those years ago that was murdered. I heard rumors of it before I was captured.”

“And her murderer is locked in a tin suit!” Archie snarled. “But Ozmalita was kind and returned Ambrosia’s soul to us. She’ll be reborn. I want her born somewhere safe and Storybrooke is safer than the OZ right now. The Sons and Daughters of Shadowlands will be after us again once word gets out that Dellia’s pregnant, so it will be best if we leave before anyone finds out we’re still alive.”

“You want everyone to think you died that night.”

“It’s better this way, Deege,” Az said softly. “We can only return when it’s time to return Alemedia to her prison but never forget that I love you.”

DG nodded through her tears.

“You’re in good hands now. Take care of her Wyatt or I can become the Sorceress,” Az threatened.

Wyatt put his arm around DG’s shoulders. “She’ll be safe with me.”

The couple then said their goodbyes to Az’s parents, Archie noticing that her mother wasn’t as upset that she was leaving as Ahamo was. He snorted in disgust. Once again, his precious wife would become the invisible to everyone else but him and hopefully her sister. He summoned a travel storm token and tossed, holding Az’s hand tightly.

“I love you Deege!” Az called out over the rising winds. “Remember. Nothing can hurt us if we’re together! I’ll see you in our dreams, little sister.”

“Find the daggers and destroy them Wyatt and guard her with your life!” Archie ordered before they stepped into the funnel cloud and vanished.

“Dottie…”

DG spun around and buried her face in his shoulder, sobbing quietly, his arms the only place she wanted to be now that her beloved sister was gone.

Oz (The Outer Zone)

Later that night

Zero was uncertain how much time had passed since he’d been locked away in a tin suit that had once been the prison of his nemesis, Wyatt Cain. The elder Cain had provoked his son’s wrath by releasing him from his bonds when Jeb wanted to run him through but Zero never expected Cain to lock him a suit and seal it with magic.

He was even in for a greater shock when his hated rival appeared in the woods, flicked his wrist and the suit opened. Zero sneered at him.

“Feeling a bit guilty Cain.”

The other man glared at him under the brim of his hat. He gestured and Zero floated over to him.
Wyatt reached into his chest and pulled out his heart, squeezing tightly.

“We asked you to do one thing. Just one. Kill the South Guardian and her bondmate…and you
couldn’t even do that!”

“Sorceress!” Zero cried happily.

“Not quite. On your knees servant!”

“M…Mistress?” he asked as he kneeled in submission.

“Well since I’m occupying this body Mistress is a bit inappropriate don’t you think?” Alemedia
demanded. “Just call me Master…or Dark One.”

“How…but I thought you were using Rumpelstiltskin as your vessel.”

“Rumplestiltskin will soon neutralize my first blade. But,” Alemedia held up Wyatt’s sword in
triumph, waving her hand over the blade to reveal his name engraved in the steel. “as a Son of
Shadowlands you should know the legend of the three blades. This is the second.” She waved her
hand and a dagger similar to Rumple’s appeared. “And this is the third, but it’s not meant for you.”

“Please! Let me take it….I’m worthy!”

She squeezed the heart tighter. “Unless you want to live long enough to see me crush this into dust
you’ll keep that mouth of yours shut! I’ve already chosen my second vessel but you might still be
useful.” She reached into the pocket of Wyatt’s duster and took out the travel storm token she’d
stolen from Ambrose’s vault. “You’re going on a trip to the other side. Kill the other Guardians
and their bondmates. The North Guardian is with child again and that child must NOT survive
outside the womb. Fail me again and I will send you down to the worst realm in Ephesis for my
pets’ amusement!”

“I won’t fail you Master. Who is the other vessel?”

“Dorothia of course. Now that she’s revealed her guilt in releasing Bastinda, the council no longer
trusts her or anyone in the royal family. And your mother is already at work spreading the fear of
magic throughout the land. Soon they will be calling for the destruction of it.” She smiled. “And
the prophecy they fear so much will finally come to pass for all but those who are most loyal to
me.”

“Yes, Master. I will not fail this time.”

“See that you don’t!” she hissed and teleported to the iron works where Wyatt Cain’s old prison
was being melted down. She smiled and tossed the blade into the hot steel watching under a
cloaking spell while it was being poured into the mold that would become Dorothia’s sword.
Moments later her name appeared on the blade. Alemedia waved her hand over it and the name
was replaced by the symbol of the chalice.

Divide…and conquer.
The Enchanted Forest
Thirteen days prior to the Final Eclipse

Cora, the former Queen of Hearts, was not a patient woman nor was she one to cross but her companion seemed to have forgotten that. The original plan was that he would climb the beanstalk, take the compass from the giant and bring it to her. A simple task really, but the fool never made anything simple and now he’d been stupid enough to let himself get caught. Once again it was up to her to fix the mess he’d made. It was the Outer Zone all over again and she’d barely escaped with her life the last time and now word reached her that Commander Ozopov was alive and well and there was no doubt in her mind he would be searching for them. It was time to leave that wretched realm behind and go find her daughter. Her mission to find the remaining two Dark One daggers had failed. Now she had to get her hands on the only one she had a chance of taking.

Oz (The Outer Zone)
Years earlier

“I do hope you enjoy your accommodations,” Commander Jiminy Ozopov taunted when he appeared inside the prison dome he’d confined her in. “Now, I believe I asked you a question and I’d like an answer: Where Is Killian Jones?”

“I don’t know! I…ahhhh!” she screamed when he blasted her. She crumpled to the ground.

“I have two guards with their hearts ripped out that are evidence enough that you are the one who helped him to escape. Why were you here? What are you after? Very well.” He gestured and teleported them out of the prison. “Bring her to our quarters and summon Lylo!” he snapped at General Lannot while Az stood by, nodding. They had their suspicions but only a reading with Lylo would confirm them. Cora was dragged into the Sorceress’s throne room and confined to a chair laced with squid ink while Lylo placed his hand on her forehead, projecting an image onto the mirror above the fireplace.

“Heartless Queen seeks missing blades. Seeks power…seeks to become immortal.”

“So, you know the legend of the three blades. I’m impressed. Very few do.”

“Once I get one of those daggers you’ll all be on your knees before me,” Cora sneered.

“I wouldn’t count on it,” Az retorted, enjoying seeing the former queen believe Bastinda was in control of her at that moment. “They are well hidden, even we can’t find them and if we did, their power would be OURS, not yours!”

“Perhaps we can…”

“An alliance with you? Don’t make us laugh!” Jiminy chuckled. “I would rather see your head on pike first! You and that worthless piece of trash you travel with. Mark my words Cora, when I find him, I will have his head on a pike for the crimes he’s committed in our realm. And I will enjoy seeing you be sent to Ephesis where you belong!” He gestured again, and Cora vanished in a puff of smoke.
Cora entered the giant’s castle seeing the captain hanging from the rafter in a golden cage while the giant slumbered in a chair below him. She approached him slowly, a bottle of Wonderland shrinking potion in her hands and threw the contents on him. He immediately shrunk down to their size. She threw a little more on him and shrunk him down further then teleported him into one of her heart boxes until she had use of him. She despised the Ozopov mages but they could shrink people and objects with minimal effort and it was a skill she wished she’d been able to learn without needing potions.

“Cora please, get me out of here!” Hook begged. She snorted and flicked her wrist, teleporting him out of the cage. “Wait, how did you get up here without using the cuffs?”

“I had my suspicions you’d double cross me, so I made another pair.” She raised the sleeves of her gown to reveal a matching set of cuffs. “With some modifications that made my climb a bit faster. My dear Captain, it seems you’ve been on quite an adventure. The compass, please.”

“Yes, that. Well matters grew complicated. It's eluded me for the moment. The details of the affair are a bit of a bore.”

“Really? Stealing my protection spell and climbing the beanstalk without me might seem like a bore to you, but to me, it's a betrayal.”

“I was gonna bring it to you. Our agreement remains. We are going to Storybrooke together. I'll get it back.”

“I don't have time for your games. I've crossed through too many worlds to be brought short at the brink of success. Who was it who bested you? The swan girl.”

“Emma. Rest assured, it won't happen again.”

“No, it won't. You chose her and the consequences of that decision.”

Oh. Are you gonna kill me now? Go ahead. Try,” Hook challenged.

“So brave. No, I'm not going to kill you. I have something far more satisfying in mind. I'm going to leave you here with your thirst for revenge unquenched, while I complete our journey without you. Or I could simply take you back to the Outer Zone and turn you over to Commander Ozopov.”

“He's dead!”

“Oh no, he's very much alive and still wants your head. I’m inclined to give it to him.”

“There's no need to be rash. We can discuss this.”

“Your pretty face buys you a lot, but not my time. It's too valuable. The final eclipse is coming, and I want my daughter back.”

“I can do this. I can get it back. You need me.”

“No, I don't. You've had your chance. Now it's my turn to do this the right way.” She reached into
his chest and tore out his heart. “Now see how it’s done.” She sent the boxes containing his heart and Tiny to her trunk aboard the Jolly Roger and they began their descent down the beanstalk. Once she was on the ground she summoned another box and took out the heart within it. “Rise,” she commanded.

The heartless corpses in the safe haven burst out of their primitive graves and an army of the dead marched toward the new safe haven, their purpose to obtain the compass and kill all those that stood in their way.

Storybrooke, Maine

Regina pulled her car into the driveway of Rumple’s mansion, still reeling from the shock that he’d actually invited her into his sacred lair after all these years. She raised her hand to knock on the door as Belle opened it. The younger woman glared at her.

“Out of the way, bookworm. Your husband summoned me. He…ooof!” The mayor went flying through the air and landed on her backside on the lawn.

“You were saying?” Belle asked, her hands sparkling with magic. “I’ve waited twenty-eight years to do that.”

“Y…You have magic?” Regina gasped.

Belle teleported over to where she lay, grinning. “I do and you’re going to play nice unless you want to experience the hell you put me through for twenty-eight years in that damned asylum firsthand.”

Regina conjured a fireball that was quickly snuffed out.

“I am the Heart of the West Guardian, Regina. Your powers are no match for mine now.”

“You bit….”

Regina gasped, tasting soap and looked down to see a bar of Camay sticking out of her mouth.

“And don’t be putting teeth marks on my soap! It’s expensive!”

Regina frantically tried to pull the soap out, but it wouldn’t budge.

“I could do worse to you….FAR worse but I would darken my heart. However, that does not forbid me from dishing out just a wee bit of payback!” Belle gestured and the vines from her rose garden wrapped themselves around Regina’s wrists and ankles and pulled her up. “And you deserve it, so take it like a man! Oh, and I wouldn’t struggle against the vines either. My roses have sharp thorns.”

Rumple stood on the doorway clutching his belly as he laughed hysterically.

“Well done, dearie, well done!” he applauded and approached his former apprentice. “May I?” he asked, his hand poised over the bar of soap.

“You may but if she says one word I don’t like it goes back in!”

“Deal!”

He pulled the bar of soap out and Regina spat out some of the awful taste.
“You’re lucky you aimed at the ground dearie or the next thing you’d be spitting are teeth,” he warned. “You’re angry, that much is obvious but as my fiancée pointed out, she could do much worse to you for the hell you put her through. All we would need to do is summon the amulet from where it ended up and the wraith will return. And we both know you don’t want that. Nor do I because it would devastate Henry and I’ve grown too fond of the lad to do that to him.”

“You leave my son alone.”

“Not a chance! Now pull yourself together because we have a worse threat to deal with. Your mother!”

Regina flinched. “She…she was supposed to be in Oz! That’s where Archie last saw her!”

“Apparently, she escaped after he was sent here, and he is too weak to handle her at the moment which leaves us. The only portal she can come through is the wishing well and it needs to be destroyed. Now, are you going to keep standing there being childish help me stop her?”

“Do you have to ask? I don’t want her here any more than you do but if we destroy that portal how are Snow and Emma going to get back?”

“Archie’s taken care of that. Come along. Belle, you should come as well.”

Once they were in the basement workroom Rumple summoned several books from their secret hiding places behind the walls, many of them written in Ozian, a language she knew Rumple was fluent in but refused to teach her. Belle gestured and one of the books floated off the table and hovered in front of them.

“Rumple, if Belle is the Heart of the West then that means…”

“I am the West Guardian, Regina, yes.”

“Then you don’t need me. You’re powerful enough to stop my mother yourself.”

He frowned at her. “I don’t have all my powers yet Regina. That’s the price I paid when I became the Dark One’s vessel. I will only get them back when I neutralize her first blade. There are two more out there and that’s what she’s after. Do you think she’ll be the loving mother you’ve always wanted after she becomes Alemedia Demonia’s vessel, dearie? I think not. You forget she ripped her own heart to stop herself from loving me. What is it she always says?”

“Love is weakness,” Regina said sadly. “My grandfather told her that.”

“What do you need me to do Rumple?” Belle asked.

“Translate, sweetheart.”

It was strange for Belle to be working side by side with the woman that had once been her tormentor, but she would do so for her beloved’s sake. He still considered Regina to be the child of his heart. While they were working Regina looked up from the ingredients she was grinding into a powder, her eyes meeting Belle’s.

“I’m sorry,” she said softly. “I know it doesn’t take back everything I did but….I’m trying to change…for Henry.”

“Do it for yourself too,” Belle advised, stunned that Regina was making an effort to show any remorse. It was a step in the right direction, but she had a long, hard road ahead of her and there
would be many temptations she would have to face along the way. She didn’t enjoy having to
deceive the former Evil Queen into thinking that these spells and potions they were working on
would keep Cora out of Storybrooke yet the will of the OZ had to be done. Regina had to earn that
right to become the Heart of the East and she would do so through pain and sacrifice.

Rumple stood back and observed the two women he loved most in the world working together and
forging a fragile alliance that he hoped would grow stronger in time. The potion completed, and the
spell written, Rumple took them out to the shop floor and locked them in his safe. Suddenly they
heard the bell tinkle above the door.

“At last!” Rumple said softly, clenching his arm into a fist and pressing it against his left shoulder.
Belle did the same and the pair kneeled before the couple that had just walked in the door.
“Welcome to Storybrooke, cousin and Archie…welcome home!”

“Go on Dellia,” Archie urged. Az took a few steps forward before her cousin rose to his feet and
took her in his arms.

“Your battle with the darkness is over dearie,” Rumple murmured, stroking her hair. “Now it’s my
turn.”

“You won’t be alone. Archie and I will fight with you. Strogoff and Ozopov, united. That is the
will of the OZ.”

“Why are you here now? The OZ cannot have recovered that quickly!”

“It hasn’t,” Archie spoke up.

“Rumple, is this the real Archie or a construct?” Regina snickered. “It has to be. Archie’d never go
around dressed in tie dye, ripped jeans and purple sunglasses. Or grow his facial hair in.”

“It is me, Regina. Dellia and I made my cursed self the exact opposite of who I really was in the
OZ and in the OZ I adopted a sort of hippie lifestyle. You can thank the Consort for that. He came
from the flower power generation and passed his love of it onto Dellia. She got me into it.”

“You start smoking weed around my son and I’ll turn you back into a bug!”

“We don’t smoke weed and we both know I’m more powerful than you, so I can take my cricket
form anytime I want to.”

“So, what are you going to do with your construct?”

“He needs to be in my place a little while longer. Dellia and I are back at full strength, but we gotta
lay low for a while. The Sons and Daughters of Shadowlands are after our baby and I am NOT
going to let them take her from us AGAIN!”

“You’re pregnant? Oh, congratulations!” Belle exclaimed and hugged Az.

“No one is getting your child Archie. We will ward your place so tight not even Cora could get
through it.” Rumple promised.

“Cora,” he growled. “Tell me you’ve got an idea on how to keep her out.”

“We do,” Regina said.

“Regina, I want you to continue your sessions with my construct but do not be surprised if I swap
places with him once in a while.”

“I have a feeling that will be interesting.”

“Now, dearies, tell me what is going on in the OZ.”

Shadowlands
Ephesis

Her name was Ozmalita, meaning "Light of Oz" in the ancients language but the two times she had to live as a human she went under a different name yet her purpose was the same. The first time she was Nimmie, the beloved of Nick Chopper, charged with teaching his heart how to love until it could be claimed by his destined mate, the other sider Dorothy Gale. She surrendered his heart willingly, but it was never claimed and died in silent agony until Ozma allowed it to be born again in Wyatt Cain. Ozmalita, now Adora Cain was returned to the mortal realm with the same task to complete. Now the princess Dorothis had come to claim him and it was her duty to surrender him, but she could not surrender him to Dorothis. She risked her mistress's wrath by failing in her mission, but she had no other choice. She had something far more precious to lose than her immortality and the goddess of Paradise's grace.

Ozmalita...

Adora cringed as she heard the familiar voice and found herself in the throne room of Shadowlands. Almedea smiled down on her from her black throne, a glowing white heart clutched tightly in her hand.

"What is thy will, my mistress?" Adora asked through gritted teeth.

"You know what my will is. Whom will you choose? Lurline or your son?" Almedea squeezed tighter.

"My son," she sobbed as she sank to her knees.

"Very well. Destroy the bond between Dorothis and Wyatt and your son will live. Fail and I will crush his heart and blast his soul into oblivion."

"Your will be done, my mistress," Adora said bitterly.

"You may want to reconsider the tone of voice you take with me, Ozmalita. Remember, I hold your son's life in my hands."

"Harm him and nothing will stop Wyatt from destroying you!" Adora raged and then laughed hysterically.

Almedea shot an energy bolt at Adora that singed her wings and forced her to her knees. "Laugh once more and it will be your last, bitch." She formed a viewing ball in her hand and Jeb's image appeared in it. She raked her sharp fingernails across the glass and Adora could hear her son screaming inside it.

"No!" Adora cried.

Central City
"Jeb!" Xenia pulled him into her arms, horrified when she saw several bloody marks on his chest as if someone or something had scratched him. The sounds of her screams brought DG and Wyatt over to them.

"Jeb!" his father cried. "Who did this?" he growled, his eyes turning red as his rage overtook him. He took his son from Xenia's arms and held him tightly.

"Alemedia," DG hissed. "If you want to pick a fight bitch, pick it with me, but leave Wyatt and his son alone!" she challenged.

I intend to, they heard a female's demonic voice say on the wind. You are no match for me little girl!

"You're no match for me, bitch!" Wyatt snarled, his eyes now turning red. "Why don't you come out and face me instead of hiding in that damned dark hellhole!"

We'll meet soon enough, he heard her say in his head.

And when we do I'll rip your black heart out and crush it in my bare hands!

You're not strong enough to destroy me.

I will be and then you'll beg for my mercy bitch.

Almedea sighed with satisfaction as she tasted the full extent of the powers he possessed. At full strength he would be able to blast her soul into oblivion, but it was not toward her that she wanted those powers directed. It was toward her bitch sister. He would show Lurline no mercy when he put his mind to thinking about how much misery she brought to his life.

DG, feeling Wyatt's destructive powers unlocking, ran to his side and pressed her hand against his heart, pushing her light into him. She reached for his hand with her loose one and a protective shield formed over them while Raw and Otille tended to Jeb.

"The darkness in each other we will fight
With a flame burning with love's brightest light!"

she chanted.

"Young Cain need more healers," Raw said softly.

"Let's get him inside," Ambrose said as he, Tyler and Raw carefully lifted the injured young man up. DG released the shield over her and Wyatt.

"Go with them," she said softly.

"My boy," he moaned. "I don't know what I'd do if anything happened to him..."

"We won't let it, Wyatt," DG vowed. "Somehow we'll find a way to stop her."

"You aren't coming?" he asked her.

“I need to speak to Az…and our cousin.”

He nodded and headed for the infirmary.

Shadowlands
As she struggled against the chains that kept her confined in Alemedia's throne room Adora wished with all her heart and soul that she held the powers her sisters did. Wyatt was now their only chance to save their son, but he would also be forced to sacrifice something else as precious to him, his heart.

Almedea descended the steps and stared down at her captive. "When Lurline casts you into this realm do not expect your eternity here to be a pleasant one and you will feel the same agony as the princess for attempting to go against me."

"The Guardians will destroy you!" Adora spat.

"Must I remind you again of the consequences of showing defiance to me, Ozmalita?" She made the viewing ball reappear and an image of Jeb in an infirmary appeared. Alemedia's sharp fingernails touched the glass.

"No...please," Adora begged.

"You have five days to seduce Wyatt back to you. If he is not yours at midnight on the fifth day, your son dies." Almedea released the chains. "I will be watching you Ozmalita so when you speak to him, choose your words carefully."

Back in her chambers in Paradise, Adora sank to the floor and began to cry.

"To save our child from a horrifying fate
Her heart he must break
In silent agony her heart will die
If she cannot see the truth behind the lie
My own fate I cannot see
An eternity in pain and darkness it must be
For that is my punishment for defying the will of the OZ."

Wyatt sat beside his son's bed, his fists clenched in silent rage. He could feel darkness overtaking him but as much as he tried, he couldn't force it back. For years his family been at the mercy of others and it was now time to end it. He would make them all kneel at his feet before he crushed them under his heels.

I am the dragon. They will all face my wrath, but no one will ever be my master! He thought before he drifted off to sleep.

The Dream Realm

He found himself back in DG’s old room, standing at the foot of the bed where one of darkest events in his life had taken place, the death of one of the people he loved. His Dottie, only she’d been a child then.

“…Wyatt.”

“Adora….” He whispered and turned to see her standing behind him as a shade, still as beautiful as he remembered her.

“Ozmalita,” she corrected.

“Oh, I should’ve known!” he moaned. “You were trapped in human form again as you were then. Why? Why did you break my heart again? You knew what it did to me the first time! Why, damn you Nimmie, why? You and DG; you tormented me in my first life and you’re doing it again in my
second! WHY!?”

“Because it was the will of the OZ,” she sobbed.

Centuries earlier

With a careful swing of his axe Nick Chopper split the last log and added it to the growing pile on his wagon ready to transport to the eastern realm sorceress Nessarose. He sat down on a stool and used a rag to wipe the sweat from his brow. He enjoyed his weekly trips to the sorceress's castle. She always greeted him with a smile and asked him to come in and have tea with her while they chatted about daily life in Winkieland. She also made sure he left with a full plate of strawberry tarts and teased him that he needed to find himself a wife who could keep his house, have his children and fatten him up with her good cooking.

In many ways Nessarose was like a second mother to him. His own parents died during a terrible flu epidemic that struck the land twelve annuals earlier. The flu had taken so many good people in the land and those who were left behind struggled to rebuild their lives. Were it not for Nessarose's kindness Nick knew he would be without a home and a steady job since she was his one and only client. The rest of the residents of the land had no need of a woodsman since they could chop and gather their own firewood.

"Let's get a move on Neru. We wanna get to Nessa's house before dark," he said as he climbed into the driver's seat of the wagon and took the reigns. His horse whinnied in agreement and trotted down the dirt road. It was a three hour trip with only a few stops along the way. Neru would've been able to make the journey blindfolded since she and her master knew the roads so well.

When they arrived at Nessa's cottage there was a young woman out in the yard hanging the day's wash on the line, her back to him. He was shocked. He'd always assumed Nessa did her household chores on her own. Why hadn't he seen her housekeeper before?

"Hello," he called out as he climbed down from the wagon. "Is Nessa here?"

The woman turned around and the sight of her nearly took his breath away. She had silvery blond hair, green eyes, fair skin and the white work dress she wore made him think she looked like one of the angels he remembered his mother telling him stories about when he was a child. She often said that angels were the most beautiful creatures in all the OZ and the young woman standing before him would put them all to shame.

"She went to the market to buy some herbs. Who are you?" the woman asked softly.

"I'm uh...Nick...Nick Chopper," he said nervously.

"Oh, the woodsman! She talks about you often. Thank goodness you came when you did. I used up the last of our firewood for this load of laundry and she would be so angry with me if she came home and there was none left for the potion she was working on. I'm Nimmie," she said as she held out her hand.

He reached for her hand, wondering why he was so nervous. He quickly regained his composure and shook it gently.

"I...I've never seen you here before. Have you been working for Nessa long?"

"Just a few weeks."

"Why haven't I seen you before?" he inquired. "I usually stop by several times a week but I always
see Nessa but not you."

Nimmie sighed. "She doesn't want any men to see me."

"Well, why not?"

"Because she's afraid I might run off with one of you and get married," she answered.

"What's wrong with getting married? You're uh...very pretty and any man in his right mind would want to marry you."

They were both blushing and quickly looked away from each other. Nick knew he was just a poor woodsman, but he couldn't help wishing he could have a wife as pretty as Nimmie. After all, it was what Nessa had always been telling him to do; get married and have a family. He was already twenty-five and nearly all of the men he knew in Winkieland were married and had several children.

"What about you?" Nimmie asked. "Why aren't you married?"

"Haven't found the right woman yet," he answered.

"Nimmie! I don't pay you to stand around flapping your gums when there's work to be done!" they heard Nessarose snap as she walked up the dirt road with a basket in her hand. Nick was stunned. He'd never heard such a harsh tone in his friend's voice before.

"Y..Yes ma'am," Nimmie said timidly as she bent over the laundry basket and continued hanging garments on the line.

"And you! What took you so damned long to bring me my firewood?" she snapped at Nick.

"Well I...uhh..." he stammered.

"Oh, never mind! Just unload it!"

What's gotten into her? he pondered. He glanced over at Nimmie several times while he worked but she refused to acknowledge his presence, almost as if she were afraid to. He could feel Nessarose watching them, her eyes ice cold. When Nimmie was finished hanging the wash she dashed into the house. As Nick added the last log onto the pile he made, he turned around to see Nessarose standing behind him. In her hands she had a bag of strawberry tarts and the coldness he'd seen earlier was replaced by the motherly affection he was used to.

"I'm sorry I took so long to come out here," he said.

"Oh, don't worry about it. I'll see you in a few days." she said with a smile.

Nick took the bag and put it in the small storage box he had on his wagon. As he was leaving he caught a glimpse of Nimmie poking her head out the front door.

"Well, that was strange Neru," Nick mumbled. "Nessa's never been nasty to me before." The horse snorted. "Well, she hasn't. "And as for keepin' Nimmie hidden...she's too pretty to be locked up."

He was plagued by thoughts of her the entire trip home. The Harvest Dance, the largest social event in all Winkieland was coming up and he didn't want to go alone this time. He only hoped he could convince Nessarose to give Nimmie permission to go.

It was after midnight when Nimmie opened her eyes. She crawled out of bed, put on her robe and
ran outside, glancing behind her shoulder to make certain she wasn't followed and headed into the woods and sat down on a fallen tree stump. She pulled a tear shaped pendant out of the bodice of her nightdress and cupped it in her palms.

"Your angel Ozmalita calls to thee
Mistress Lurline appear now before me," she chanted.

A white mist appeared before her taking the shape of a shadowy young woman in a silver gown. Nimmie rose from the stump and kneeled at the feet of the goddess of Paradise herself.

"Why have you summoned me, my dear?" the goddess asked softly as she used her magic to form a protective shield over them.

"I have located the West gate keyholder," Nimmie answered.

Lurline sighed with joy. "At last!" She waved her hand and a large crystal ball hovered between them. "Show me."

Nimmie placed her hands on both sides of the ball and allowed her memories to flow into it. Nick's image appeared in the glass.

"His powers are bound without the other half of his heart." Nimme explained.

"Ah yes, the South Gate keyholder. Have you located her?"

"I have not but when I took his hand I was given a vision. She is not from this world yet the powers she and Nick will have together will be strong enough to not only imprison Alemedia in Ephesis, but also to defeat her."

"That cannot happen Ozmalita. They must imprison her in Ephesis, nothing more. If they gain control of the Underworld who is to say that they will not attempt to defeat me?"

"Nick has a good heart. He will serve you faithfully mistress."

"You had better be right Ozmalita because if tries to gain control of the Underworld I will hold you personally responsible and you will no longer have my protection. Is that clear?" the goddess demanded.

"It is, my mistress."

"The affections he is starting to have for you are weakening the locks on his heart and his magic, but you must always keep in mind that his powers can only be fully unlocked when his bond with the Southern keyholder is consummated."

"She is not yet a woman."

"How young is she?"

"Ten annuals."

"She will not have enough power to imprison Alemedia now. She may, however, be able to drive her essence out of Nessarose. Nessarose is having more and more difficulty keeping her from taking control of her body and her magic."

"If we force her essence out of Nessarose she will try to take possession of Bastinda or Glinda's soul next."
"I'm afraid Bastinda will be a far easier target," Lurline said with a sigh. "Bastinda is more powerful. She also tends to use her darkness more than her light."

"There's nothing you can do?"

"No. Not as long as she's in the mortal realm. And you know the protection laws of this world would not apply to Nick's bondmate since she is not from here and once Nick consummates his bond with her, they would not apply to him either. And we both know damned well that if my former consort Aramon found out there was someone out there who had enough power to defeat Alemedea and me, he would not hesitate to tell them how to do it, so he could have his own revenge on us for his exile."

"That's why we need Glinda and your mortal descendant to balance out Nick and his mate's darkness with their light. Is he still under Alexander Strogoff's protection in the Emerald City?"

"Yes. Nicolai will not be able to take the throne of the OZ until he is twenty annuals. I should have listened to you. You warned me there would be consequences for not maintaining the balance and now this world is in more danger than it ever has been before."

"We will set it to right again, Mistress. I must get back before Nessarose suspects I'm gone."

"Be careful Ozmalita. As long as you're in human form Alemedia can harm you. And if she takes the other three protectors there will nothing I can do to save either of us."

"It will not come to that Mistress."

Lurline vanished leaving the young woman alone. As she sat outside Nimmie thought of the woodsman again, unable to deny the sensations he stirred in her the moment their eyes met and their hands touched. It was unlike anything she'd ever experienced before. From the moment of her creation she knew her loyalty was to her goddess and her goddess alone and many of the pleasures humans took for granted were forbidden to her, yet she longed to experience them just once.

Nick rose early the next morning and instead of making the necessary repairs to his cottage roof he sat on his porch whittling a piece of wood. Keeping Nimmie's image in his mind as he worked, the wood began to take the shape of a beautiful woman. There were other small wooden carvings scattered throughout the house that his friends kept insisting he take to the marketplace to sell but he couldn't bear to part with any of them. Every one of them was inspired by something or someone he cared about deeply. His favorite was the carving he made of his horse Neru, named for the moon itself.

"So, who's the girl?" he heard his friend Rufus the tinsmith ask him. He looked up from his carving. Rufus and his wife Coraline took it upon themselves to look in on him after his parents passed away just like Nessarose did and had they not had seven children to feed, they would've taken him in.

"Nessa's maid," Nick murmured as he worked.

"Maid? No kiddin'. I didn't know she had one."

"Me neither."

"You gonna bring her to the Harvest Dance or chicken out just like the last time?"

"I didn't chicken out!" Nick protested. "I fell off Neru and was passed out for a few hours."
"Uh huh. Every time a girl wants to go to the Harvest Dance with you, there's always some excuse why you show up alone or don't show up at all. You're gonna havta settle down soon son. You're not getting any younger."

"I know. I'm...I'm thinkin of asking Nimmie to come to the dance with me but I don't want any trouble with Nessa."

"Why would there be? Ain't she always telling ya to settle down?"

"Yeah but Nessa acted a bit strange when I was out there. Snapped at the poor girl for talking to me and yelled at me because she said I took too long bringing her wood out to her. Then she turned around and was as sweet as honey."

"She's a woman. They get moody ya know."

"This was more than bein' moody Rufe."

"Ah, I wouldn't worry too much about it," the tinsmith said.

"I have to worry. She's a sorceress. If she gets mad at me she might put some kind of curse on me!" Nick cried.

Rufus shook his head. Nick was a good boy but not the sharpest tool in the shed in his opinion and he worried over nothing. "Ask the girl to the Harvest Dance and don't fret over Nessa."

He wished he didn't have to but although it was only that one time that Nessa was so cold to him he sensed there was something else behind it and he had to find out what it was. The next day Nick rode out to Nessa's cottage. He spotted Nimmie out in the yard raking up leaves and rushed over to help her.

"I can manage," she said softly.

"You work too hard. Why don't you sit down for a few minutes?" he asked.

"I...I have to get the yard cleaned up before Nessarose gets home. She doesn't like all these leaves laying around." Nimmie explained while she continued raking.

"The way the wind's been blowing lately you're gonna be picking them up constantly. Where is Nessa by the way?"

"Went to see her sister."

"Bastinda the Bitch," Nick muttered.

"That's not nice!" Nimmie scolded.

"Well it's the truth. She's as mean as a snake. She was here once when I came to deliver some firewood and treated me like I was a bug under her boot. I bet she's mean with you too."

"She is but it doesn't bother me."

Nick handed her a small sack.

"What's this?" she inquired.

"Something I...uhhh...made."
"Oh, how nice," she murmured as she opened the bag and took out the carving, gasping when she realized how closely it resembled her. "Y...You made this for me? Why?"

He looked away, unable to find the words to express his feelings. "I know...I know, it's stupid. I barely know you and..."

"I feel the same way," Nimmie confessed knowing Ozma would strike her dead for it but she didn't care. She reached over and took his hand in hers. "You're a good man, Nick Chopper."

"Look uh...I was wondering if you want to go to the Harvest Dance with me this weekend."

"I'd like to but Nessarose may have a problem with it."

"I don't understand why she wouldn't want you to be happy."

"I think she's lonely and having me around helps."

"All I've heard her do is order you around," Nick pointed out. "Nimmie, why is she mean one minute and nice the next?"

"She usually turns mean after she's visited her sister."

"The Bitch."

"Nick," Nimmie admonished.

"I know...be nice but I don't have anything nice to say about her. She's mean and she scares people around here plenty. I think she enjoys it too."

Nimmie found little reason to disagree with him especially when she sensed Bastinda was surrendering more and more of her soul to Alemedia with each passing day. Soon there would be no light left in her to conquer her darkness. With two of the strongest sources of the light in the OZ under the control of the dark queen of the Underworld, the greater the chance that it would become nothing more than a haven for the most evil creatures of the world. Images of pain and suffering filled the angel's mind.

It can't happen. Not as long as I have the ability to prevent it.

One of her three chances was this handsome young man who possessed very little intelligence, but he had no need of it for his true power rested in his pure and loving heart. Once that heart was bound to its soul and its missing half through unions of love, light and blood, the world would be safe from Alemedia forever.

"Nimmie! Must I remind you again about sitting around talking while there's work to be done? And you? What are you doing here?" Nessarose demanded from behind them. Nimmie cringed in terror and released Nick's hand.

"I came here to ask Nimmie to the Harvest Dance," Nick answered calmly as he stared down the furious sorceress. She glared at him, her dark eyes burning with hatred.

"She won't be going," Nessarose stated firmly.

"I think that's for her to decide."

"You hold your tongue, boy!" Nessarose threatened.
"Why are you so against her seeing any men? And I thought you'd be happy that I finally found a woman I was interested in. Ain't you always tellin' me I need to settle down?"

"You can settle down with any woman you like...except for this one!" Nessarose hissed as she stretched out her hands. Nimmie flew off the steps she was sitting on and was pressed against a tree. Vines grew out of the ground and wrapped themselves around her.

"Nick, get out of here!" Nimmie cried out as she struggled to free herself.

"I'm not leavin' without you. You don't belong here with her when she treats you like this."

"Nick, please!"

"Run away while you can, woodsman," the sorceress said, her voice now sounding demonic and her eyes turning black as coals. Several bird shaped markings appeared on her chest. "Zora, take him!" she commanded.

"Nick, for Ozma's sake run!" Nimmie screamed as one of the bird shaped markings flew off the sorceress's chest and became an animal that was part monkey and part bat. The mobat lunged toward him and grabbed him in its massive claws.

"I warned you before what would happen if you disobeyed me, Nimmie," the sorceress reminded her servant. "You have a choice to make. Agree to never see him again or I have my demon tear him apart."

"Nessa, stop this...it's not you. I'm your friend, remember?" Nick prodded.

"You're trying to take what belongs to me."

"Nimmie is a human being not a possession!" he shouted. The demon gripped his arms tighter, its sharp claws digging into the flesh of his arms. He felt warm streams of blood pouring down them.

"She is what I say she is!"

"Nessarose, I'll do whatever you ask, only please let him go!" Nimmie begged.

"Then I want your word that you'll never speak to him again...or he dies."

"Nessa, what the hell's gotten into you?" Nick demanded. "That sister of yours must've been puttin' ideas in your head because the real you would never hurt anyone!"

"How perceptive you are, woodsman," Nessarose said softly as she approached him. She pressed her hand against his chest and felt an energy source in his heart that was bound yet held powers even she didn't possess in this form. "Ahhhh...what have we here....?"

"No..." Nimmie moaned as she struggled to free herself.

"And how would a feeble-minded woodsman possess a heart with bound magic?" Nessarose inquired.

"I don't know what you're talkin' about. I don't know anything about magic," Nick insisted.

"Oh, but I feel it," the sorceress murmured, pressing her hand firmer against his chest. He glanced down, shocked when he saw a faint glimmer of light where she was touching him. "And I want it!"

"You'll never have it!" Nimmie screamed. The sorceress spun around and faced the captive servant.
girl, her lips curled into a sneer.

"So you've gotten better at masking your presence Ozmalita, but not good enough and your precious goddess can't help you. You bound the magic he has, now undo it!"

"I can't!" Nimmie insisted.

"You mean you won't. Not even to save his life?" Nessarose pressed.

"I can't. It can only be unlocked by his bonded. You know that!" Nimmie cried.

"Then bring her to me!" Nessarose hissed.

"I can't," Nimmie sobbed. "She has to come here through a travel storm."

"Very well. There's another way. Release him, Zora." she commanded the mobat. Nick fell to the ground. As he was about to rush the sorceress she sent a burst of wind at him that threw him against the side of the cottage.

What the hell have I gotten myself into? he thought frantically. All I wanted to do was ask a pretty girl to a dance and I'm gettin' mixed up in some magic stuff that'll be the death of me for sure!

"So much light in the heart of a woodsman. If you can't unbind it, I'll just have to cut it out," the sorceress whispered as she focused her gaze on the axe sitting in the back of Nick's wagon.

"Nooooo!" Nimmie screamed as the axe flew through the air toward the direction of the house, slicing Nick's right hand at the wrist. He howled in pain. Nessarose cackled wickedly as she commanded the axe to sever his left hand. "Please stop," Nimmie pleaded.

"Then summon a travel storm and bring me the South Gate keyholder!" the sorceress commanded.

"Whatever she wants, don't do it," Nick croaked. "She's gonna kill me anyway."

"If I summon her, will you let him go?"

"His heart is worth more to me alive than dead." She turned back to the servant girl and shot an energy bolt at her. "The travel storm, Ozmalita. Now!"

"Nimmie, for Ozma's sake it's a trick!" Nick shouted.

"I can't let her hurt you anymore."

Nick barely understood what Nessarose and Nimmie were fighting about if he had to give up his life to protect someone else, so be it. His eyes met hers and he pleaded silently with her not to give in to Nessarose's demands.

The spell holding Nick against the side of the house weakened and he fell to the ground, his arms bleeding profusely from where his hands had once been. She waved her hand and the woodsman vanished along with his wagon and horse.

"W...What did you do to him?"

"Sent him away but if you keep refusing to bring the South gate keyholder to me I'll have his axe chop at him until there is nothing left but his precious heart."

The goddess clapped her hands and vanished, leaving Nimmie at the cottage alone. She sank to the
ground and burst into tears. Although she was beginning to love the woodsman her first duty was and always would be to her goddess. She could never surrender the South gate keyholder.

When his horse Neru led the wagon to their home, Rufus and Coraline had been horrified at the condition their friend was in. Both of his hands had been severed at the wrists but even more disturbing was his news that it had been no accident.

"Nessarose did this to ya?" Rufus asked.

"I..told you...she'd curse me," Nick murmured. Rufus and his sons pulled Nick from the wagon and took him in the house while Coraline fetched the doctor. Unfortunately, there was little the doctor could do but attaching a tin limb to a human being was not a foreign concept to Rufus. He'd made a new leg for one of their other friends, years before and he managed to live and work with it just fine.

Over Nick's protests, Rufus and Coraline insisted the young man move in with them. He built himself a smaller house in the backyard and insisted on earning his keep by helping Coraline with the household chores, but he hadn't touched his axe since Nessarose used it to sever his hands. Word of her treatment of him spread fast in their village and everyone began to fear the sorceress. She was especially cruel to the munchkins yet Nick heard nothing about Nimmie.

It never stopped him from thinking about her. One day he saddled his horse and rode out to Nessarose's cottage, concealing himself behind an apple tree and waiting until Nessarose left the cottage to go on her daily trip to the marketplace before he knocked on the door. It opened slowly and Nimmie stood on the other side, her eyes wide with horror.

"Nick, what are you doing here?" she cried. "You have to go...please!"

"I had to see you, to be sure you're all right," he said softly.

"Now that you've seen me you should go."

"Come with me."

"I can't!"

"Why? You can't stay here with her. Look what she did to me!" he cried, holding up his arms with the new tin hands on them. "She'll hurt you worse if you stay."

"She'll hurt you if she finds out you're here!" Nimmie cried.

"What made Nessa change the way she did? Bastinda? And why did she call you Ozmalita? Ozmalita is supposed to be Lurline's right hand."

"Because I am Ozmalita," the angel said softly and allowed the spell that was disguising her appearance to weaken. Her white wings appeared on her back.

"Why didn't you tell me who you were? Why did you lie?" he asked, unable to disguise the pain in his voice.

"My duty is to protect the heart of the OZ, and one half of it is you," the angel answered.

"I don't understand what you mean, Nimmie. I don't know anything about magic."

She pressed her hand against his chest. "Lurline is to have four protectors here in the mortal realm.
You've already met two of them. Nessarose and Bastinda."

"Nessa and her mean sister are supposed to be Lurline's protectors? That's crazy!" he cried.

"They weren't always evil Nick. Bastinda's lust for power has turned her and Nessarose is under the control of Alemedia, the goddess of the Underworld, Ephesis."

"Well, can't you stop her?"

She shook her head. "My powers are weakened as long as I'm in the mortal realm as are Alemedia's. That's why she took control of Nessarose. She's using her magic."

"What's she want?"

"After I discovered that Alemedia has been corrupting Nessarose and Bastinda my task was to come here to the mortal realm and locate the four humans with the strongest and purest hearts and souls and give them the powers they would need to become Lurline's protectors and return Alemedia to the Underworld. They represent the four points on the compass." She picked up a stick and drew a makeshift compass configuration in the dirt. "Each of them will have the ability to control one of the four elements as well as have a symbol." She moved him into the western direction. "You are the Western Gate. Your element is fire and your symbol is the blade."

His eyes widened. "I can control fire?"

"Not yet but you will learn to."

"Why me? I'm just a simple man. Why did you pick me to protect the goddess? I can't even protect myself from a mean witch!" he growled.

"I would give anything to be able to unlock your magic so that you can protect yourself against Alemedia's attacks but I cannot. The only one who can is, the Southern Gate keyholder."

"Who's that?"

"Your female counterpart. Her symbol is the chalice and her element is water."

"So, the witch wants to use her to get to what magic I've got in me?"

"Yes."

"Can I get rid of it?"

She knew of only one way, but she wouldn't dare reveal it. Severing a bond such as theirs set in motion a painful curse on the one who broke it.

"No!" she said firmly.

"The punishment is severe for defying the will of the OZ
A heart bond of our choosing is one that is meant for eternity
Should this bond be broken by human device
Everything it holds most dear it will be made to sacrifice
The rivers of its memory will flow with the image of spilled blood
Until the dams burst and they become a raging flood
If one day the lost half of its heart returns to reclaim
The one who has forgotten it, through love shall it be relieved from its pain."
"If breakin' this bond is so bad, why didn't you just leave me alone!" Nick cried. "I didn't ask to have magic in me and I don't want it." He stood up and started to walk away. "And I doubt the girl who can unlock it wants hers either," he added.

"Nick, please don't go yet."

"First you wanted me to leave, now you want me to stay. Make up your mind, Nimmie...Ozmalita...or whatever the hell your name is!" he said bitterly.

Nimmie expelled a deep sigh. "You don't know how hard this is for me. My duty is serve and obey my goddess at any cost but I would give anything to have what you do."

"You'd want to be normal, like me? Why?"

"Because I would have your love," she sobbed. "Just once I wanted to know how it felt to be loved and now that I've seen it and experienced it, I've realized how lonely my existence truly is."

"I never thought an angel would be unhappy," he mumbled.

"We have feelings like mortals only....we are forbidden to have such close contact with you unless we're ordered to."

He scowled. "Oh, aren't you? So while we regular humans suffer through our lives you all just sit in your shiny palaces and watch until your boss tells you she needs you to do something for her. Seems to me we're nothing but puppets and the great Lurline is holdin' the strings!"

She should have struck him down for uttering such blasphemy but there was an undeniable ring of truth to his statement.

Central City
Centuries later

“...And we're STILL her damned puppets! Was making me fall in love with you again and having our son one of her orders Ozmalita? Was it?!” Wyatt raged.

“No. I wanted your love. I wanted it so badly I defied my goddess to have it...and I will do so again and again! I love you and I always will...in EVERY existence I have! I surrendered your heart to that foolish girl once and I'll be damned if I'll do it again! You still love me. I know you do. You can’t forget all the years we had that easily Wyatt Cain.”

“No I can’t,” he confessed. “But I can’t be with you now. I...I have to move on...as hard as it may be...I have to. Because I love her too.”

“Do you? Or do you think you do?”

“I don’t know.”

Now back in her human form, Adora came up behind him and began to massage his shoulders as she used to after his long days of training at the Tin Man academy. “She is still a girl, but I am a woman, Wyatt and I’m not afraid to love all of you as she is. We can be a family again...you, me, Jeb, Xenia and any children they have. We won’t have to be puppets anymore. We would be free. Don’t you want that?”

“Yes,” he whispered. “Adora...”
“I love you Wyatt.”

He picked her up and carried her over to the bed. A bond would be consummated that night in that bed, but it was the wrong one and the Balance would shift once again.

Storybrooke

Az! Az! I need you!

“Archie, it’s DG. She’s in trouble. The seeing globe. Quickly!” Az commanded. Archie reached into the bag he was carrying and took out a seeing globe, placing it on the glass display counter. Rumple waved his hand on it and a raven-haired women in her early twenties appeared in the glass. “Deege, what’s wrong?”

“There’s no time to waste. We must go there now!” Rumple said. “Archie, dearie ye’d best be telling me ye hae a travel a storm token!”

“I do.”

“Rumple, wait…what about…?”

“Destroy that portal if we’re not back in time Regina!” he ordered and teleported himself, Belle, Archie and Az to MacDonald’s farm. Archie tossed the coin and a funnel cloud began to spin its way toward them. “Hold on tight, Belle! We’re going to the OZ!”

We’re coming cousin, we’re coming, Rumple sent to the terrified young woman on the other side of the storm.
Oz (The Outer Zone)
The Northern Island

One minute she was in her warm suite at the Emerald Place in Central City, the next she was back in the room that had been the scene of her death years before, a room she once vowed to never return to until she learned it was the only place she could undo the terrible curse that had been placed on her heart and Wyatt’s but the moment she approached the bed the image that flashed before her eyes chilled her blood and her heart now felt like a piece of stone in her chest. She’d been betrayed and the man she loved was now in the arms of another woman.

“Az! Az….I need you,” she moaned and crashed to the floor.

The Dream Realm

“I’ve missed you so much,” Adora murmured, burying her face in Wyatt’s shoulder and kissing it. He reached for the blanket and pulled it over them, unable to chase away the chill the crept into his bones though a warm fire blazed in the hearth or the guilt that washed over him like a tidal wave. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing,” he said quickly.

She raised her head and kissed his lips. “Then don’t think about it anymore. Think about us.”

“This is just a dream Adora. You’ll be back in that cold grave alone when I wake up.”

“It’s no dream. It’s real. Feel it,” she whispered as she caressed his chest.

But she knew there was little left to feel when his heart was no longer in his body. Alemedia had already removed it and hidden it away while she was in control of him and now her essence had transferred to her third vessel to take DG’s.

The Northern Island

“Wyatt…” DG sobbed as she crawled toward the bed, her tears turning to ice on her cheeks, the pain in her chest so intense it took every once of strength she had to pull herself up.

“DG!” Az screamed from the doorway.

“She feels as cold as ice,” Belle cried. “Rumple, what do we do?”

Rumple scooped her up and the moment her body touched the mattress icicles began to form on her fingers and toes. He rubbed his hands together and moved them over her limbs to warm her with a spell but to no avail. The ice began to spread to the rest of her body. “I can’t stop it unless I know what’s causing it!” he growled in frustration. “Help me!”

Az reached for her sister’s icy hand and held it tightly. “Nothing can hurt us if we’re together, Deeg. Remember,” she said through her tears. A faint beam of light emitted from their joined hands. Suddenly they were all blasted back, and a construct of DG rose from the bed laughing evilly as she approached them, and a katana sword appeared in her hand. She waved it over the
blade and they could see the name Dorothea Ozopov written on it.

“‘The second dagger!’” Az exclaimed.

“They were right under your nose the entire time Az,” Alemedia taunted in DG’s voice and waved her hand again. A tin suit appeared in the room along with the badly rusted remains of the first Tin Man. “And now they’re in the hands of the vessels that will do what that village coward will not, bring me the heart of Lurline!”

Rumple rose to his feet and glared at her. “You may have the upper hand now dearie, but you won’t for long because I am FINALLY going to do what I should’ve done centuries ago and rid myself of this curse that has done nothing but drive away the ones I loved and who loved me.”

“And you’ve been my vessel longer than any other. I know you too well Rumplestiltskin. You’ve never been able to choose love over power when it came down to the wire, now could you? It’s why you sent your son to the other side alone and threw Belle out of your castle.”

“I will get my son back and once I do, I am sending your arse back to Ephesis where it belongs!”

“Only part of it, Rumple,” the goddess reminded him. “You’ll never be able to break my hold on these two.”

“We’ll see about that.”

“Will we? Remember the prophecy, Rumple? The boy will be your undoing? Now you know who that boy is.” DG’s lips curved into a devilish smile. “Your grandson.”

“But not if I get to him first, laddie.”

Rumple cringed when he heard the familiar voice in the mirror behind him.

“Never!” Rumple raged and threw a fireball at the mirror, shattering his father’s image.

Alemedia gestured and an orange shimmering portal appeared on the floor in front of them. “So many Daddy issues! Now let’s see if you are strong enough to free yourself from me.” She flicked her wrist and sent the four of them flying into it and the last thing they heard was her maniacal laughter until they were dumped in the field at MacDonald’s farm.

Storybrooke
Hours earlier

After hearing rumors of portal activity being reported near MacDonald’s farm, Charming jumped in his truck, stopped by the school to pick up Henry and the two of them raced to the farm unaware that Regina pursued them in her Mercedes, the potion intended to be used on the wishing well in her jacket pocket. She knew her mother was no fool and that the wishing well couldn’t possibly be the only portal she would use but she wasn’t taking any chances. Cora ripped the heart out of her fiancé and there was no doubt in her mind that she would kill Henry too unless he agreed to become her puppet as she did.

“I hope its Emma and Mary Margaret!” Henry exclaimed.

“So, do I, Henry. So, do I.” Charming murmured. He turned down the gravel road leading to the farmhouse and spotted two black SUVs parked near the barn. He stopped the truck and pulled his gun out of its holster. “Henry, stay in here and keep down. Understand?”
“Who do you think they are?”

“I don’t know but I’m not taking any chances. Stay down.”

Henry nodded and slid down between the dash and the passenger seat as his grandfather crept toward the farmhouse with his gun drawn. The front door opened and a tall Japanese American male in his early thirties came out.

“Who are you?” Charming demanded. “Hands up where I can see ‘em!”

He raised his hands. “Lieutenant Jim Koto, SFPD homicide,” he recited.

“You’re a long way from home, Lieutenant.”

“But you may know me as the White King of Wonderland, well one of them anyway.”

“How did you get here? Why are you here?”

“Because there’s something coming and you’re gonna need our help. Hello, Your Highness. It’s been a long time,” David Molk said when he came out of the farmhouse with Beth beside him. “Except my brother and I aren’t crickets anymore.”

“Jasper,” Charming breathed a sigh of relief and lowered the gun. “Henry, you can come out! It’s safe!” he called out to his grandson. Henry jumped out of the truck and ran to the farmhouse, a wide smile on his lips when he recognized Archie’s twin and his wife.

“Come on in and we’ll introduce you to the rest of the crew. You don’t ah…mind that we’re squatting here for a little bit until we’re sure it’s safe to go into town?”

“No but I sure am glad to see at least one familiar face among you.” He followed them into the farmhouse where their friends Hildy and Terry English waited along with Hildy’s daughter Louise and Edgar Navarro and his wife with their four daughters. Edgar’s wife and children were in housecat form.

“…So when Regina’s curse was cast Maleficent sent me and Navarro to San Francisco while Beth ended up in Pennsylvania.”

“Hildy, Terry and I came through the Looking Glass when our armies were defeated by Hearts,” Jim added. They were gathered in the kitchen. “The new Queen of our Wonderland is no better than yours. She may not rip people’s hearts out by she keeps them under control by drugging them. A little trick she picked up from the Sorceress Bastinda.”

“So there’s another Enchanted Forest?” Henry asked.

“Five as far as we know. Different worlds, different lives. Archie’s counterpart from their world works for the NSA.” Beth spoke up. “And David and I don’t exist in it.”

“And I’m supposed to be Ingo Montoya’s dead father from the Princess Bride and Puss In Boots from Shrek,” Edgar joked. “I don’t even have a son yet, but I do have four beautiful daughters.” His kitten daughters meowed and rubbed against his feet.

“David you said something was coming and that I’d need your help. What are you talking about?”

Terry slid a bottle of whiskey across the table. “Might wanna have a sip of that, man because you’re gonna need it.”
“Henry, why don’t you and Louise come in the living room with me?” Beth suggested.

“Go in the living room with Beth, girls,” Edgar instructed his kitten daughters.

Once the children were out of earshot David brought out the files Isaac Wallace had given him along with copies of the department’s own files on the Fairy Tale killer cases and laid them out on the table. Charming’s hands shook while he read the reports and looked at the crime scene photos.

“If we found the town, they can find it,” David pointed out. Charming sighed and raked his hand through his hair. “And we gotta be ready for them or we’re gonna be like the other safe havens; wiped out of existence.”

Suddenly they heard a knock on the door and reached for their guns. Charming stood up. “Let me handle this.”

“We got your back if there’s trouble,” David said. The others nodded in agreement. They walked out of the kitchen and took positions in the hallway as Charming opened the door to find an impatient Regina standing on the other side.

“What the hell is going on here?”

“You better come in Regina. It’s okay. Stand down.”

“Are you nuts, man? That’s the Evil Queen!” Edgar exclaimed.

“Don’t shoot my mom!” Henry pleaded.

“Stand down,” Charming said again, more firmly this time. “Madam Mayor, won’t you join us in the kitchen?”

“Figures SHE’D be running the town,” David muttered, and they went back into the kitchen.

A short time later Regina set the last file folder down and shook her head. “And you’re sure this Home Office is going to try to come here?”

“They got through every other safe haven no matter how strong the wards were.”

“First my mother then a cult of fairy tale killers!” Regina grabbed the bottle of whiskey and poured herself a drink. “We need to talk to Rumplestiltskin but right now he’s in Oz trying to settle a crisis there. Charming, these people are your deputies effective immediately. We’ll take them down to Granny’s to introduce them before a panic starts and you and Emma can decide whether she wants to stay sheriff or allow one of them to take over since they obviously have experience that wasn’t given to them by the curse. Then we’re going to figure out how we can keep this Home Office OUT of our town.”

Moments later they saw a flash of orange light.

“Beth, stay here with the kids. We’ve got portal activity!” David called out to his wife. Regina conjured a fireball and teleported outside while the others followed with their guns drawn. As they crept around the side of the barn Regina burst into laughter seeing legs in a pair of Armani trousers and loafers sticking out of a pile of hay.

“It’s Rumple!”

“Dinna just stand there laughing like a hyena dearie!” came an angry shout from the pile followed
by a sneeze. Hay scattered everywhere revealing Rumple, Belle, Az and Archie. Belle stood up and rubbed her red nose then sneezed again, emitting a gust of wind that sent Regina and the former SFPD inspectors flying.

“Oh no! I am so sorry!” she cried. “I…aahhhh choooo!”

“Oh, for God’s sake take a damned Claritin before you blow us all to China!” Regina yelled.

Rumple conjured a gold band and slapped it on Belle’s wrist. “I’m sorry sweetheart but I’ve got to dampen your magic a bit and drink this.” He gestured, and an allergy potion appeared in his hand. Belle took the bottle gratefully and sipped, her allergies beginning to subside.

“Thank you Rumple.”

“Well, well looks like the prodigal brother’s come home Archie…and Charming’s out of a job!” Rumple giggled.

“Very funny Gold. Actually, Regina just appointed them to be my deputies.”

“Did you get the crisis settled in Oz?” Regina demanded.

“No because now we have a worse problem dearie. I’m not the only Dark One anymore.”

“What! Are you saying my mother…?”

“No. My sister and her bondmate,” Az spoke up and got to her feet.

“Jesus….three Dark Ones. And let me guess, they’re coming here?”

“Not at the moment. Alemedia’s got something planned with them but we were locked out of the OZ before we could find out what it was. She now has the advantage, but we can gain the upper hand when I break my curse but first we need to keep your mother out of here.”

“I’m afraid we have more than just her to worry about now Gold.”

“The Home Office is coming, Archie,” David informed his brother.

“You’re sure?”

“One of the twelve dancing princesses, whose cursed name is Alyssa Garrett, was working in a strip club in the Bay and she knows who one of them is. His name is Greg Mendell and she says he has a female accomplice, but she hasn’t been able to find out who it is yet. She’s still workin on it.”

“Wait a minute…Archie you KNEW about this and didn’t tell me?” Regina asked angrily.

“I was going to, dammit and they’re being helped by a dark mage! It’s not just any dark mage. It’s my father…Peter Pan,” Rumple confessed.

“Peter Pan is your father?” Regina stared at her mentor in shock.

“He’s worse than me, dearie! He may be in Neverland but he’s able to exert his influence outside its boundaries. He also can cross worlds easier than we can though I’m not certain how he does it. The Home Office is merely a diversion for what he really wants. He wants Heart of the Truest Believer and we both know who has that heart, Regina.”

“Emma.”
“Henry.”

“NO! He is NOT getting my son!”

“Then we need to make certain he doesn’t…by keeping his puppets and your mother out of this town.”

“Let’s get to the wishing well.”

“Not yet. There’s some instructions I need to give Henry before he contacts Aurora again.”

“He’s in the house. Do you want him to try now?”

“The sooner the better. It’s nighttime there.”

“Archie and I can take the others into town and introduce them Regina,” Charming offered. “But Archie…uhh…you might wanna change first.”

“What’s wrong with what I have on?”

“Well you look like a hippie with those clothes and no one’s gonna recognize you with your facial hair grown in.”

“I am a hippie. Deal with it,” Archie retorted and snapped his fingers. A painted VW bus appeared in the field.

“You’re not seriously gonna drive around in THAT thing are you?”

“Yes I am. We all drive around in old cars anyway so it’s not gonna make that much of a difference.” He climbed into the driver’s seat of the bus and turned on the radio, Jimi Hendrix’s version of the Star-Spangled Banner blaring out of the speakers.

“Will ye turn that disrespectful crap off?” Rumple yelled, covering his ears.

“Respect the classics, man. It’s Hendrix!” Archie yelled back and started the engine as his brother and his family and Edgar and his boarded the bus. It billowed out green, pine scented smoke while it cruised down the driveway. Rumple, Regina and Belle went into the farmhouse. Regina gestured, and a blanket appeared in Henry’s hands.

“I brought your blanket. From your bedroom back home.”

“All right Henry, just relax and soon you're gonna drift off,” Rumple said softly.

“What do I tell them?”

“Just listen to my bedtime story and all will be clear. Once upon a time, Snow White and Prince Charming needed to stun a very powerful magician long enough to lock him up in a dark dungeon…”

“That was you. They used Cinderella to trap you with a magic quill.”

“Yes, indeed.” Rumple waved his hand over his grandson and cast a mild sleeping spell. “The quill. And yet, it wasn’t the quill itself but the ink that captured the Dark One. Harvested from the rarest species of squid from the bottom of a bottomless ocean impossible to find, unless you’re a mermaid. Or me. I happen to have a private supply on a piece of parchment with Emma’s name on it. All they have to do obtain it is just blow on it.” He placed a small vial in Henry’s hand. “And
catch it in this.”

The Enchanted Forest

The hiding place Mulan believed Cora could’ve been hiding turned out to be a dead end. The sorceress was nowhere to be found and they still had hours to go before Rumplestiltskin’s cell and they stopped to rest. Phillip decided to take first watch to give all the women a chance to sleep despite Mulan, Snow and Emma’s protests while Aurora waited to find Henry again in the burning room for a new message from the other side. Her dreams, once painful and terrifying now offered her the chance to be of use to her new friends and it brought her one step closer to being reunited with her daughter.

“Hello Henry,” she greeted him once she found him in the room, the flames retreating with every step they took toward each other.

“Hi Aurora. Rumplestiltskin says that you need to look in his cell for a piece of paper with Emma’s name on it. It has squid ink on it you can use to freeze Cora. Blow on it and catch it in this.” Henry handed the vial to her. “You’ll be able to catch it in this. Good luck…and please tell Emma and Mary Margaret I can’t wait for them to come home.” He smiled. “And I’ll tell your daughter you’ll see her soon.”

“Thank you, Henry.”

She awoke a short time later, the vial clutched tightly in her hand. “Parchment with Emma’s name on it in squid ink. That’s what we’re looking for. We have to blow on the page to release the ink and catch it in this.” She stood up and brushed the dirt off her dress.

“Okay. Let’s go get some ink. In and out. Should be simple,” Emma said.

“Nothing’s ever simple in this realm,” Snow reminded her.

They heard growling and snarling as a pack of corpses began shuffling toward them.

“Oh crap!” Emma groaned. “We got the walking dead coming!”

“Emma, watch out!” Snow yelped.

“The compass. The COMPASS! You know how to kill these things?” Emma asked her mother while she started firing arrows at the zombies, the compass falling out of her pocket. She kneeled down and snatched it up.

“No. Mulan! Mulan!”

“Where is she?” Emma decapitated one with her sword.

“Hurry, hurry. Go. AURORA! Phillip!”

“You're still in one piece?”

“Yeah, pretty much.”

“Their heads!” Phillip called out when he approached them with Mulan and Aurora. “Destroy the heads!”

“That I can do!” Emma kicked one of the zombies and thrust the tip of her sword into its head. Aurora battered at another with a stick. “We gotta get the hell outta here!”
Snow rode up on her horse and held out her hand to her daughter. “Get on!”

Emma jumped onto the horse behind her mother and the pair rode off with Aurora, Mulan and Phillip behind them and soon they left the zombies behind in a cloud of dust as they raced to Rumple’s cell unaware that Cora was already there with a more compliant Hook courtesy of the heart she’d taken.

Cora held out the parchment page with the Savior’s name and blew on it, the ink hovering in the air above her. She conjured a vial and trapped the ink in it and tucked it in her cloak pocket.

“Now what do we do?” Hook demanded impatiently.

“We wait.”

“I’m done waiting. I want to skin that damned crocodile now.”

“We can’t give the portal its direction without the compass that you allowed to slip through our fingers.” She summoned his heart from its box. “Now unless you want to stay here as corpse I suggest you follow my orders.”

“No need to be hasty Cora love.”

“Quiet! We have visitors!”

She waved her hand and transformed them into rats as Snow, Emma, Aurora, Mulan and Phillip entered the cave.

“Huh. Rumplestiltskin's cell. I haven't been here since before Regina's curse. This is where he told us you were going to be the Savior.”

“He knew?”

“Oh, it was prophesized. Come on.”

“The parchment’s not here!” Aurora exclaimed.

“Gold said we would find it,” Snow reminded her.

“Well, was there anyone else in here with him? Could they have taken the ink?” Mulan inquired.

“No, he was kept alone. Visitors were forbidden. He was too dangerous to allow any human contact.”

“How'd he keep from going crazy?”

“He didn’t,” Phillip murmured. “Look.” He held his lantern up, showing Emma’s name written on the walls of the cell.

“We've looked everywhere. There's no ink in this cell.”

“Well, it has to be. He had Henry tell us it was!” Snow kicked up a pile of dust in frustration.

“Maybe something got lost in translation.”

“No. She heard right. But someone got to it before we did.”
“Yes, we did,” Cora said triumphantly when she reappeared with Hook at her side and held up the bottle of ink. She then gestured and the cell door slammed shut, trapping them inside and summoned the compass to her hand.

“Forgive us. We'd love to stay, but Storybrooke awaits.”

“Hook. Wait. Please don't do this. Our children are in Storybrooke. They need us,” Aurora pleaded.

“Perhaps you should've considered that before you abandoned me on that beanstalk,” Hook sneered.

“You would've done the same.” Emma retorted.

“Actually, no. Do you know what this is, Emma?”

“The bean that the giant kept.”

“Yes, indeed. A pirate always keeps a souvenir of his conquest, but this...well, this is much more than a mere trinket. This is a symbol...something that was once magical, full of hope, possibility. Mm. Now look at it. Dried up, dead, useless. Much like you. The time for making deals is done, just as I'm done...with you.”

“Well the feeling’s mutual, pal! But don’t think you’re gonna have an easy time of it in Storybrooke because Gold’s gonna kick both of your asses!” Emma taunted.

“We’ll see,” Cora sneered, and they teleported out.

“Open...you...worthless...prick!” Emma grunted, swinging at the cell bars with her sword.

“We aren't going to break it down, Emma. It was enchanted to hold Rumplestiltskin. We don't have a chance.”

“Yes we do. With this!” Aurora held up the travel storm coin.

“We can’t. We have to stop Cora and Hook from getting to Storybrooke,” Snow reminded them.

“We’re out of time Mary Margaret. They may already be there. Throw it Aurora!”

“We don’t even know if it will work.”

“It will work,” Phillip said confidently. “My son-in-law is no fool. Ozian travel storm tokens have been used since the beginning of time and they never fail to reach their destinations.”

“But this cell was built to dampen magic! We can’t risk it!”

“Phillip, she’s right.” Emma sighed. “I'm the Savior, and I'm not doing much saving, am I?”

“We're going to win this fight, you know. Good always defeats evil.”

“You sound like Henry.”

“Guess optimism runs in the family.”

“I think it skipped a generation.”

“You should know better than anybody. You broke the curse.
“What have I done since then? I got us stranded over here, burned down the wardrobe, let Cora get the ash, and now, the compass. The only reason I ever broke the curse was because it was exactly what Gold wanted me to do. I had nothing to do with it.”

“What are you talking about?”

“He told you I was the Savior. It was his plan. Once I fulfilled that role, maybe that's all I was ever meant to do. Everything I've ever done… He had it all mapped out before I was even born. I'm not powerful. I'm… I'm not… a Savior. I'm a name these walls. I'm a pawn, and that's exactly why we are in here. And Cora's on her way to Storybrooke.”

“We are going to get out of here.”

“How? By staring at the walls? It's not like they're going to magically open a door for us.”

“Yes they are,” Snow said with a smile. “He always finds a loophole. He had his method for escaping right in front of our faces, but he never used it. Look at the walls a little more closely Emma.”

“Squid ink! He wrote on the walls with squid ink! Come on, let’s blow this joint!”

Mulan, Phillip and Aurora stared at her. “What?”

“You heard me. BLOW!” Emma blew on the letters on the wall beside her, the others following suit the ink floating over to the bars and melting them.

“Told you. Good always wins.”

“Now let’s get the hell outta here. Aurora, toss that coin!”

“Wait.”

“Mary Margaret, you’re not suggesting we still try to go after Cora,” Emma groaned.

“We have to.”

Storybrooke

“You are certain the portal is going to open up all the way out here,” Regina asked Rumple while they stood in front of the wishing well.

“This is where Cora's going to come through,” he insisted.

“Unless it’s Snow and Emma.”

“No. They will come through at the farm as planned. Drop the potion in and we’ll begin. It doesn’t matter how comes through now. They won’t survive.”

“if it’s them Henry will never forgive us.”

“Oh, I think Emma is more clever than that. She will do as I’ve instructed.”

The Enchanted Forest
Lake Nostos

“And now the ashes. Would you care to do the honors?” Cora handed Hook the bottle with the
ashes and he poured it into the newly restored lake. A few seconds later a glowing whirlpool appeared in the water.

“Here we go. We'll be in Storybrooke soon enough. I really look forward to seeing my daughter. I told you I'd deliver you to Rumplestilskin. Now don't let go unless you want to end up some place that isn't Storybrooke,” she advised as they held the compass in their hands. An arrow zipped through the air and it shot out of her hands and onto the beach.

“You're not going anywhere!” Emma announced.

“The compass. Get it!” Snow ordered. While Aurora hid behind a tree with the travel storm token
in her hand, Phillip

“Find it first. I'll take care of them.” Cora instructed and threw a fireball at Snow. She twisted to
the size as it flew past her and felt some of her hair being singed. Hook grabbed the compass and
started running with Emma and Phillip in pursuit. Cora threw a fireball at Mulan and she held up
her sword to block it. Snow fired another volley of arrows at Cora only to have her catch them in
her hand. Hook kicked Emma’s knees out from under her and she fell on her back.

“Normally, I'd prefer to do other more enjoyable activities with a woman on her back. But with my
life on the line, you've left me no choice. Bit of advice: when I jab you with my sword, you'll feel
it. You might want to quit.”

Emma snorted and felt something metallic in her hand. “Why would I do that when I'm winning?”
She kneed him in the groin. “How’s your sword feel now, asshole!”

“Bitch!” he hissed. Emma tossed the compass to Phillip. Hook got up slowly and ran toward him
and they began to fight. “Emma, I’ll hold him off. Get your mother and Mulan, use the token and
go home!”

“We go together!”

“Why do you want to go to Storybrooke?” Mary Margaret was asking Cora. “Regina doesn’t want
you there.”

“Because my daughter needs me. And now I'm going to give her the one thing she's always
wanted: your heart. Goodbye, Snow.” Cora stalked forward ready to do just that when Emma
jumped in front of her.

“No. You want a heart, come get mine bitch but you ARE NOT TAKING MY MOTHER’S!”

“Emma!”

“Oh, you foolish girl. Don't you know? Love is weakness. Once I kill you I’ll take her heart
anyway.” She plunged her hand into the girl’s chest.

“No, it's strength.” Emma declared, bright white light emitting from her chest, transforming into an
energy blast that sent the queen flying. “What the hell was that!?"

“That is a great subject for discussion... when we get home.”

“Yeah. Let's go. Phillip! Come on.” The prince and Hook were still engaged in a duel until Hook
and Cora teleported out. “Dammit!”

The portal closed.
“Aurora, toss the coin!” Mulan yelled. Aurora stepped out from her hiding place behind the trees and tossed the coin onto the beach. A funnel cloud made of sand began to spin toward them.

“It’s a twister!” Emma cried. “We’ll get ripped apart.”

“Join hands and hold on tight. Snow, where do we need to go?” Aurora asked her.

“MacDonald’s farm.”

Emma’s eyebrows rose into her hair. “Seriously?”

“Seriously,” Snow said with a smile.

Seconds later they were swept into the cloud.

Storybrooke


“Thank God…” Regina murmured.

“We must go back to MacDonald’s farm.”

“If Emma and Snow aren’t there, we’ve killed them, and Henry will never forgive me!”

“He will in time.”

“No, he won’t. They won’t let him.”

“Do you sincerely believe your son can’t think for himself? Because if you do then I need to question his upbringing and for that I’d need to talk to you. You always had a difficult time thinking for yourself because of your mother and I’d hate to think you’ve repeated her mistake with Henry.”

I didn’t. I couldn’t have. Could I? she thought worriedly while she followed Rumple back to his car. Belle was sitting in the passenger seat with the door open reading a book, classical music playing on the stereo. She leaned across the seat and turned it off when they approached.

“Is it done?”

“It’s done,” Rumple confirmed. “Now we need to go to MacDonald’s farm and make certain Emma and Snow have followed my instructions.”

Or they would be holding a memorial service instead of a victory celebration.

The Enchanted Forest
Lake Nostos

“We failed,” Cora said sadly as she stood by the lake.

“Really, Cora. After all this time, why do you still doubt me?” Hook held up the bean necklace in triumph.

“But that bean is petrified. It’s useless.”

“But these waters have regenerative properties. Perhaps it’s time to do some gardening.”
She smiled. “Perhaps it is.” She waved her hand and the Jolly Roger appeared on the beach before them. The pair climbed about and she tossed the bean into the water and another whirlpool formed around the ship. Hook grabbed the wheel and began to steer the ship toward it. There was a brief flash of magic and suddenly there were in calm seas and he could see a port in the distance.

“There it is,” Hook announced, pointing to the shore.

“Storybrooke.” Cora smiled.
The Consequences of Introjection

Chapter by cjmoliere

Storybrooke
Twelve days prior to Final Eclipse

Once the dust from the twister settled Emma, Snow, Aurora, Phillip and Mulan found themselves in field.

“We’re home!” Snow sobbed and threw her arms around her daughter. “We’re finally home!”

“Mom!”

“Henry!” Emma ran to her son and threw her arms around him, hugging him tightly while her mother lost herself in the arms of her husband. “I missed you.”

“I missed you, too.”

“I missed you so much.”

She watched Regina approach out of the corner of her eye.

“She did it. She stopped Cora from coming here,” Henry announced.

“Um, your mom - she's... She's a piece of work, you know?”

“Indeed, I do. Welcome back Miss Swan.”

“Thanks.”

“You did it. You came back to me,” Charming murmured, kissing his wife passionately.

“Did you ever doubt I would?”

“No, but that portal gave me pause. It looked more like a twister.” He kissed her again.

“We need to talk,” Emma said when she approached Rumple and Belle. “I understand why you wanted to keep Cora out of here.”

“Just remind me never to bet against you in the future, Miss Swan.”

“It's not really a bet when the game is rigged, is it?”

“To what exactly are you referring?”

“The walls in your cell. You wrote my name all over them.”

“I just wanted to make sure it would stick.”

“The ink was there all the time. You could have gotten out.”

“I was exactly where I wanted to be. You needed to find that, so all of this could occur.”

“You created the curse, Gold. You made me the Savior. So everything I've ever done, it's exactly
 what you wanted me to do.”

“I created the curse, dearie, but I didn't make you. I merely took advantage of what you are, the product of true love. That's why you're powerful. And everything you've done, you've done yourself.”

“So, you don't know.”

“Know what?”

“Cora tried to rip my heart out, but she couldn't. She was blasted back with something inside me. By... By...”

“By magic. Whatever that was, I didn't do that. You did. And now it's time for you to learn how to use it. Come by the shop tomorrow Miss Swan and your lessons will begin.”

“But…I have a job I have to get back to…”

“Why not consider handing the Sheriff’s office over to those with more experience?” He glanced over to where Archie’s brother stood with his friends. “Those people over there are from our world but they’re also experienced officers with the San Francisco police department. Oh, don’t get me wrong Miss Swan. You’re good at your job but you still owe me a favor and I am ready to collect it. You will learn magic and help me find my son.”

“I guess I can’t refuse, can I?”

“I wouldn’t advise it dearie. You have the potential to become one of the most powerful mages in all the realms…and you can be. With the proper guidance. My shop. Nine o’clock sharp. I do not tolerate lateness.”

“Guess I’ll see you then.”

“You’re preparing her aren’t you,” Belle said when Emma walked away.

“If Regina cannot earn the right to be the Heart of the East, I am going to make damned certain Emma does.” Rumple glanced over at where Regina stood with Henry. “Cora will be on her way here. We may have destroyed the portal in the wishing well, but it is the will of the OZ that she comes here to test Regina’s resolve. She passed her first test by helping me destroy that portal but there are far more difficult tests coming and the chess pieces are moving into the proper order on the board to do so.”

“What do you need me to do?”

“Pack our things. Cora will be bringing me the globe I need to help me locate Bae.” They vanished in a puff of smoke.

“I was right. You really have changed.” Henry hugged Regina. “Thank you.”

“I’m trying my best honey.”

“Emma, Henry, come on,” Snow called out.

“You…you should go with them Henry. I’ll see you soon.”

“Well, it looks like we have some catching up to do.” Charming hugged Emma.
“You have no idea.”

“How about dinner at Granny's? On me?”

“As long as it's not chimera, I'm in. Hey, kid, you hungry?”

“Yeah. I'll see you later, Mom.” he said to Regina.

Regina watched them go, her heart sinking. Now that Emma was back she knew having Henry all to herself now would be impossible.

“Well, my dear Cora, this is where we should part ways. Thank you for... everything. It’s time for me to skin my crocodile.”

Hook started to walk away but Cora teleported into his path.

“You might want to rethink this.”

“We had a deal. Get out of my way.”

“Believe it or not, I'm doing you a favor.”

“By preventing my vengeance?”

“Ask yourself how I'm doing that.”

“By using your Dark Magic.”

“Magic is here, and that makes matters a bit more complicated. If you go off half-cocked after an empowered Rumplestiltskin, do you know what'll happen? So, you do. Good,” she said when he winced.

“Bloody hell!”

“Hey. You folks need anything? Tackle shop don't open until morning, but if you want to go out and try and snare some of New England's finest pescetarian creatures, I'd be happy to open early for ya,” a fisherman inquired when he came toward them.

“No, thank you. We're fine.”

“It's a fine vessel you got there. When'd you get in?”

“What vessel?”

“Why, that one right... “

The ship suddenly vanished.

“Hey, that's a neat trick. You some kind of magician back in our land?”

The fisherman flapped on the dock now in the form of those he used to catch. Hook kicked it into the water.

“What did you do with my ship?”

“I hid it from prying eyes. For what we both want to do, we need the element of surprise. Now you ready to listen to me?”
“Go on, Your Majesty. What now?”

“Let’s go have a little look at this Storybrooke. Shall we?” She linked her arm through his and they strolled down the dock under a cloaking spell.

Back at the loft Charming and Snow were making the most of their free time together in their bed.

“What are you thinking?” Charming asked as he kissed her.

“Oh, that it's good to be back.” She nestled in his arms.

“Yeah. And what are you really thinking?”

“Twenty-eight years is too long to wait between...”

“Hey, guess what. Taco shells were on sale. Oh crap! Come on! Not you guys too. First Archie...” Henry exclaimed when he walked in while his grandparents attempted to cover themselves.

“Apparently, tacos are not a big item in the Enchanted...oh my God!” Emma exclaimed, dropping the bag of groceries she was holding.

“What are you guys still doing in bed? It's the middle of the afternoon,” Henry pointed out. Emma frowned at her parents, wondering how they were going to explain away this one while she wanted a bottle of bleach for her eyes and Henry’s. Seeing her parents in bed doing…that…had been the last thing she expected to walk into!

“The trip back was tiring, and I needed to rest,” Snow lied.

“And I needed to... help her... rest.” Charming added.

“Uh, let's-let's go make the tacos. We have to make a lot because there's gonna be a ton of people at Granny's welcome back party tonight. Go on Henry.”

“We thought you were gonna be back later,” Snow whispered.

“Yeah, well, we weren't, so maybe next time you could put a tie on the door or send a text or... You know what? I’m...I'm gonna go make some tacos.” She shook her head and walked away, certain she wouldn’t get that sight out of her mind for very long time.

“It's impressive that we can still provide her with a few traumatic childhood memories at this stage of the game,” Charming joked and Snow started laughing. “Come on.”

“And we need to get a new place….one with more doors…and locks!”

Emma and Henry were covering their eyes when the couple walked into the kitchen.

“You can put your hands down now. We’re decent.”

Thank God,” Emma muttered.

Rumple held a seeing globe in one hand, observing while Hook and Cora explored the town through a second cloaking spell while another kept the Jolly Roger invisible from prying eyes while another moved a chess piece into position on the board he kept set up in the backroom of his workshop. Belle stood at the worktable practicing some spells from her copy of Cora’s book. She waved her hand over the dying rose she’d plucked from their gardens and it began to bloom again then conjured a glass dome to place it in. Rumple smiled softly.
“The enchanted rose. What do you intend to do with that, sweetheart?”

“I thought it was time we had one. We have the chipped cup, the magic mirror but not the rose. They’re here aren’t they? Cora and Hook.”

“Yes, and soon she’ll come to me and offer me a deal. The tracking globe in exchange for Regina. But first, we have to take care of her pirate companion.”

“Leave that to us.”

Archie and Az’s sudden appearance startled Belle while she was performing another spell and she blasted Rumple accidently, throwing him to the floor.

“Archie! Warn us before you drop in like that,” Rumple snapped as he got to his feet. Archie and Az took one look at him and burst into laughter. “Now what’s so funny dearies?”

“Rumple, you ahhh…might want to look in a mirror.” Az giggled.

“Rumple, oh God I’m so sorry!” Belle moaned.

Rumple walked over to the mirror, horrified at the sight that met his eyes. His hair was now purple and sticking up in spikes, he had a nose ring, black lipstick on his lips and a spiked collar around his neck. His Armani suit had been transformed into a Sex Pistols t-shirt with black leather pants and steel toed boots.


“Well you were listening to Anarchy In the UK this morning;” she defended. “And I was going to try the transformation spell on myself until they startled me. So what brings you here?”

“Something we found on the docks while we were taking Pongo and Perdy for a walk. The Jolly Roger. It’s here under a cloaking spell,” Archie said. “Anarchy In The UK?” He made a face. “I’ll take the White Album by the Beatles over that but…yes, the Jolly Roger is at the harbor under a cloaking spell.”

“Of course, it is. Now, how are you proposing to take care of our mutual pirate and witch problem?”

“Have a seat. This is going to take a while.”

Later that night new and old residents of the town gathered at Granny’s Diner for a grand celebration of Snow and Emma’s return. Emma was nervous about meeting the officers of the San Francisco police department knowing that any one of them was more qualified to be in her position and her father’s.

“I can’t believe it…Archie a twin. Where is he by the way?” she asked David.

“Ummm…he’s making a cake and said he’s gonna be a little late.”

Cora and Hook stepped out from behind a corner watching a clean shaven and nicely dressed Archie walking toward the diner with a cake pan in his hands.

“Commander Ozopov! Bloody hell!” he cursed.

Cora withdrew the vial of squid ink from her satchel and threw it on Archie who promptly froze.
“I’ll take that!” Cora snatched the cake out of his frozen hands and transformed into him. “Take him back to the ship,” she instructed Hook. “The cuff will block his magic but with just the right motivation he’ll chirp and tell us Rumplestiltskin’s weakness.”

“You’ll never get away with this!”

“Oh, but I think we will. Come along mate,” Hook taunted. Cora gestured, and they vanished in a puff of smoke unaware of the crickets pursuing them. Hook dragged his captive down to the storage hold and locked him in, securing one of Cora’s magic dampening cuffs around his wrist before the ink wore off, unaware that it was merely the construct he’d captured.

They bought it! Archie chirped to Rumple.

Of course, they did, Rumple chirped back. That pirate can’t tell his arse from a hole in the ground and Cora is a novice compared to me, but your brother had best be careful. Cora would not hesitate to kill him too if he lets on she’s a fake.

He’ll be careful. Now let’s go find out what she’s up to.

The pair flew back to the diner and took their positions on one of the window ledges while Cora circulated among the guests as Archie. Finally, she approached his brother and wife.

“How is Emma taking you being here?” she asked David.

“Ah, she seems okay with it. Where’s Az? I thought she’d come tonight.”

“Oh…ahhh…resting,” Cora lied quickly. “Why don’t you come and have a piece of cake. You won’t be sorry.”

“David, what’s wrong with Archie? He looks different and he’s acting strange,” Beth whispered in her husband’s ear.

“Because that’s not him. It’s a fake…and not one he made,” he whispered back and snapped his fingers at his friends. They quickly excused themselves and made their way to the men’s room. Archie and Rumple flew off the ledge and followed them in. Terry was checking the stalls while Jim blocked the door with his body. It was a running joke at their old station they had a habit of bursting in on each other in there to talk about cases or personal issues.

“What’s going on Molk?” he asked.

“That’s not Archie out there and it’s not a construct he made either so look sharp. There might be trouble.”

“Indeed, there will be dearies but not yet,” Rumple said as he took human form, Archie following suit.

“Cora is here with Captain Hook,” Archie informed him. “She’s the one glamoured to look like me. I don’t know what she’s up to, but you cannot let on that you know she’s a fake. Hook has my construct down at the docks and I think I know why. I have information on everyone in the town and they’re going to try to get it out of him.”

“So, let’s go get him!” Edgar exclaimed.

“Not yet. We’re setting a trap for Cora and Hook and right now and he’s one of the pieces of bait we’re gonna use to lure them in. Now dearies, put on your best smiles and go out there like
nothing’s amiss but keep your eyes and ears open.”

“It’s okay. We got this,” David assured him.

“….Tacos. I cannot tell you the relief of cooking something that I didn't have to kill first,” Emma was saying when they reentered the dining room.

“Don't I know it. Meatloaf back home? What a bitch.” Granny grouched.

Charming tapped his glass for attention. “I just wanted to, uh, thank you all for joining us tonight. Mary Margaret and I, we have a saying, that we will always find each other, and while I believe that with all my heart, I'd like you all to raise your glasses and join me when I say, here's to not having to look for a while. To Mary Margaret and Emma.” He raised his glass just as the door opened and Regina walked in with a pan in her hands.

“Sorry I'm late.”

“What is she doing here?” Leroy grabbed a knife.

“I invited her. We're celebrating today, because of Regina too. She helped us get home and deserves to be here. No matter what she did in the past, we owe her our thanks now.” Emma informed her parents.

“Didn't you think to tell us about it?”

“I did, but you two were a little busy this afternoon, David.”

“Emma! She tried to kill us!”

“No, she didn't, Mary Margaret. Not recently. She's trying to change for Henry. He believes in her, and right now that's enough for me. I couldn't have changed if I wasn't given a chance, so... she gets one, too.”

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“I'm glad you came, Mom.” Henry said with a smile.

“Me, too. Oh, I made lasagna.”


“Red pepper flakes. Gives it some kick.”

She could feel all eyes on her and immediately regretted accepting Emma’s invitation, even if it was for Henry’s sake. They would all still see her as the Evil Queen no matter what she did. She picked up the pan and walked out.

“Mom!” Henry cried.

“Stay here kid. I got this!” Emma said and hurried after her.

“Archie made a cake. You don't want to stay for a piece?” she asked her as she was about to get in her Mercedes.

“I'm fine. Thank you.”

“Okay.”
“Thank you.”

“You just said that.”

“F..For inviting me.”

“Henry wanted it. I'm glad you guys got to spend some time together.”

“Me, too. I'd like to see him more. Maybe you'd consider letting him stay over some time. I have his room just... just waiting for him.”

“Ah. I'm...I'm not sure that's best.”

“Because you know so much about parenting in the five minutes you've been with him. Talk to your father. At least he took care of him while you were away, like I did, during the ten years you were away the first time.”

“Okay. Thanks for coming.”

“No. Wait I'm sorry. I... Emma, I'm...I'm sorry. Snapping at you...I shouldn't have done that. Will you accept my apology?”

“Okay. You're right. Archie said you were trying to change, and, well, you are.”

“Dr. Hopper said I was trying?”

“He said you came to see him, that you're trying not to use magic, that you're trying to be a better person. You understand, I was hesitant to invite you, but I did and when I asked him tonight at the party he thought it was a good idea.”

“Thank you it was. I should be going.”

She was going to kill that cricket.

“Well, is she broken?” Hook asked from the rooftop where they were spying on her from, Cora having given the excuse that Archie had early appointments to explain her hasty exit.

“Not yet. But she will be...and then she'll need me.”

The next morning Regina sat in her Mercedes watching as Archie came out of his house with his dog on his leash, taking him for his morning walk around the town. When he reached the docks, she turned the car off and waited for him when he turned around to walk back into town.

“Beautiful day isn't it, Regina?”

“Why should I answer you, bug?”

“What the hell has gotten into you?” he demanded angrily. “I'm making friendly conversation.”

“That you'll just repeat to anyone with an ear. You told Ms. Swan about our sessions,” she accused.

“Now how would I have done that when she’s been in the Enchanted Forest and I was in the OZ?”

“I came to you in confidence. How am I supposed to prove to people I've changed when you're there to chirp in their ears and remind them of my past or have your construct do it for you?”
“I would never betray the doctor-patient confidentiality.”


“No, I got my education in the OZ. And need I remind you the curse was altered in my case.”

“Hey. Is everything okay here?” Ruby asked when she jogged over to them, concerned for Archie’s safety.

“Private conversation. Go take yourself for a walk.” Regina snapped.

Ruby glanced over at Archie.

“I’m fine. Go on.” A reluctant Ruby jogged away.

“I can be trusted. I assure you.”

“You’re lucky I’ve changed.”

Archie gestured, and Regina was lifted off her feet. “Need I remind you of what I can do to you if you keep threatening me? I was not at that party last night in this form, but I was as a cricket.” He dropped her. “Neither was my construct, but someone was and they were glamored to look like me.”

“You know who it was,” she said as she got her feet.

“Yes, I do.”

“Who?”

“Your mother.”

Regina paled. “She…she’s here?”

“Regina, I want you to listen to me…dammit don’t you turn away when I’m talking to you! Listen to me. You have to be strong now. You have to be stronger than you ever have before no matter what she tells you, no matter what she promises you.”

“I want Henry back,” she sobbed. “They won’t let me see him. It doesn’t matter how I good I am. I’ll always be the Evil Queen.”

“This is exactly what she wants. To see you broken so she can swoop in and get you to do what she wants you to do but you cannot let her win Regina.”

“I just…want Henry back…”

“Then let me keep working with you,” he pleaded. “It’s not going to be an easy path but eventually everyone is going to see that you’re not the Evil Queen anymore.”

“Do people still see you as the Commander?”

“Yes,” he sighed. “But I intend to change that.” He glanced over to where the Jolly Roger was anchored. “Courtesy of an old enemy.”

She shook her head. “It won’t matter. They’ll always see the darkness in you like they do in me.”
“Let’s discuss this somewhere more private.” Archie flicked his wrist and they vanished in a puff of smoke.

Az was waiting for them at MacDonald’s farm when they returned and threw up a cloaking spell. The former queen was surprised when the younger woman embraced her. “You won’t fight this alone Regina. We’ll be with you all the way because we know how hard it is for you. We’ve lived it.”

“Regina, you have the chance to be so much more than the Evil Queen and we’re going to make damned sure you are.” Archie summoned his katana and handed another to her.

“I know how to sword fight Archie.”

“How?”

“Graham. He taught me years ago.”

“But you’re a little rusty?”

“Yes.”

“Brushing up on your sword skills isn’t the only thing I’m going to teach you Regina. I’m going to teach you how to finally break that hold your mother has on you.” He swung his sword at her. She raised her own to block it. “Psychological warfare is what your mother has been raging on you for years. Now you’re going to learn how to fight it and win. Okay Dellia, let’s begin!”

Later that evening Pongo lay in his bed sleeping and was suddenly awakened hearing the voice of the construct speaking to Regina.

“I know it's late, but I was hoping we can talk.”

“Sure. Come on in. Hush, Pongo. You know ReginaI know how hard it is. Real change can often be...a struggle.” He went over to his filing cabinet and opened it, pulling out Regina’s folder.

Pongo began barking frantically. Evil! Evil!

“I couldn't agree more.”

“Regina, is there something...” he began when he turned around. Regina lifted him in the air and began to strangle him then froze Pongo. Once the construct was dead she let the body fall to the floor and left the office.

“….Everyone will think that was me!” Regina whispered, handing the seeing globe back to Az while they sat in the living room at MacDonald’s farm. “Henry will think that was me!”

“And that is exactly what she’s counting on,” Az said. “Bastinda killed my sister using my body but everyone believed it was me...everyone except Archie. I was sent to the Northern Island to fend for myself when I was only thirteen. My mother didn’t care whether I lived or died but she cared enough about DG to resurrect her. Bastinda took full advantage of my exile and tried her damndest to gain complete control of me but she couldn’t...as long as I had Archie. His love, his belief in me, was strong enough to subdue her for so many years.”

“That’s not the construct I made or my brother. My construct’s still on the Jolly Roger and David is safe at home but she sent another construct to my office and killed it. Once the body’s found, they’re gonna be looking at you because of our argument at the docks. Ruby saw it and she’s going
“to tell them,” Archie added.

“Damn you Mother!” Regina cursed. “You’re trying to turn them all against me, even Henry! I will not lose Henry!”

“You won’t!”

“How?”

“With this.” Az gestured, and a construct of Regina appeared in the room. “You will stay here with us under our protection. Your construct will act and speak for you since it has all your memories and you can switch places with it at any time but make sure you do it at the proper times.”

“My mother will see right through her.”

“No, she won’t. She couldn’t see through Archie’s construct and she won’t with this one.” The construct vanished.

“Tomorrow’s going to be a hard day,” Archie advised.

Regina sighed. “I can’t say I’ve had worse.”

“I’m sorry but in case you get any wild ideas about going after your mother…” Archie held out his hand and blew on it.

“Ozian poppies!” she moaned and collapsed on the sofa.

Early the next morning Pongo raced out of the office and across the street to the diner where he found Henry and Emma having breakfast.

“Hey, Pongo. It’s okay.” Pongo continued barking and ran outside. Henry got up and followed him.

“Where’s Archie? He’d never let Pongo wander around like this.”

“Emma! Something’s wrong,” Ruby cried when she ran out of the diner and over to Pongo.

Archie. Come to the office. Quickly! He sent to her.

“How do you know? Never mind. The wolf thing. You know what? Eleven is old enough to walk to the bus stop. I’ll pick you up later, Henry!”

“Okay.”

The moment Emma and Ruby reached the office, Emma had an uneasy feeling in the pit of her stomach. The door was unlocked and slightly ajar.

“Archie? Archie? Oh, hell,” she whispered when she kneeled down to examine him, his skin feeling cold to the touch.

“What? What is it?” Ruby asked.

Archie. He..he’s gone.”

“No. No!”

“Who would do this?”
“I think I know. Regina. She argued with Archie yesterday. I saw them. She killed him!” Ruby sobbed.

Emma took out her phone. “David…you’d better get over to Archie’s office right away. Something’s happened.”

“What is it?” Charming asked.

“He’s dead…” Emma croaked.

“Oh God…Emma…his brother’s right outside. He has to be told before everyone else. I’m bringing him with me.”

“No…”

“I have to.”

“And I gotta tell his wife….oh my God! His wife! And I have no idea where she is!”

“Maybe…we’d better let Molk do it.”

“Yeah…I’ll…ahh…see you then.”

Charming took a deep breath before he opened his office door and walked into the vending room where David was putting some change into the slot and punched a number.

“Uhh…Molk…?”

“Hey.”

“Something’s happened…with…with Archie.”

“What’s happened?”

“Pongo came over to the diner a little bit ago…he wasn’t on his leash so Emma and Ruby followed him over to Archie’s office and…”

“And what?”

“They…they found him….oh God…David I’m so sorry.”

“No…no! My brother is NOT dead. I would know! I would feel it!”

David….stop! Don’t say anything else and listen to me.

Archie?

It’s a construct dead in my office but not one I created but when you go over there I need you to act like it’s me. Understand?

What the hell’s going on!?

A trap for Cora and Hook. And I’m part of the bait.

Oh boy! Does Az know?

Yes. Tell Beth and your crew but NO ONE ELSE and use mindspeak only! Be careful.
“Can you?” Charming was asking him.

“I wanna see him. I wanna see my brother,” he said through tears. He was silent during the drive but only to Charming while his mind was carrying on multiple conversations with the people he trusted the most and when he arrived at the crime scene he played the part of the grieving brother perfectly.

“I….I gotta tell Az. It’d be better if she heard it from me. She…she’s at my house with Beth and Jasper.”

“Deputy Molk…David….I’m so sorry,” Emma said softly.

“Just…just get that bitch!” he hissed.

“We will. We will,” Emma assured him.

“I’ll drive you home,” Charming offered.

“And I’m bringing Regina in.” Emma grabbed her phone. “Hello, Madam Mayor. I need you to come down to the station. Yes, now or I’ll come down there and get you myself!” She hung up. “She’s on her way. Acted surprised but she’s on her way.”

“I’ll meet you there.”

“Glad to see the sheriff’s station's now a family business. Why am I here?” Regina’s construct inquired with a smirk when they returned to the police station to find her sitting in the interview room. “Your newest deputies wouldn’t tell me anything.”

“You know why you're here. Because of Archie.” Emma said coldly.

“Oh, it's now against the law to get into an argument with someone?”

“It is if you go to their office later that night and kill 'em,” Charming pointed out. “We may not be experienced police officers, but we know a murder when we see it!”

“Archie's dead?”

“Stop it, Regina. Ruby saw you going into his office last night.”

“Then she's lying. I was home all evening. After everything I've done to change, to win Henry back, why would I toss it all away now? And if I did, and I was going to kill Archie, you would never know it. The fact that he's dead and you "caught" me shows sloppiness.”

“You've been caught before. Come on, Emma. Who do you think is lying Ruby or her? She's incapable of change, no matter how many times we've given her the chance. Why should this time be any different? We’ve got you…and there’ll be no mercy for you this time! But we’re not the ones who are going to kill you. Archie’s wife will.”

He spun on his heel and left the office, slamming the door behind him, finding the SFPD homicide inspectors waiting for him.

“Did she confess?” Jim asked.

“She’s still denying it. I’m going to go search Archie’s office, see what we can find.”
“Let us go with you,” Jim pleaded.

“I’m sorry…but we’d like to handle this ourselves.”

“Afraid we can do a better job? Is that it?”

“Hildy!”

“No Terry, we know what we’re looking for and can find it faster than they can. Molk’s family. Archie’s family”

“Enough!” Charming snapped. “This is the Evil Queen we’re dealing with and Snow and I have more experience dealing with her than you. Right now, I want all of you to stay close to Molk and his family and if Regina comes anywhere near them you call me!”

He was not surprised when their search of the office turned up another damning piece of evidence, Regina’s missing patient file yet despite all the evidence staring in her face, Emma continued to have her doubts, convinced that Rumple had committed another of his famous frame jobs.

“Oh, well, that looks delicious. Thank you very much, Belle,” Rumple said to her when she arrived at the shop with their lunch. She was about to unpack it when Emma, David and Snow walked in.

“Ah. Nothing warms the heart more than a family reunited. You have your mother's chin, Ms. Swan.”

“We know that you killed him.”

“And your father's tact.”

“Someone's dead?” Belle asked though she already knew the answer, but they were none the wiser.

“Dr. Hopper.”

“Why on earth would you think I had anything to do with that?”

“Because all the evidence points to Regina.”

“And she's not possibly capable of doing something so vile?”

“It's a frame job.”

“It wouldn't be the first time you used someone to try to hurt her. You used me and Kathryn to set her up the last time!” Snow reminded him.

“Nice to see your memory's still intact, dearie, but this time, I'm afraid I'm gonna have to disappoint you. It wasn't me.”

“Why should we believe you?” Charming demanded.

“Because I can prove it. Ask the witness.”

“No one was there.”

“Well, that's not strictly true, now is it? Bring Pongo. He was the witness and he can tell us what really happened last night. Bring him.”
“This is ridiculous!” Charming protested.

“David…come on. It’s worth a try,” Emma pleaded. “He’s out in the car.” Charming rolled his eyes and went outside to retrieve the still grieving Dalmatian from the car.

Do animals get Oscars? Pongo sent to Rumple who was fighting the urge not to laugh. Archie owes me a dozen of them for this show I’m putting on.

Well it’s not the first one you’ve done now is it Pallux?

Call me that again and I’ll shred your Armanis.

Would you like to be neutered?

Ha ha. Get on with it.

“Hey, boy. Good boy. Good boy. Good boy,” he soothed and petted the dog’s head.

Your breath smells like my ass.

Yours smells like the filthiest toilet in Scotland.

Wanna take a swim in it?

Sod off!

“I, uh, I didn't know you were such a dog person. We had a cat but…” Belle murmured.

“Well, a long time ago, in another life, I got to know a sheepdog or two.”

“That's fascinating. But unless you speak dog, how is Pongo gonna tell us anything?” Emma inquired.

“Through magic, of course. It won't allow us to communicate, but it will allow us to... extract his memories.”

“Extract?” Charming didn’t like the sound of that one bit.

“You don't have to worry. He won't feel a thing.”

“Why should we trust you? Couldn't you just as easily use magic to fool us?”

“Because I’m not gonna be the one using magic, Emma. You are though you missed your first lesson this morning. I expect you to keep your appointments after this little puzzle we have is solved.”

“Me? How?”

“You have it within you. Told me so yourself. You witnessed it, didn't you?” he asked Snow as he took one of his dream catchers out of the cabinet.

“Emma, you don't have to do this.”

“If it tells us something about Archie's death, so be it.”

“Now... you know what this is?”
Emma felt her heart stop. “A dream catcher.”

Neal…

“Well… it's capable of catching so much more.” He brushed it over Pongo’s back allowing the memories he had to be transferred to the dream catcher. It began to glow.

“What is that?” Belle inquired.

“Memories. Now Ms. Swan…you show us how.”

I’ll teach you this later sweetheart, he sent to Belle.

“How? It’s just a jumble.”

“Will it. Will it, and we shall all see.”

“I can’t.”

“Yes, you can. Focus.”

Emma gazed into the dreamcatcher and focused and suddenly an image formed of Archie’s office the scene playing out exactly as Pongo saw it the night before. Now firmly convinced of Regina’s guilt, Emma stormed out of the shop ready to put an end to her terror once and for all, not knowing Cora was observing everything glamored as a cat.

“You insult the species, dearie!” Rumple hissed and cast a stronger ward on the shop while he and Belle went to the backroom to enjoy their lunch.

“Miss Swan. I assume you're here to apologize.” Regina said when they arrived at the mansion, swapping places with her construct in preparation for a magical attack while Archie and Az observed through their seeing globe.

“I saw you do it.”

“What?”

“I saw it. You choked the life out of Archie.”

“What are you talking about? How is that even possible?”

“Magic,” Charming clarified.

“You…”

“I saw what happened, and it was you.”

“Gold. He helped you. You're going to trust him, of all people, when he's probably the one behind this?”

“We didn't trust him. That's why Emma used magic instead.”

“You can use magic… The Savior. Of course. Well, I can only assume he warned you then.”

“About what?”

“That magic always comes with a price.”
“Yeah? Well, that's a price we're both going to pay.”

“How's that?”

“Henry. He believed in you. His heart's going to break. That's both our prices.”

“No. I will not let you poison Henry against me!”

“It's an interesting word choice, since you already did.”

“I want to see him. He deserves to hear my side of the story! He's my son!”

“He's not! He's mine! And, after this, you're not getting anywhere near him! Do it!”

Blue teleported in and threw an orb of fairy dust at her. Regina caught it in her hand, thinking how impressed Archie would be that his lesson had worked.

“Did you really think that would work again?” She threw the orb back at Snow and Charming. “So much for fairy dust. Maybe some of your newfound magic can save you now.”

“I don't need it. I already won. There is no way Henry will swallow your lies about Archie now. You can pretend all you want, but we know how you are, and who you will always be.”

Regina vanished in a puff of smoke. Archie and Az were waiting for her on the porch when she returned to the farm.

“Your construct’s back in place?” Archie asked her.

“Yes. But Emma’s right. We’re both going to pay the price by breaking his heart.”

“You underestimate him Regina. He’s smarter than you think.”

“I know he’s a smart boy, but my mother’s plan is working perfectly. She knows Henry is my weakness and she’s going to exploit him as long as she can.”

“No, she’s not because tomorrow the gloves come off and we hit back with everything we’ve got.”

Snow, Charming and Emma stood on the street waiting for Henry’s bus to arrive.

“Henry's bus is going to be here any minute.”

“You can do this,” Snow encouraged.

“Tell my son that someone he loved was killed by someone else he cares about? I don't know if I can. Yeah, I don't think I can do any of this. This is like real parent stuff. How can I be a parent if I never was one?”

“I know. I've been asking myself the same question,” David lamented.

“Oh, no. You guys don't have to... It...It's different.”

“No, it isn't. And yes, we have to. We can figure it out. So can you.”

“You don't know me. You don't know what I was before Storybrooke. And trust me, I was not parent material.”

“Yeah, but we know who you are since you've been here.”
“What if I revert? Regina did.”

“You're not going to. And the Emma I know was great with Henry.”

“I was his parent for five minutes.”

“And I was yours for five minutes, too, but things are different now, for all of us. We don't have to go through any of it alone. We're family.”

Seconds later the bus pulled up.

“Emma. I told you I could walk myself.” Henry said he got off the bus when he approached him.

“I know. Something happened, and... I want you to hear it from me first.”

“What is it?”

“Come here.”

He heard the words, but he would not allow himself to believe them, to believe that the only father figure he'd ever known was dead and that his mother was responsible. He buried his face in Emma's shoulder and began to cry while Regina’s construct wept from inside her Mercedes while her counterpart’s tears splashed onto a seeing globe and Cora observed from a rooftop smiling with satisfaction.

Regina waved her hand over the seeing globe, unable to bear any more.

The moment they got Henry home he went upstairs to his room and locked the door behind him.

“Henry! Henry!” Emma cried, pounding frantically.

“I just wanna be alone!” he cried. “Leave me alone!”

He lay down on his bed and clutched the blanket Regina had given him, weeping softly until he could see a faint beam of red light inside his backpack. He unzipped it and took out his staff, the eyes glowing red. As he held it in his hands, the mouth of the dragon opened and blew out a white mist.

The winds of truth….look my master. Look and see the truth.

Henry gazed into the mist and could see an image of Archie’s office.

That’s not Archie. Archie has a beard and mustache. It’s his construct!

He kept watching as Regina strangled the construct and let the body fall on the floor then walked out of the office. Soon a cloud of blue smoke enveloped her and when it cleared Cora was in her place.

I knew it! She’s innocent! It’s Cora! Mom! Mom! I have to tell them.

No, my master. You must wait.

But why?

Because this is your mother’s test to prove that she is willing to become whom she is meant to be.
But she thinks I hate her…that I think she did this.

Then you must go to her.

How?

By flying on my wings. Hold tight master and I will take you to her.

But…they won’t let me alone forever. They’ll try to get in!

A Henry construct appeared on the bed beside him. “Go. She needs you.”

Hold tight master and let us fly.

A cloud of silver smoke surrounded Henry and he vanished. Moments later he reappeared on the front porch of MacDonald’s farm and could see his mother through the window. She was sitting on the sofa hugging a photograph of him, tears streaming down her cheeks. Archie sat beside her trying his best to comfort her. He took his cellphone out of his pocket and called her.

“Regina, don’t answer it,” Archie advised. She picked it up and looked at the screen. “I have to. It’s Henry.”

“It might be Cora!”

“Mother knows nothing about this land’s technology. Hello?”

“Mom?”

“Henry!” she murmured.

“They told me…what they think you did…that you killed Archie.”

“I’m so sorry honey but I didn’t kill him. I wouldn’t.”

“I know you didn’t. Look out the window.”

Regina pushed back the curtain to see Henry standing on the porch, waving his hand at her while he talked on his phone.


Archie grinned. “Of course, we did. Wards that only kin to a Strogoff or Ozopov can pass through.”

“Wait…what? Henry is….but that’s not possible!”

She jumped off the sofa and ran outside, hugging him. “Oh, I am so glad to see you but Henry, you shouldn’t have come.”

“I had to see you and make sure you were okay.”

She smiled through her tears. “You’ve always believed me, loved me, no matter what I did.”

“You’re my mom.”

“So is Emma honey and right now…you need to be with her.”
“But this isn’t right! You’re innocent. Archie, you have to go back to town and tell them!”

“We can’t yet Henry. Cora is still out there and she’s going to make her move now that she thinks Regina’s broken.”

“But you’re not broken. You can do this. You can fight her,” Henry insisted, taking his mother’s hands in his and suddenly they began to glow.

“Yes!” Archie exclaimed. “Dellia! Get out here, quick!”

“Archie, what’s going on…oh my goddess!”

“What…what is this?” Regina gasped.

“Nothing can hurt you if you’re together,” Az whispered. “Come in the house. We have a lot to talk about.”

Mother and son’s hands continued to glow as they walked back into the house.

“You're back. So did you get what you wanted?” Hook asked Cora when she returned to the ship.

“Yes. My daughter's lost everything now.”

“Ah. Well, aren't you mum of the year?”

“I did what was needed.”

“What about what I need? You promised you'd help me get my revenge on Rumplestiltskin.”

“And you will, but you must be patient.”

He was running out of patience.

As they viewed the day’s events in the Seeing Globe, Rumple picked up the Red Queen and moved her to another space on the chessboard while Belle picked up the Black Queen and moved her.

“Regina is ours. Another few moves,” she murmured. “But Emma has a way to go yet.”

“With these moves we take back Bae and send Cora and Hook where they belong. Ephesis!” Rumple cried triumphantly and demonstrated using the pieces. “You’re becoming quite the player, Belle.”

“I learned from the best, dearie!”

And gods help anyone who dared to play the game better.
Lately my son I feel ashamed
For many things that have happened
And are happening again
Really my son I thought we'd learn
From what I see around me it's a very tough world
But all I can hope is that you take it as a challenge
To create something new that will take you far and
Hope that you can manage
Scatter some hope, 'cause it's not too late
To repair the damage
The only way it can be, so easy to see
Is I am here for you, and you are here for me
It's an ongoing process
I will take care of you and you will take care of me
If we're gonna make some progress

Gloria Estefan - I Am Here For You (Nayib's Song)

Storybrooke, Maine

Eleven Days Prior to The Final Eclipse

Holding her son's hand in hers, Regina felt at peace for the first time in so many years. Just when she felt compelled to sink back into the darkness once again, he'd thrown her a lifeline and pulled her back to safety. She now felt confident that she could be strong enough to change and she wanted to...for him. He was the truest love she'd ever had, and she would give her life to protect him.

Henry led her over to the sofa and Regina gasped when she saw the silver dragon's head staff sitting on top of his backpack.

"You...you're the East Guardian!" she exclaimed.

"I am the East Guardian and the keeper of the staff of air," Henry declared. "And the last of the Strogoff bloodline."

"You're Rumple's grandson? Archie, is this...?"
"It's true Regina. Now you know why I was sent here. My duty was to protect him until his bondmate was ready to do so herself. And now I am proud to say she is."

"Emma?! But Archie, a bonding like yours is like that of lovers!" Her face paled. "How can you endorse something so vile?"

"Henry's bonding is unique Regina, It's the strongest one there can be, that of a mother to a child and Emma wasn't chosen to be the Heart of the East Guardian. You were. That's why I was so harsh with you once I regained my memory. Henry needs you to be strong for him now more than ever because now every dark mage in the realms will be hunting him now that he's revealed himself."

"Who are they?" Regina demanded angrily.

"The Dark Ones for one."

"You mean Rumple isn't the only one?"

"No and Alemedia's control over him is weak now because Belle and Henry are keeping him anchored to his humanity. Once we find Baelfire he'll be strong enough to cast her out of his soul. Getting her out of the other two is gonna be a little harder and that's why the rest of us have to be at full strength in eleven days or Aramon's prophecy is going to come true."

Regina gasped. "No…no! Archie, you KNOW what that prophecy says will happen!"

"Mom, what's Aramon's prophecy?" Henry inquired of her.

"The destruction of our world, of Nonestica," she murmured. "Centuries ago the god Aramon foresaw that someone would destroy the emerald that stored our goddess Lurline's life force. Once that happened everyone left in our world would die and we would be trapped in this world forever. And we would see the destruction happening as the price we would pay for our survival."

"Can we stop it, Archie?"

"The only way its possible is if all eight Guardians are united and at full strength. We have to subdue Alemedia and banish her back to the Ozian Hell Realm, Ephesis. Rumple has one more trial to endure before he's ready to banish her and he cannot face it until he's reunited with Baelfire. You have more trials to endure too Regina, but I am confident these are battles you can win."

"My mother. I have to face my mother, don't I?"

Archie nodded. "And Rumple has to face his father because they both want the one thing that binds you…Henry. They know how powerful Henry is and will be and they want that power for themselves."

"Never!" Regina hissed.

"Are you prepared to protect your child until your last breath Regina Mills?" Az demanded.

"I am," she declared. Suddenly a cloud of smoke surrounded her, and her pantsuit transformed into black satin robes with an apple embroidered on the back. In her hands was a katana sword with an apple engraved on it. Az waved her hand and the group vanished. Moments later they reappeared in the sitting room of Rumple's Victorian mansion. Rumple's eyes filled with tears of pride at the woman he loved like a daughter. She had at last accepted the role the OZ had for her; to protect and love his grandson until her last breath. Not knowing why she was doing it, Regina clenched her
hand into a fist and pressed it against her shoulder, kneeling.

"I couldn't have chosen a better protector for my grandson," Rumple murmured and helped her to her feet. "But you won't be fighting alone Regina. You and Emma must protect Henry together. That is my will and the will of the OZ. Has Archie explained what must be done?"

She nodded. "I have to face her one more time...and you have to face your father." She sighed. "Our darkness was born with them Rumple. We feared becoming them so much that we weren't strong enough to resist doing it." She held out her hand to Henry. He clasped it in hers and reached for Rumple's with his free hand. Archie, Belle and Az watched with amazement as a shield formed over them. "But we'll defeat them together. For Henry, for each other and for ourselves."

"There is another danger we all face Regina that you must be aware of."

Rumple went on to tell her of the looming threat of his father's minions, the cult of mage destroyers known as the Home Office. He summoned his copy of the files Archie's brother had given him and gave them to her to read through. One of her counterparts in the parallel world known as the Wish Realm barely escaped their clutches and she was now hiding in Seattle along with Rumple, Belle and a reformed Hook's counterparts, also targets of the cult. The other Rumple and Hook were Seattle PD detectives under the names Weaver and Rogers while the other Regina lived under the name Veronica and owned a bar with her sister Zelena aka Kelly, the reformed Wicked Witch of the West and Rumple's fraternal twin daughters by Cora along with Regina's husband Robin. Weaver's son Baelfire worked in the violent crimes division at the FBI along with the Wish Realm's Emma while his younger brother Gideon worked in vice for the Seattle PD.

"You've spoken to Weaver?"

"A few times since Archie's counterpart gave me the number to contact him. He broke his curse years ago. He hasn't seen any trace of the Home Office in Seattle in two years, but they killed at least six people there. Now we know they were last in San Francisco because they killed a Cinderella and Snow White from another Enchanted Forest."

"How many other worlds are there?"

"We don't know. Isaac, that's Archie's counterpart, has found five so far and says the doors to the Storybrookes for each one become visible when we need to see them. The doors are right outside our town line but ours is the first one that was created. I'm not certain how the others came into existence."

"Alemedia," Az spoke up. "She created the other worlds and rumor has it she had her mother reborn into one of them without her memory to torture her father."

"It's highly unlikely she kept Persephone alive, dearie. Alemedia was fiercely jealous of her mother. And speaking of mothers, we need to discuss how we are going to take care of yours, dearie."

"Rumple, part of me still loves her. You understand, don't you? Doesn't a part of you still love your father?"

His eyes narrowed to slits. "That part of me died centuries ago in Neverland! And he died again the day Pan tried to take MY son from ME. I will not allow myself to be enthralled by him again. He was a liar, a cheat and a poor excuse for a father and I....I'm as bad as he was. I abandoned my son."
"No. You spent centuries trying to find him. That's what makes you different," Belle insisted, taking his hands in hers. "And we will find him. Together."

"Then why can't we imprison Mother somewhere she can't harm anyone else."

"We can." Rumple held out his hand and a strange box appeared in it.

"Rumple! Is that…" Belle exclaimed, her eyes wide with interest.

"Pandora's Box. But it does much more than contain the realms' darkest evils, dearie. It is also a gateway to one of Ephesis' worst prisons, The Realm of the Forgotten. There is another gateway in the OZ."


"What's the Grey Gale?" Henry wanted to know.

"Lurline's first temple but now it's the burial vault of the Ozopov and Strogoff families. According to the Book of the Ancients, Aramon Strogoff's crypt is the gateway to Ephesis and that gateway was what Bastinda was trying to unlock using my emerald. They can also use Lurline's emerald to unlock it…or destroy it so that Alemedia can walk the mortal realm in her own right," Az replied.

"And believe me, no one wants that to happen. She's dangerous enough contained in a vessel but without one she could send this world back to the Big Bang if she wanted to," Archie added.

"So, if we trap Mother in there she can never get out?" Regina asked hopefully.

"Not unless you will her out," Rumple said. "Now about her travelling companion…"

"He has a date with the executioner's axe," Archie said firmly. "Dellia and I are going back to the OZ find out what our Dark Ones are up to and we're taking him with us. Alemedia can't control them both at the same time so we're going to have to find out whether she's controlling Wyatt right now or DG. She was controlling DG when she booted us out of there."

"Be careful. The first sign of trouble you summon me. Understand?" Rumple ordered. "You know the minute you step foot there the Sons and Daughters of Shadowlands will be after you and the child Dellia carries." Rumple approached them and waved his hand over the amber rings and pendants they are. "But this should help."

The couple teleported out in a puff of green smoke leaving the others back at the shop.

But I also want my daughter back, he sent to Belle. You don't know Cora like I do. She knows Regina's every weakness and will exploit them to try to lure her back to her side. And when that happens, I will do what must be done for her sake and Henry's and that is not imprisoning her in Ephesis and risking Regina releasing her in a moment of weakness.

Henry stayed with her for another hour until she begged him to go back to the loft and get some sleep. The next day was going to be a difficult one for him as they were planning on burying Archie's construct. Her son would have to put on the performance of his lifetime while the others in the town were none the wiser.

"....Some of us knew him as Archie, others as Jiminy, but we all knew him as a true friend. And though he may now be gone he will always live on inside of us, reminding us to be our best selves. To do the right thing, to always fight for what we believe in. So we shouldn't think of today as goodbye, just as a way of saying, Archie we'll be listening," Snow was saying as she stood in front
of the closed casket the following morning.

As she stepped back and into her husband's arms, Geppetto approached the grave with Archie's old umbrella in his hand. He placed it beside the tombstone.

"I miss you so much my friend. But at least you're in a better place." he said softly.

Not at the moment, he heard Archie say in his mind. No one suspects anything?

No. Are you certain this will work?

It has to. Just keep playing your part.

I will.

David stepped forward with Beth on his arm. Some of the townspeople found it difficult to look at him without seeing the man they were burying.

"I was so angry when I first found out is was your wish that made me into a cricket too, but it was as crickets that we were finally reunited. We had so little time together before the curse was cast. We thought we'd come to this land together and even though the Queen would take away our memories, she wouldn't be able to change that fact that we are...we were twins. And I'm not..." He took a deep breath. "I'm still not ready to say goodbye." He placed his hand on the casket. "But I promise you...the one who did this is going to pay!" He lowered his head and burst into tears.

And the Oscar goes to...David Molk!

Oh, shut up Archie! You better be right about this or you and I are gonna end up six feet under.

I am right and I'm sorry we have to do this but it's the only way we can lure Cora out.

Moments later the casket was lowered into the ground and everyone stepped forward to cover it with a small patch of dirt while two crickets observed the scene from their hiding place on a nearby tombstone.

That thing is getting removed when this is over! Az sent angrily.

I'm not arguing with that. I hate making David and Geppetto do this, but I couldn't let them or Henry think I was dead. They've got everyone convinced it's me in that grave.

Hook still has your construct on the ship.

Yes, and trying to scare the hell out of him. He wants to know where the dagger is. I might have him let one tiny detail slip.

Az chirped evilly. Oh, and what is that, Commander?

About Belle.

And she'll be ready for him!

Yes, she will. Let's go!

The pair flew off as the mourners began to depart.

On the Jolly Roger, was having a jolly old time, pun intended, torturing the now powerless
Commander Ozopov, or so he thought.

"I don't know anything about a dagger!" the construct cried.

"No, you don't, do you? It's his weakness. Now tell me, does he have any others? Very well. I've always wanted to dissect a cricket," he added when he didn't reply. Hook pressed his hook against Archie's forehead.

"No! Wait, wait. Please."

"Aah, that's more like it. You're pathetic without your magic. Now tell me, cricket. What is his weakness?"

"Belle. The...the woman who lives with him...she...she works at the library."

"Does she now? You just sit tight. I'll be right back."

Once Hook was out of earshot Archie swapped places with it, performing a cloaking spell on his facial hair and magicking the magical restraining cuff off and replacing it with a fake, feat no other mage but an Ozian Guardian could accomplish. He was going to enjoy watching the pirate squirm before the axe fell.

At the shop Rumple kept himself busy putting out new items he'd discovered in some trunks that had been carried over from the Dark Castle when he heard the bell over the door ring but when he looked up he couldn't see anyone. He walked over to the door and stepped outside, still seeing no one. He turned around and went back into the shop to see a box sitting on the counter. He smiled, seeing the Ozian text written on the front of it.

"Hello, Rumple."

"Well, I expected this was just a matter of time. Had hoped you were dead, but hey – disappointment's just part of life. I'm sure we can agree on that," Rumple said bitterly when he turned to find Cora standing there.

"Aw, the crocodile snaps at the little bird. And after I brought you a gift."

"Yeah, did you bring the antidote, too?"

"Oh, Rumple. It's a peace offering."

"And what do you want for this, uh... this peace offering?"

"My daughter. You were so clever to get her to lay the curse so you could come here. You don't need her anymore. Let me try to get her back and let us live."

"And what do I get for my troubles?"

"Your son. You know what that is, of course."

"The seeing globe you took from Jeb Mysticos. The one I wanted. It'll find him... If this one truly is it."

"Oh, darling, I have no reason to cheat you."

"Anymore."
"I want you to find the one person in this universe who might still love you. After all, I'm doing the same thing."

"Do you have any spells to return memories? Once we cross the town line we lose ours," he lied smoothly.

"I only know what you taught me… Master. So, will you accept my offer of a truce?"

"Truce." He extended his hand and she shook it.

"Let's seal it like we used to." She leaned forward and kissed him and he felt a chill race down his spine. How could he have been so foolish to love someone like her? He would never make that mistake again. His heart and soul belonged to Belle now and soon they would consummate their union. Nothing would ever come between them again.

Belle had just finished stacking a new supply of books when a cricket flew onto her cart.

Belle. Hook is here.

Oh, is he? She grinned. Where, Az?

In the Nautical section.

How fitting. I guess I'd better go throw him out with the rest of the trash.

Mind if I watch?

Not at all.

She found the pirate standing in the corner of the Nautical section holding one of her books on pirate legends in his hands. "Uh, sorry the library's not open yet."

"Oh, I'm not here for the books, love."

"You. You're the one that broke into my cell at the Queen's palace. You wanted to kill Rumplestiltskin."

"Oh, I still do. But right now, I'll settle for you." He lunged toward her.

"Oh, will you?" She pushed one of the bookshelves, onto him and sped off, wanting to conserve as much of her magic as she could. He chased after her and approached her as she was about to get into the elevator.

"Maybe I'll have a little fun first before I kill you. You are a pretty piece, but I doubt that crocodile can keep going all night like I can." He winked at her.

"Pig!" she snarled and gestured, throwing him against the wall.

"Crocodile!" Hook growled. "Show yourself."

"Oh, Rumple's not here. It's ME doing this….dearie!"

"You have magic?"

"Yes…and I'm not afraid to use it!" she hissed and summoned his hook to her. She held it up, seeing the enchantment placed on it with her mage's senses. "Ahhh…so this has been enchanted to
rip out a heart, has it? I think it fitting that it should be used to rip out yours!" She reached into his chest with the hook and yanked his heart out as he screamed. "Painful isn't it? And you deserve it! Now, I'm sure you understand what happens when someone takes your heart since you travel around with the bitch who made a career out of it. Do you?" He nodded. "Good. Now you're going to do what I say!"

She flicked her wrist and dropped him, still holding his heart in her hand.

"You just sit there and be quiet while I have a little peek at the memories in here." She conjured a seeing globe into her other hand and cast the heart's memories into it as Rumple taught her, furious with what she found there. "So….you planned to kill Rumple with dreamshade? Where is it? Answer me!"

"On…on my ship."

"And the antidote? Answer!"

"On my ship too…in case I accidentally got exposed."

"Thank you. Now you can go back to your ship but I'm going to hold on to this for safe keeping." She gestured and he vanished in a puff of smoke. Az flew off one of the book shelves and shifted back into her human form.

"Now do you understand why we want to take him back to the OZ?"

Belle nodded. "Yes…but that doesn't mean we can't give him a good ass kicking or two first, now does it?" She conjured a box and placed the heart in it. "You can have it back when you're ready to take him but I'm holding onto it to be sure he does NOT use that dreamshade on Rumple. It can kill him, can't it?"

Az nodded. "Its antidote is ambrosia and it can only be found in the OZ…in the gardens at the Temple of Lurline. Hook must've stolen some of it while he was there because dreamshade originally grew in the OZ near the Temple of Shadows. I suspect Hook or Pan stole some of it too and grew it on Neverland and tried to sell the idea that it originates there."

"Come on. We need to go to the shop. I don't think this is the only place Hook has been today."

"It hasn't," Rumple said when he walked into the library. "He's been to the shop looking for my dagger, but he found something else instead. Bae's shawl."

"Oh Rumple!"

"Oh, I'll get it back but not before I remind me what a mistake it is to try to steal from me." He glanced down at the box in her hands. "Is that what I think it is, dearie?"

Belle opened the lid. "His hook was enchanted to rip out a heart, so it did. His own. I accessed its memories Rumple and you need to be careful…you and Archie both. He has dreamshade on his ship and he's planning to use it on you. And he could try to use it on Archie."

Az grinned. "He can try but it would be useless. Archie already has the antidote on him."

"What?" Rumple and Belle asked in unison.

Az held up her ring. "We named our daughter for the legendary food of choice of the Greek gods but we also had some of it mixed in with the amber in our pendants and rings. If Hook uses the
dreamshade on Archie, the ambrosia on our pendants will counteract it."

"Then I suppose I’d better go to the Jolly Roger."

"I should go with you."

"No, I want you to go back to the shop and keep that heart handy in case we need it. You can use the seeing globe to watch…Belle Corleone!" he joked.

"Well it's about time people learned I'm more than just a librarian."

Rumple laughed as he vanished.

Back at the loft Snow and Charming felt uneasy when they saw Henry on the phone.

"Who's he calling?" Charming asked. Snow pressed the button to turn on the speaker.

"You have reached the office of Archibald Hopper. Sorry if I can't take your call right now. Either I'm with a patient…"

The line went dead.

"Or dead." Henry said sadly.

"It's okay, buddy. Things'll get better, I promise. You just gotta hang in there."

"Doesn't feel that way. Pongo!" he cried when the Dalmatian trotted into the apartment.

Archie sent me to look after you, he sent.

"How did he get in here?" Snow wondered.

"I brought him. David, Marco and I had a chat. Archie knew how much Henry loved this dog. We decided he should have him," Emma said when she walked in behind him. "That is, if you're up for taking care of him, Henry."

"Yeah, I am!"

"Henry, why don't you take Pongo outside and clean him up?" Emma suggested when she and Snow noticed Pongo tracked in a bit of mud.

"Okay! Come on, boy!"

"Look, I know there's a lot to work out logistically, but…"

"No, I think giving Pongo to Henry is a great idea. It's just four people and a Dalmatian, things may get a little..." Snow trailed off.

"Cramped. I know. We'll get creative."

"Or.. we could get our own place."

"You wanna do what?" Charming stared at his wife.

"You wanna move out?" Emma desperately tried to conceal her disappointment.

"Whoa! I-it's just a suggestion."
"After twenty-eight years, isn't this what we've all been waiting for? All of us under the same roof?"

"Yes, I just imagined a bigger roof... with turrets. Being in Storybrooke, we have a chance at a fresh start. Let's take it. But first, why don't David and I pick us something up from Granny's?"

"Sounds good to me."

After he cleaned Pongo off Henry went up to his room in the loft and started drawing a set of blueprints for the loft once Snow and Charming found a house of their own. He was hoping that once all the chaos with Cora blew over Emma and Regina would have joint custody of him as some of his friends' parents who were divorced did. He could live with Regina during the week and stay with Emma on the weekends or he was hoping Regina would let Emma move in with them. It was too much to hope for, but he wasn't going to stop trying.

I don't know if the three of us in the same house would work Henry.

Mom. Henry smiled.

You can hear me?

Sure, I can! Are you okay?

I just miss you honey. That's all. I want all this to be over, but it can't be as long as my mother's out there somewhere waiting for me to come to her. I'm terrified Henry. You don't know what she's like.

You can do this Mom. I believe in you. I love you.

Regina picked up the mold Henry made of his handprints as a class project when he was six and cradled it against her chest as the tears fell again.

I love you too Henry.

"Plotting your escape from Shawshank, kid?" he heard Emma ask when she walked into the room while he was sketching.

"No, they're blueprints. I had some ideas about what to do if Mary Margaret and David move out. Look." He showed her the drawing he made.

"You wanna make Mary Margaret's room an armory?"

"Yeah, you know, for weapons and stuff. To protect us, from Regina." Inside he cringed as he spoke those harsh words yet her knew it was necessary to continue their deception.

"She's not gonna hurt you. I'm not gonna let her."

"She hurt Archie. What if she wants to take me back?"

"That's not gonna happen," Emma vowed. "David and Mary Margaret are back from Granny's and they brought lunch. Go on down and join them. I gotta get back to the station."

They heard Pongo barking downstairs as they went down and saw David Molk standing in the doorway and for a moment everyone was silent, unable to stop seeing their dearly departed friend in his face.
"Hey Molk," Emma greeted and hugged him. "Why aren't you at home? I gave you the week off."

"I…I had to see Henry and Pongo." David kneeled down and petted the Dalmatian.

"We brought lunch back from Granny's. There's plenty if you want to join us," Snow offered.

"Ummm…I can't. People have been bringing so much food to the house that Beth and I are having a hard time trying to figure out what we're gonna do with it all." He sighed. "Everyone's been so kind even though I haven't been here long."

"We all loved Archie and we feel responsible for making sure you're taken care of, David. It's what he would want," Charming said.

"If you don't mind…I'd like to come over and spend more time with Henry. Henry, I know I can't replace Archie but…but he would want me to get to know you."

"What're you gonna do about Regina?" Henry asked him.

I'll keep an eye on her, make sure she's safe, David sent.

"I have to stay out of the investigation since I'm family, Henry but I know Emma and David will do their best to see justice done." Snow handed him a warm cup of coffee. He sipped it gratefully, wishing the charade would soon be over and they could all get back to living their lives. He only stayed for an hour and spoke to Henry, mostly using their minds. This was the longest he'd used mindspeak in years, but he was getting used to it.

Regina took sanctuary in the basement of her vault. She'd sealed the doors with blood magic but that would be easy enough for her mother to break through and come to see her, but she suspected her mother had a pit stop to make first, to her former lover. Regina suspected their relationship was more than that of teacher and student once her father told her how Cora learned magic and she'd discovered the evidence for herself in her mother's spellbook, a letter hidden between the last page and the cover.

Cora, dearie

I've finally got my hands on your daughter. Never thought I'd find her, did you? Now I know why: She's the most powerful sorceress I've ever encountered. Even more powerful than you. Stunning in every way. She is the child that should've been mine…and she will be. I will make certain of that. You may have tricked me into changing our contract but as you know, I always find loopholes. She will cast my curse and reunite me with my son and then she will have the one thing you have never been able to give her, a father who truly loves her and is not afraid to fight for her against you. I do love her Cora, as the child I wanted with you, but you refused to give me. Were it not for that damned squid ink, I would've taken her from you when she was a babe in your arms. Go on then, push her into becoming queen but there will come a day dearie when your ambition will be your undoing. You will know the pain I've endured since the loss of my son.

Regina's hands trembled as she held the letter she read so many times back in the Enchanted Forest when she doubted herself and her potential. She folded it and stood up, clutching it against her breast.

"I am the Heart of the East Guardian. I will protect my son with my last breath…and damn anyone who tries to stop me!" she vowed.

Even if that person was her own mother.
"Hello Regina," Cora said softly when she walked into the vault.

"How did you get through? We destroyed the portal you could come through."

"Determination. I had to see you. I needed to tell you that I know why you sent me through the looking glass. And I know why you tried to have me killed. And it's all right."

"I think it's not all right. You told Hook you wanted to rip my heart out. I'd say that makes it not alright Mother. And I haven't forgotten you took Daniel away from me and made me queen because it was what YOU always wanted. I wanted a different life, a simpler life with Daniel."

"I love you. I just I've always shown it in all the wrong ways. And I never should have made you marry the king. I'm so sorry. When you cried over my coffin, it all changed."

"You framed me for Archie although I don't know how you managed to defeat an Ozian Guardian when Rumple warned us they are the most powerful mages in all the realms."

"Even Ozian Guardians have their weaknesses. And I did it so you could see what these people really think of you. Now you know, don't you?"

"You made an airtight case. Anyone would believe it and they do. His brother….my son…"

"I didn't want you to reject me. Not again."

"You wanted me broken."

"Receptive."

"You are the most manipulative No….I won't even argue. Come with me. We're going to town."

"Now but….!" Cora protested

"I don't care. You're going to tell Emma, Henry, Deputy Molk and the two idiots how you killed Archie! You owe me that." And then you'll let us start over?"

"I don't see that happening, mother. But I am. I was trying so hard to be worthy of Henry. And I deserve the same thing from you."

"You're right. For you, sweetheart. Anything. And Commander Ozopov isn't dead. He's just…tied up at the moment. You are correct. I couldn't kill an Ozian Guardian unless I wanted to bring the wrath of the North Guardian down on me now that she's no longer being held by Bastinda."

"What?! Mother, what did you do? Who did you kill?"

"A construct dear. And I'm assuming Commander Ozopov demonstrated his powers to you?"

"He tried to suck out my life force Mother! How did you manage to grab him without risking her wrath?"

Cora produced a bottle of squid ink. "And I have a cuff that renders any magical user powerless… even an Ozian Guardian. I'm going to hold onto him a bit longer for insurance. But if we can convince him to work with us…"

"Work with you? I want no part of this Mother. Archie is a friend and you're going to go tell them
what you've done, or I will and you're going to let him go."

"If I do this…will you give me another chance?" Cora asked again. "Let me be your mother again."

"You want to be the mother I need. Prove it," Regina challenged.

"I will." Cora said firmly.
The jig is up, the news is out
They've finally found me
The renegade who had it made
Retrieved for a bounty

Never more to go astray
This will be the end today
Of the wanted man

Styx – Renegade

Storybrooke, Main
Ten Days Prior To The Final Eclipse

Still seething from being bested by the crocodile’s whore, once Hook returned to the ship he was going to enjoy working out his frustrations on the still incapacitated Commander Ozopov. He retrieved his sword from its place on the wall in his quarters and went down to the hold where Ozopov was still tied up. He laughed evilly and pressed the blade against the older man’s throat.

“Now I think I’m ready to dissect a cricket and there’s not a damn thing you can do to stop me.”

“Well I’d hate to disappoint you but you’re not dissecting anyone today,” Archie laughed and summoned another sword from the cabin that flew through the air and sliced through his bonds. He raised his foot and kicked the pirate in the groin. Hook moaned and doubled over, clutching himself.

“How...how...did you escape the cuff?”

“Because I wasn’t in it until now,” Archie said triumphantly. “Cora’s not the only one who can create a construct, mate. Oh, get up! You’re acting like I kicked it up into your throat but unfortunately I didn’t. I’ve been waiting years for us to finish our duel.” He gestured and teleported them on the deck of the Jolly Roger.

“Mind if I join you?” Rumple asked, stepping onto the deck. “I still have a duel to finish with you too, dearie,” he hissed at Hook. “And then I’m gonna take back what you stole from me. You took it because SHE made it, didn’t you?”

“You look different in this world, Crocodile. Like the coward I met so long ago, limp and all.”

“And yet, you still can't kill me. I don’t need this to walk anymore.” Rumple tossed his cane in the air and it transformed into his katana sword.

“Let's have it, Dark One, Commander Ozopov. What magic are you gonna hide behind today?”

“Oh no, not magic. We’re gonna kick your arse without it,” Rumple sneered.

“Unless you think you can’t take both of us,” Archie taunted.
Hook howled with rage and attacked Archie who blocked his sword with his own. Hook then lunged at Rumple who jumped back as Hook swung his sword at the sorcerer’s leg. “You crippled yourself once and I’ll be bloody glad to do it again when I cut your leg off!”

“Not before Exner cuts off your head!” Archie growled. “Unless I do it first!” He swung his sword, the blade slicing into Hook’s cheek.

“First blood lad! Well done!” Rumple praised.

“I wasn’t named commander of the Ozian royal army for nothing! I earned it!”

Hook wiped the blood off his cheek and turned to Rumple, thinking him the weaker of the two and attacked him full force. Rumple cursed himself for not brushing up on his swordplay, but he wasn’t going to use magic. Not this time. Out of the corner of his eye Hook could see Archie getting ready to attack and swung his sword in his direction, leaving Rumple an opening. He swung own his sword and sliced into the pirate’s leg just above the knee.

“Better get fitted for a peg, dearie!” he giggled.

“Bastards!” Hook growled.

“Not going to dissect this cricket now, are you?” Archie teased.

“Maybe not but I can still skin me a crocodile,” Hook boasted and attacked Rumple again, barely missing cutting him on the shoulder. “Your form is weaker than the Commander’s, crocodile!”

“Maybe…maybe not!” Rumple’s sword nicked him in the arm. “Oh, damn and here I thought I was gonna get your other hand.”

“I’m not done yet!” Hook panted. Where the hell was that damn Cora when he needed her? One of them he could’ve handled but not both. The crocodile proved to be more difficult than he thought without his magic and he recalled he hadn’t been so lucky the last time he’d crossed blades with Commander Ozopov. He could feel himself getting tired both from a loss of blood and exhaustion, but he wasn’t willing to surrender yet. He yanked his dagger out of its scabbard and threw the dreamshade tipped weapon at Archie, the amber pendant on his neck glowing and blasting it back. It fell onto the deck at Hook’s feet.

Seeing the pirate tiring, Rumple kicked Hook’s legs out from underneath him and sent him crashing to the deck, pointing the blade of his sword at his throat. “Now do you yield, dearie?”

“Rot in Ephesis, crocodile!” he snarled and rolled to the side. Rumple slammed the blade of his sword into Hook’s shoulder, pinning him to the deck while he howled in pain.

“You first!” Archie snarled and summoned a set of shackles. “I arrest you in the name of Queen Regent Lavinia Ozopov of the OZ and if you have a hundred years I’ll list the charges…a raping bastard at the top of my list!” He hauled the bleeding pirate to his feet and secured him to the mast with a set of chains as Az and Belle teleported onto the deck of the ship, Belle holding the box containing Hook’s heart. There’d been no need for her to use it to control him during the battle when she had every confidence that Rumple and Archie could handle him themselves.

“Now, where is Bae’s shawl?” Belle demanded, squeezing the heart in her hand.

“My…my quarters…” he panted.

Az walked up to the mast and kicked Hook in the groin again. “THAT is what I owe you for what
you tried to do to me all those years ago!” she hissed. Belle handed the heart and box to Rumple while she went below deck to search for the shawl while Archie tossed a travel storm token onto the deck and a shimmering green portal opened.

“Elmer Gulch and Jebediah Cain, Commander Ozopov summons thee!” he shouted. Moments later the two men stepped through the portal.


“Next time I am turning you into a cricket Gulch! We’re taking this raping bastard back to the OZ.”

“The Queen’s expecting him and you Commander,” Jeb informed them.

“We’re going with you,” Rumple said, indicating himself and Belle who had just returned with Bae’s shawl in her hands. Archie released Hook from the mast and Jeb and Elmer seized his arms and started dragging him toward the portal with Rumple, Belle, Archie and Az following behind him.

Oz (The Outer Zone)
Emerald Palace

DG tried desperately to remain focused during one of the many High Council meetings she’d been required to attend now that peace had been restored to the OZ, but she couldn’t help fearing that it was merely the calm before the storm and she lay the blame for it at the feet of Ozmalita, Adora or whatever name she chose to call herself.

Now you know how it feels to have the man you love taken away from you, she thought bitterly. You did it to her…twice.

Claiming she had a headache DG excused herself and left the council room for the solitude of her suite. She locked the door with a spell and walked over to the wall where the portrait her husband Nicolai had commissioned for her in her first life as Dorothy hung and moved it aside revealing a small compartment. She grabbed a silver box off the shelf and opened it, revealing a heart inside.

“The Queen of Hearts ripped hers out, so she wouldn’t love my cousin anymore….” she said through her tears. “I ripped mine out, so I don’t love you anymore Wyatt because I don’t know who you are now.”

“Oh cousin, dearie, what have you done?” Rumple whispered. DG spun around, glaring at him.

“How did you get in here?” she demanded.

“You are powerful cousin but not as powerful as me,” he informed her. “And now that part of your soul belongs to Alemedia, she will use your magic to disrupt the Balance and destroy not just the OZ but all of Nonestica.”

“I just don’t understand!” DG sobbed. “How could he turn on me so suddenly?”

“You now have her memories, Dorothia. Look in them and see the reasons for yourself,” he encouraged, summoning a seeing globe.

“You don’t know? You’re a Dark One too.”
“The curse is weakened on me now, dearie but it’s not on you and it will only grow stronger the more you give in to your darkness. “

DG waved her hand over the heart and cast its memories onto the seeing globe, her eyes wide with shock and horror, a chill seeping into her bones as she watched Jeb being tormented for the goddess’s amusement and Ozmalita’s difficult choice; seduce her husband back to her or watch her son die. Given the same choice, DG knew she would’ve chosen any of her children too. She banished the seeing globe and slammed her heart back into her chest, the pain within it rushing over her like a tidal wave. She sank to her knees on the floor, gasping for air.

“I…I don’t want to feel this again…I can’t!”

“Yes, you can! Don’t you understand Dorothia, you have the power to defeat this inside you! Your love for Wyatt isn’t your weakness, it’s your strength! Use it! Wyatt is one of the anchors to your humanity as you are to his. If you can weaken her hold on you, it will weaken her hold on him! Fight for him, dammit! You know what’s at stake if you don’t!” He helped her to her feet. “Now get your arse to the Northern Island and bring that Tin Man back here!”

DG hugged him and vanished in a puff smoke.

Rumple heard laughter in the mirror behind him and spun around to see Wyatt’s reflection staring back him.

“Still think it’s gonna be easy?” he challenged. “You know what it takes to free yourselves from me, but you’ve always gotten someone else to do the deed for you. You’ll never turn your blade on yourself knowing you’ll never see your precious Belle again.”

“If it’s what it takes to save her from you and the bastard that spawned me, so be it Alemedia,” Rumple growled and threw a fireball at the mirror.

But do you have what it takes, Tin Man? he pondered. You sacrificed yourself for Dorothy’s love once before. Would you be willing to do it again?

It was a question he was now afraid to learn the answer to. There were only ten days left and they’d made little progress.

Upon their arrival at the palace Hook had been taken to the Healer’s Ward under guard to treat his wounds while Az and Archie had been summoned to a private audience in the Queen Regent’s chambers. Ambrose was happy to entertain Belle with a tour of the palace library. Lavinia and Ahamo seemed to have aged ten years in the days since Az and Archie’s return to Storybrooke.

“We only have ten days my angel and the OZ still is not secure. But I’m afraid there’s worse news. Zero has been released from his prison,” Lavinia announced. Archie’s hands clenched into fists.

“Wyatt released him,” Archie growled as Rumple walked into the room with Belle and Ambrose. “Or more appropriately, Alemedia did. She’s pitting them against each other so that we’ll be short two Guardians when the Final Eclipse comes.”

Rumple closed his eyes. “When the crimson moon appears in the Ozian skies, that is the time when this world dies,” he murmured. Everyone shivered for those were the very words spoken by Aramon centuries earlier, words that damned him to an eternity spent in one of Ephesis’ darkest prisons.

“Az!” DG cried when she ran into the room and threw her arms around her sister. “You look great! How’s the baby? I missed you so much!”
Az laughed. “I wasn’t gone that long Deege.”

“It felt like a lifetime to me.”

“Are you going to stay?”

“We can’t Deege. I’m sorry. It’s just not safe for us here.”

“But I need you here!”

“I’ll still be with you Deege, just in a different place and you know you can always come visit me in Storybrooke. But the OZ needs you more than you need me right now. There’s still so much rebuilding to do and the people need to see that you’re willing to be there for them. That’s all they’ve ever wanted, and we haven’t been the rulers they needed. You can change that.”

“But it’s not my right. You should’ve been queen Az. I know all about the change in the succession.” DG glared at her mother. “You started all this.”

“DG, my angel…”

“Stop Mother. Just stop! Why did you do it? Az was training to be queen since she was born, and YOU took it away from her, so your little ‘angel’ could inherit the throne after you died. You did to Az what your mother did to Katia!”

Lavinia gasped.

“Shocked I know about her? I’m one of the Dark Ones now Mother and have access to her memories.” She glanced over at Az and Archie. “She’s Zero’s mother. I’m so sorry, Az.”

“She is Katia?” Archie growled, recalling the night of Ambrosia’s birth and the seemingly innocent face of the midwife who delivered her. Neither could see a family resemblance in her face or Zero’s but had she been using a glamour spell it would have been difficult for them to notice.

“Does she still have her magic?” Lavinia asked worriedly.

“Yes,” DG murmured. “And she’s the High Priestess of Shadowlands which makes her doubly dangerous. We have to find the third Dark One dagger before she does.”

“We already know where it is, dearie. Wyatt has it. He’s had it all this time,” Rumple spoke up.


“It was merged with the remains from his first life,” Belle replied.

DG sank into her chair, pressing her hand to her heart. “His sword. Oh, I should’ve known. That was her plan all along…to get the other two blades in our hands and pit us against each other. The perfect revenge.” DG’s eyes glowed red with rage. “But she is NOT going to win this time! Neither is Ozmalita! Wyatt is bound to me and he always be!”

“DG be careful. Don’t let your love turn into an obsession,” Archie advised. She made a face. “You sound just like those doctors I had to listen to after prom night.”

“Well you’re going to listen to me, young lady!”

“I will…”
“You will,” Rumple said, leaving no room for argument. “The fate of our world depends on it, Dorothia. If you cannot resist surrendering to your inner darkness, how can you expect Wyatt to?”

“I can’t.” She sighed. “I have to try to break her hold on him but Ozmalita is making it difficult.”

Rumple frowned. “How?”

“Alemedia has her heart. She’s ordered to seduce Wyatt back to her or Jeb dies. Were I placed in the same situation centuries ago, I would’ve done as she asked to protect my children. Rumple, she may try the same attacks on you with Belle, Henry and Baelfire.”

“I’m aware of that cousin. She also has another ally at her disposal. My father,” he said bitterly. “He is after Henry’s powers because once Henry is at full strength he will be the most powerful Guardian that has ever lived. You must go to the Northern Island and try to reawaken Wyatt.”

“She must perform her first official duty as queen first,” Lavinia pointed out. The others frowned at her. She raised her hand. “Hear me out first. We’ve apprehended one of the OZ’s most wanted criminals and his execution will send a message that the Ozopov are back in power and we will not allow this realm to be divided again. Killian Jones’ crimes were one of the reasons why the East and West seceded from the OZ.”

Ahamo, Ambrose and Archie nodded in agreement.

“What did he do here?” DG asked.

“Captain Hook and his crew raided ten villages in Lowlands. They raped and killed dozens of women, forced their men to watch then killed them too. Your sister was almost raped by him too, but Archie got to her before the deed could be done.” Ambrose replied. “And every year on the anniversary of those atrocities the surviving women wear torn white dresses stained with blood. They’re wearing those dresses to represent the innocence that was lost, and the blood spilled.”

“Then he will be executed on the anniversary of the day this took place,” DG said coldly. “Have Gulch go to those villages and inform them. He doesn’t have to have a trial, does he?”

Lavinia shook her head. “He was tried years ago.”

“Glitch, can you make the preparations for the execution?”

“I can, DG. Otille tells me his wounds weren’t that serious.”

“Unfortunately,” Rumple snorted. “I would gladly behead that pirate myself.”

“We’ve already summoned Exner.”

“The anniversary is when?” Belle wanted to know.

“In two days,” Ahamo replied.

“Well then it looks like that pirate better get his affairs in order…again” Rumple quipped. “Oh, you must allow me to be the one to give him the good news.”

“Knock yourself out,” DG murmured. Rumple laughed and vanished in a puff of smoke. When he reappeared in the Healers Ward he growled in rage seeing Hook attempting to climb down the open tower window using a bedsheet, the nurses on duty in the ward dead. He flicked his wrist and sent the pirate flying into the wall and pinned him there.
“Should’ve known you’d try to escape, dearie!” he hissed. “But you won’t be this time. Get your affairs in order again because you’re going to be losing your head on the block!” He teleported them into the Queen Regent’s chambers and pinned Jones to the floor with his magic.

“I caught him trying to escape again. He’s killed the three nurses on duty in the ward.”

DG approached the pirate and lifted him off the floor with her magic. “Hope you enjoyed it while it lasted. Jeb, Gulch, take him to the dungeon and make sure he’s heavily guarded. We’re not taking anymore chances.”

“Yes, Your Majesty.”

She dropped him and conjured a set of shackles. After he was led away she sat back down again, shaking her head. “I think we’ll all rest easier when he’s dead.”

Central City Square

A large crowd gathered in Central City square two days later to await the trial and execution of one of its most notorious fugitives, the pirate Killian Jones, alias Captain Hook. A group of women moved to the front of the line, all of them wearing white dresses torn and stained with red paint, a reminder to all the horrors they’d endured when he and his crew raided their villages and raped them while their husbands and lovers watched, killing the men once they were finished. The women were stunned when the Princess Azkadellia approached them also wearing a stained and torn white dress.

“Will you allow me to stand with you?” she asked softly.

“You may for I was there the day that monster attempted to assault you,” said one of the older women. “And we beg your forgiveness for thinking that you were responsible for what…what has happened to our land.”

“I thank you for that.” She waved her hand and a clay figurine wearing the same clothing appeared in it. “I will make larger ones that you must take to your villages. No one must be allowed to forget the sisters we lost.”

The women nodded through their tears.

It never would’ve happened to your sister had your mother not exiled her to Northern Islands for something that wasn’t her fault! She heard Wyatt’s voice hiss in her mind. Take a good look Princess and see what else your carelessness has done to this realm!

DG leaned back in her chair, her hand pressed to her heart.

“What is it, doll?”

“Nothing,” she said quickly.

The Northern Island

Wyatt waved his hand over the seeing globe, his eyes narrowed to slits. “Is it?” he asked bitterly. “That’s it, do what you do best. Forget. But you’re not going to forget because I’m going to be there to remind you. You’re as weak now as you were then, and this realm is damned because of it!”

“We can still save it Wyatt. Together,” Adora vowed. “Come with me.”
“Not yet. I’ve got some business to attend to.” He vanished, leaving her sitting alone in the bed.

Central City

DG rose from her throne. “Bring the prisoner!” she called out.

“Stretch him out good!”

“Hang him by his balls!” yelled one of the women at the front of the crowd.

“Put his head on a pike in the square!”

Hook glared at the crowd as Jeb and Elmer dragged him up the steps to the scaffold where the executioner, Ambrose, Rumple and Archie waited. DG raised her hand, her signal to Ambrose to begin.

“Killian Jones, do you have any last words before your sentence is carried out?”

“Go to Ephesis and rot…Crocodile and Cricket!” he snarled. Rumple approached him smirking.

“You first, dearie!”

“Get on with it!” yelled a man in the crowd.

“Cut him into pieces!” yelled another.

Elmer and Jeb removed the shackles and dragged Killian over to the block, the pirate fighting them all the way. They forced him to his knees, still struggling.

“Be still or he will cut you into pieces!” Jeb ordered.

“Do it! Cut him up the way he cut my papa up!” screamed a young girl.

“Make him suffer!”

“The crowd’s getting restless,” Archie said worriedly. “If he doesn’t stop squirming this is going to get messy and I’d rather the women in the crowd didn’t see it.”

“Maybe one of you could ahhh….assist.”

Archie waved his hand to cast a spell and felt pain surge through his arm. “Someone’s blocking me! Rumple!”

“It’s not me!” he protested.

DG drew her finger across her throat in a slicing motion. The executioner picked up the axe and brought it down not on Hook’s neck but between his shoulder blades. He screamed in pain and Exner pulled the axe out.

“What in the name of Lurline…?” he muttered and tried again, this time slicing off one of the pirate’s ears.

“What in the hell is going on!” Ambrose asked angrily.

Rumple and Archie tried casting their spell again only to be knocked off their feet by a blast of dark magic. Exner raised the axe again and once again missed, this time cutting off Hook’s other hand.
“YES! Chop him up!” some in the crowd cheered while many of the women started feeling ill. The axe seemed to have a will of its own, slicing off parts of the pirate’s body while all anyone could do was watch in horror for if they tried to look away, something compelled them to keep their eyes to the scaffold. Finally, the axe descended, and Killian Jones’ head was severed from his body but by that time he was already wishing for death.

“DG, what have you done?” Az whispered, glancing up at her sister but DG seemed as confused as everyone else.

“I wanted justice but that….that….was horrible,” one of the women moaned.

Suddenly a mob of people ran to the scaffold and began dipping cloths into the blood, smearing it on their faces and clothing and some even tried to steal parts of the corpse until they were blasted back by DG.

“That is enough!” she bellowed. “All of you…GO HOME. And I would like an explanation, sir!” she demanded of Exner once the crowds began to disperse.

“I…I don’t know, Your Highness. It was as if the axe had a will of its own.”

“Like it was enchanted. Let’s see it, dearie,” Rumple ordered. Exner held the bloodstained weapon out to the sorcerer. Rumple waved his hand over it, faint traces of an enchantment spell lingering over it.

“So, what was it?” Archie asked him.

“An enchantment, one I believe you may be familiar with Dorothy,” Rumple said, scowling at his cousin. “Was it your intention to hack him up the same way Nick was, dearie?”

“I didn’t do it!” DG cried.

“This is his axe. You know it is.”

“Rumple, that’s not possible. Nick Chopper’s axe was a woodcutter’s axe,” Archie disputed.

“Watch.” Rumple waved his hand over the axe again and it changed into a woodcutter’s axe.

“Someone switched Exner’s axe with this one and enchanted it with the same spell Nessarose cast over Nick’s axe.”

“It wasn’t me,” DG said firmly.

“And it wasn’t me.” Az quickly turned her head while Hook’s remains were being loaded onto a cart. “But whoever it was had a spell over me that was dampening my magic…and yours too,” she said to Rumple and Archie.

“Did you try to stop it DG or did you just sit there and watch?”

“Glitch…I swear to you I was so horrified I couldn’t move!”

“Come inside my angel. We need to talk about this,” Lavinia informed her daughter.

DG bit her lip and fought back her tears. She was innocent but who would believe her?

Once they were in the council room Rumple set the axe on the table and began casting a locator spell. Seconds later it vanished.
“Dammit!”

“Now you know it wasn’t me!”

“Then there’s only one other person it could’ve been. Wyatt,” Rumple said gravely. “Hook deserved to die but this….this was a warning. To us. Wyatt’s losing his humanity and darkening his heart.” Rumple removed his own heart. “See all the darkness in mine? Belle keeps my darkness in check, but darkness unchecked in a Dark One vessel is more terrifying than you can possibly imagine.”

“Mother, all this royal protocol will have to wait. I have to stop him,” DG informed her mother before she teleported out.

“And we must return to Storybrooke. Cora is still there chipping away at Regina and we will need her because my father’s people will be trying to snatch Henry any time now.” Rumple took a travel storm token out of his jacket pocket and teleported himself, Belle, Az and Archie into an open field where he tossed the coin.

Storybrooke, Maine
Nine days prior to the Final Eclipse

A couple stood outside the town line, the woman holding a device in her hand. She held it out and there were several beeps before a set of tunnels appeared.

“This is it. The one we’ve been looking for. The original,” she proclaimed. “You’d better call it in.”

The man took a cellphone out of his pocket and dialed a number.

“We’ve located it…the source.”

Neverland

“You know what to do. Find the stone and activate it then bring me the boy,” Pan commanded. He disconnected the call and gazed over at the hourglass. Three more days. How quickly time had gone by. He’d been in Neverland for centuries but now he was living on borrowed time. He only had three more days to take the heart that would ensure his survival.

Storybrooke

Greg Mendel got into the car alone and started the engine, his fingers caressing the only item he had left to remember his father by. Kurt Flynn was still trapped in that damned town and he was going to get him out before it turned back into the forest that had been their sanctuary until that bitch who called herself the Evil Queen stole it from them. He rolled down the window and smiled at his companion.

“I’ll meet you at the abandoned cannery at midnight Tamara,” he said. She leaned down and kissed him.

“We’re finally getting your revenge Greg. This town’s gonna be nothing but forest when we’re done with it and it’ll take the others down with it.”

“We do nothing until I get my father out. That bitch Regina has him hidden somewhere in there and I’m gonna find him!” He floored the gas pedal and sped down the road, zipping around an emerald
green Fiat.

“There’s no passing you bloody bastard!” Zelena yelled, beeping her horn.

“Wonder what he’s in such a hurry for,” Bae mused from the backseat. “What the hell…Zee look out!” he yelled as the front of the Fiat slammed into the back of the Ford Taurus that had passed her earlier, now parked in the middle of the road.
Author’s Notes: Although some of the dialogue from ‘Manhattan’ and later episodes appear, they are in a different order to fit the scenes I have rewritten.

Friends are "annuals" that need seasonal nurturing to bear blossoms. Family is a "perennial" that comes up year after year, enduring the droughts of absence and neglect. There's a place in the garden for both of them. – Erma Bombeck

Storybrooke, Maine
Nine days prior to the Final Eclipse

It had been two days since Archie’s funeral and no one saw hide nor hair of Regina. It should’ve made them breathe easier, but Emma knew it was just a matter of time before she returned with a vengeance and she and Charming were working round the clock searching for a way to capture her and lock her in a prison she could never get out of. The townspeople were impatient to see justice done, Archie’s brother ever more so and the last thing she needed was him trying to capture the former queen himself.

“You picked a crappy time to go AWOL Gold,” she grouched when she drove up to the pawn shop and saw the closed sign hanging on the door for the second day in a row. Moments later Charming drove up in his truck.

“Emma! We gotta get to the town line right away. There’s been an accident.”

“Anybody hurt?”

“Don’t know. Hildy and Terry are on the scene, but they radioed that both vehicles have out of state license plates...New York and Pennsylvania. Outsiders, Emma.”

“Okay, I’m comin!” she hopped into the passenger seat of the truck and Charming gunned the engine.

At the town line trying to control four angry people while investigating the scene of an accident was proving to be a difficult task for Hildy and Terry. Three of them were injured and they were all mad as hell. They were relieved when the ambulances pulled up along with Emma and Charming in his truck.

“What’s going on here?” Charming demanded.

“This bloody idiot sped past me like he was racing in the Grand Prix then stopped right in the middle of the bloody road and I ran into him because I couldn’t stop in time!” Zelena ranted, pointing at Greg while she tried to tend to her bleeding husband.

“Why weren’t you paying attention?” he countered.

“You'll be paying attention when I shove my cane up your ass!” Angelo shouted, waving his cane. Terry got between them and held Angelo back.
“Whoa, whoa, settle down y’all!”

“What the hell are you even doin’ here, Mendell?” Bae snapped at Greg. Zelena started laughing.

“THAT is who the putana is sleeping with? She must have to put a bag over his head.”

“Bitch!” Greg hissed and tried to lunge at Zelena only to be dragged back by Hildy.

“Hey! Cool it or you’ll be cooling it in a jail cell.”

‘All right everyone settle down or….NEAL!” Emma exclaimed, feeling as if the ground were collapsing under her feet. It had been ten years but little about her former lover had changed, except he had a few more grays in his hair. “What…what are YOU doing here?”

“Emma,” Bae whispered. She was still as beautiful as he remembered her only she no longer wore her glasses and the dresses she loved to wear had been replaced by a red leather jacket, tank tops and jeans with boots. She glared at him.

“How the hell did you find me, you son of a bitch?” she demanded angrily. “And why the HELL are you here NOW?”

“You know this guy?” Charming asked her.

“Yeah. Too well,” she said through gritted teeth. “Arrest him.”

“What!” Bae exclaimed. “For what?”

Emma smirked. “You’ve got a record Cassidy and I’m the sheriff in this town. Deputies make sure the EMTs have a look at him and if he’s well enough to walk take him to the station and lock him up!”

“Emma, please, let me explain.”

“I don’t wanna hear SHIT outta you right now!” she screamed at him.

“You can’t arrest him! He hasn’t done anything!” Zelena protested.

“She can arrest him for being an asshole,” Hildy joked. Terry chuckled. She’d used that line on one of their murder suspects back in San Francisco.

Bae continued to protest while Charming cuffed his hands and the EMTs examined him. After he was judged to be unharmed, Charming escorted him to the back of Hildy and Terry’s squad car and locked him in the backseat.

“Oh, very funny,” Zelena snorted. “I’m fine! Take care of Angelo!” she snapped at the EMTs.

“You and your husband will have to come with us,” one of them said. They would also be taking Greg in after he began to complain of neck pain.

“You can take my truck back to station when you’re finished,” Charming informed Terry and Hildy. He and Emma got into their squad car to drive Bae back to town.

“Emma, look, I know you’re angry…”

“You’re damn right I’m angry and if you have any common sense at all you’ll just shut the hell up until we get back to town!”
She gripped the hand rest, fighting the urge to have Charming stop the car and get out so that she could show Cassidy just how angry she was by either blasting him into the trees or just beating him to a pulp. Having him in town was the last thing she wanted to deal with and if he thought he was just going to breeze in and take up where he left off, he had another think coming.

Charming glanced over at his daughter, frowning. There was only one reason why she would be so hostile with this man. He’d have been blind not to see the resemblances to his own grandson. This Neal they’d just picked up was Henry’s absentee father, not dead as Emma claimed but apparently a man with a criminal record.

“...Outsiders!” Leroy bellowed when he walked into Granny’s a few minutes later. “We’ve got OUTSIDERS at the town line!”

Granny grabbed her crossbow from underneath the bar counter. “You sure Leroy?”

“Saw Tillman bringin’ their wrecked cars in. From New York and Pennsylvania.”

“David is it true?” Beth whispered to her husband at their booth while they waited to pick up their order. He gazed down at his phone and nodded.

“Hildy and Terry saw them driving in and one plowed into the back of the other and just told me Leroy’s right. Plates are from New York and PA, but the PA driver isn’t from your adopted family. They’re searchin the cars now.”

She tensed. “Do you think it’s them, the Home Office?”

“I hope not.” He took a wad of cash out of his wallet and handed it to her. “Can you pay for this stuff and take it home? I gotta find out what’s goin on.”

“David, you’re supposed to be on bereavement leave.”

“I can’t afford to sit around if they’re here sweetheart.” He got up and hurried out of the diner

“How did they find us?”

“Isn’t the town warded?”

“Maybe they killed Archie and not Regina!”

Ruby and the other waitresses began having checks thrust at them along with wads of cash as the patrons raced out of the diner in a panic.

“Lock it up Ruby,” Granny ordered her granddaughter while she took all the cash and checks out of the register and shoved them in the safe along with the money and checks her staff was giving her. Ruby turned off the open sign and the lights. The same was happening with all the businesses and homes all over town, doors locked, lights extinguished while the residents prepared for battle. The same panic was spreading like wildfire at the hospital and suddenly Dr. Whale found himself trying to wrangle difficult patients and terrified townspeople.

“Everyone out and let us do our jobs. NOW!” he bellowed at his fellow townspeople while Zelena and Angelo were being brought in followed by Greg Mendell. He sprinted down the hall to the ER, thankful he’d gotten plenty of sleep on his day off. It was going to be a long night.

Mills Mansion
“This world has so many wonderful things!” Cora exclaimed. “I love these moving pictures and your home…it’s like a palace…only smaller.”

Regina picked up the remote and paused the movie they were watching.

“Mother, you promised me we would go to the station.”

“Oh, let’s finish watching this moving picture you call Beaches first! I do hope that CeCe woman takes care of her friend’s child now. And I cannot believe how much that woman you call Barbara looks like me!”

I guess that’s why I love this movie so much, Regina thought. Hilary Whitney was the kind of mother she longed to have even if she did die young.

“All right but after this we’re going to the station. No more excuses.”

“If you wish dear.” Cora picked up her glass of wine and smiled, silently thanking her counterpart in the other Wonderland. Elizabeth Heart’s teas were indeed the wonder of all wonders, capable of draining one’s emotions allowing them to be easy manipulated. She’d taken a drop of Clear Conscience, a drop of Pure Innocence and combined them with several drops of the most useful teas to make a concoction that would ensure Regina’s full cooperation in her mission. She could have used the vapors Bastinda was so fond of in the OZ, but the tea effects lasted longer and were more potent, even against the strongest mage.

Regina finished her cider and set her cup down.

“It’s late Mother and we should get some sleep. Come on. I’ll show you your room. It’s not as grand as what you’re used to but…”

“It doesn’t matter,” Cora said softly. “But didn’t you say you wanted us to do something after the moving picture was over?”

“Did I? It must not have been that important. I’m so glad you’re back Mother. I missed you.”

“I missed you too dear.” She followed her daughter upstairs to a room that was no bigger than one of her closets, but it would do for the time being. Regina gave her a brief tour of the room and explained how the lights worked and gave her a nightgown to sleep in. “Will I be meeting my great grandson tomorrow?”

“I hope so. Emma and the two idiots have been trying to keep me away from him.”

“They won’t be able to keep him away from me. We’ll get him back, Regina. I can promise you that.”

Regina kissed her mother’s forehead and turned off the light. Once she heard Regina’s bedroom door close Cora summoned a mirror and waved her hand over it, the image of another woman appearing in the glass.

“The tea worked.”

“Of course, it worked.” Elizabeth Heart boasted. “And soon we’ll be able to make pills from them and give our economy a boost. But first I need to find out where that damned son of mine took the Stone of Wonderland! He’s in that world.”

“Oh, not to worry dear. If he’s here I’ll bring him back to myself…minus his heart of course as my
“Our children have been such a disappointment to us, haven’t they?” Elizabeth asked sadly.  

“Perhaps you should use some of your teas on your son.”  

“I will when I get him back.”  

“I’m confident we’ll both get what we want,” Cora said with a smile and the mirror vanished.  

Emma stood out in the hall gazing at Bae as he sat handcuffed and alone in the interview room.  

“He’s Henry’s father, isn’t he?” Charming asked her.  

“Yeah. I met him in Portland when I was eighteen,” she said.  

“You loved him.”  

“Until he ran out on me and got me thrown in prison,” she said bitterly.  

“You wanna talk about it?”  

She nodded and began to tell him about those painful months back in Portland when she’d been so close to having her dream of a normal life come true, fighting back the tears. She’d promised herself years ago that she would never cry over her lost first love again but once she finished the armor and the walls she’d built up over the years shattered and she sobbed in her father’s arms.  

“I loved him so much!” she moaned. “I was willing to do anything for him and he left me! He left me with a son I couldn’t take care of and an eleven-month prison sentence. I hate him! I wish he’d never come here!”  

“But he is here honey and we need to find out why.” He sighed. “And he’s not the first outsider to come here.”  

“He isn’t?”  

Charming shook his head. “The first ones came the day we arrived here. A man and a boy. The boy escaped but the man…he has to be around here somewhere unless….”  

“Unless Regina killed him like she did Archie. It looks like our queen’s got more than Archie to answer for if we find her.”  

“When we find her,” he corrected. “We always find each other and we always find her. You want me to talk to this Neal for you?”  

“No. I got this. He was with two of the people who crossed the town line which explains why they’re here but I wanna know who the guy in the other car is. Go down to the hospital and see if you can get anything outta him.”  

“Oh but Emma, give him a chance to talk before you go full Snow on him. Outsiders aren’t supposed to be able to find this place but somehow, he has. Don’t you find that odd?”  

“You think he might be from there? From our world?”  

“Look what happened with Archie. He didn’t come here when everyone else did.”
“Wish he were here now. He’d be able to make sense of all this or maybe Gold can though I really hate having to go to him for anything since I already owe him a favor.”

“Just talk to him Em,” her father pleaded. “I’ll call you if I find out anything at the hospital.”

They heard a throat being cleared behind them and turned to face David. Emma scowled when she noticed he was wearing his uniform.

“You’re supposed to be on leave, Deputy Molk.”

“I can’t be. Not now. Has anyone had a chance to question our newcomers yet?”

“I’m going to be talking to one of them. Nolan’s going to the hospital to interview the other three. Why?”

“Because I think they’re part of a cult we were investigating in San Francisco.”

“What kind of cult?” Emma demanded.

“One that finds and kills people like us…people from other worlds. Magical words.” He sighed. “I think…I think one of them might be responsible for my brother’s death.”

“David, it was Regina. We saw it through Pongo’s memories.”

“Have you considered the possibility that she might’ve been framed?”

“We did but too much of the evidence points to her. Why are you thinking…?”

“Because she was framed.”

Emma spun around, her eyes wide with shock to see Archie standing there, or at least someone with facial hair that looked like him.

“What the hell…?”

“We’d better go into your office,” Archie suggested, and a numb Emma followed them down the hall. Archie waved his hand and cast a protection spell once they were inside.

“…Now let me get this straight. Nearly half this town, including my son, knew you were alive, and you kept up this charade to try to trap Cora and Hook?” she asked once Archie was finished speaking.

“Hook has been taken care of.”

“Has he?”

“He was executed in the OZ yesterday. Unfortunately, one of the new Dark Ones decided to have a little fun and enchanted the executioner’s axe to quarter him before beheading him.”

“So, Rumple isn’t the Dark One anymore.”

“He is but the curse is weak on him now. The other two are in the OZ and if they come here Cora will be the least of our worries. Have any of you been intelligent enough to keep an eye on Regina or have you just left her wandering around thinking she’s going to be convicted for my murder?”

“We’ve been working with Blue on a way to trap her,” Charming informed him.
“The I suggest we make some statement that she’s innocent and find her. You’ve dealt with Cora, Emma so you know how manipulative she can be. The only person who can defeat her is Rumple and we have a plan to lure her in.”

“Your last one hasn’t worked out too well if she’s got her claws into Regina.”

“Regina is changing so it would have to take some powerful dark magic for Cora to lure her back.”

“Archie, I know we have a lot on our plate, but we do have to find out if these outsiders are from the Home Office or not,” David reminded his brother. “I have a call in to one of my contacts in San Francisco. She’s one of the Twelve Dancing Princesses and works at a strip club called The Invisible Hand.”

“See if your girl has any information on a guy named Neal Cassidy,” Emma instructed. “That’s the man I have in custody right now. “Hildy and Terry just sent me the IDs on the other three…Zelena Strogoff Sabitini. Angelo Sabitini and Greg Mendell.”

“Strogoff!” Archie exclaimed.

“That name familiar?”

“Yes. It’s Rumple’s real last name. It can’t be a coincidence.” We might need to bring him in on this.”

“Let’s see what we can find out first,” Charming suggested. “I’m gonna go talk to the Sabitinis and Mendell.”

“I’m going with you,” David said firmly. “Mendell has two homicides to answer for because I’m not so sure Beth’s ex was involved in them.”

“I’ll see if I can find Regina and I’ve gotta go talk to Henry,” Archie said and vanished.

Emma took several deep breaths before she walked into the interview room where Bae waited, his cuffed hands on the table.

“You played me. You're from there, aren’t you? You played me. Did you know who I was, where I was from the whole time? Was this just some sort of sick twisted plan? Did…did you even care about me at all? I wanna know! I want the truth, all of it!” she yelled.

“Okay…but maybe we better have a beer. Or two. Or three.”

“I am not drinking with you! Whatever you're gonna tell me, tell me now!”

“Trust me, you’re gonna want a beer Em.”

“Don’t you DARE call me Em! My name is Emma. Sheriff Swan. Get it?”

“Yeah, I get it but trust me, you’re really gonna need that beer.”

“Fine!” she growled and gestured a bottle of vodka, orange juice and two glasses appearing on the table before them.

“You remembered,” he said softly, the fact that she had magic not bothering him as it would have in the past. He’d been told to expect it.

“Yeah. You were the one who got me my first illegal drink,” she said bitterly. “And eleven months
in jail with nothing but an old car to start my life with,” she went on while she mixed up a screwdriver and slid it over to him then made one for herself.

“What are you talking about? I left you the car and twenty-thousand. Are you tellin me that son of a bitch August took off with the money and just left you the car?”

“Wait a minute. Wait just a goddam minute. August? You saw August? When?!”

Bae exhaled slowly. “When I went to fence the watches. I thought he was an undercover cop, but he told me you were a friend of his and he had something to show me. So, I followed him back to his bike and he had a box on it. There was a typewriter in it and there were four words typed on a sheet of paper. Just four words. But they were enough to scare me.”

“What four words?” Emma asked through gritted teeth.

“‘I know you’re Baelfire.’”

“Baelfire….oh my God…” she moaned. “You’re his son. Gold’s. Rumplestiltskin’s. Did you know who I was when we met?”

“If I had, I wouldn't have gone near you.”

“Come on!”

"Come on?" Come on, what? I was in hiding. I came here to get away from... all that crap.”

“So, if you didn't know, then you were just using me. You just needed someone to take the fall for all the watches that you stole.”

“I wasn't using you. When we met, I didn't know. Not until I met August.”

“You left me... and let me go to prison because Pinocchio told you to?”

“Emma…”

“I loved you.”

“I-I was, um, I was tr... I was trying to help you.”

“By letting me go to jail.”

“By getting you home.”

“Oh yeah I got home alright. I took the long way home and if you start singing that damn song I’m gonna smash this glass right in your head. Are you telling me that us meeting was a coincidence? How the hell did that happen if it wasn't in your plan or your father's?”

“Think about it. He wanted you to break the curse. Us meeting, that could've stopped it. Maybe it was fate.”

“You believe in that?”

“You know, there's not a ton I remember about my father that doesn't suck, but he used to tell me that there are no coincidences. Everything that happens, happens by design, and there's nothing we can do about it. Forces greater than us conspire to make it happen. Fate, destiny, whatever you want to call it, the point is, maybe we met for a reason. Maybe something good came from us
“No. Not that I can think of. I just went to jail. That’s it. Doesn’t matter now, I’m over it. And you.” She gulped down the rest of her screwdriver.

“Why do you wear the keychain I got you?”

“To remind myself to never trust someone again,” she said and ripped it off her neck. “Come on. I made a deal with your father I’d help him find you.”

“You made a deal with him?”

“Yeah, and I’m upholding my end; but I have a few more questions for you first. Those people you were traveling with. Who are they?”

“Zee…Zelena, Angelo and I own an interior design firm in New York City and Zee….she’s a distant relative of mine through Papa’s side. When I found out the curse was broken I came here wanting to see you, not him but Zee thinks I should try to patch things up. Patch things up.” He laughed harshly. “That man abandoned me when I was still a child so he could keep his power. He’s still the Dark One, isn’t he?”

“Yeah. And you abandoned me. Funny how the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree!”

“Em…”

“Don’t. Just don’t! Don’t even try to justify what you did. How do you know being with you would’ve stopped me from becoming the Savior? You don’t and neither did August. You decided my life for me and never gave me a chance to decide for myself! You left me to rot in jail with nothing but an old car and a baby I had to give up…”

“What!” Bae gasped.

“Nothing! Nothing.”

“You were pregnant, and you gave the baby up?!”

“Hey! I am the only one allowed to be angry here! What did you expect me to do? I was eighteen years old and still in jail. I couldn’t….I couldn’t be a mother like that. All I could do was give our son his best chance.”

“I have a son,” Bae whispered.

“You don’t have a son. I have a son and all he knows is that his father was a fireman who died. It was better than telling him the truth.”

“You know where he is. Tell me!” Bae demanded, standing up. Suddenly he found himself being forced back into his chair. “I have a right to know Emma!”

“I am NOT gonna let you break his heart the way you broke mine you bastard. You stay away from my son.”

“Does my father know?”

“Yes, he knows.”

“You think he’s gonna let you keep him away from me.”
“No,” she admitted. “But I’m warning you; if you hurt Henry the way you hurt me I will rip your heart out. I don’t give a damn whose son you are. I will rip your heart out! Now get up! I’m taking you to your father.”

Bae stood up, his heart beating with dread. He’d spent a lifetime running away from his father and facing him again terrified him. He knew the power Rumple wielded as the Dark One and how he hurt anyone he perceived as a threat and Emma with her magic was a definite threat. She may have wanted him out of her life, but he would never stop loving her or try to protect her.

You did a bang-up job of it last time, didn’t you Cassidy? he scolded himself. She led him outside to the parking lot. He smiled when he saw the familiar yellow Bug in the lot. The paint was peeling but other than that it appeared to be in good running condition.

“Thought you would’ve junked this old thing by now.”

“I didn’t. In,” she barked.

The interior was still the same and he could still see the stains from the candy bars they’d stolen during one of their convenience store jobs, candy bars they’d allowed to melt in the hot summer sun when they forgot to take them out of the car. He turned his head to look at the backseat, seeing the tear in the fabric that reminded him of the first time they made love.

“What’s his name?”

“Whose?”

“Our son’s.”

“Henry.”

“Who named him that?”

“His adopted mother. The Evil Queen.”

“Our son is being raised by the Evil Queen? The same Evil Queen that cast the curse? Are you crazy?”

“I didn’t know he would end up with her!” Emma protested, slamming on the brakes when she arrived at the pawnshop.

“You gonna leave me in these?” He held up his cuffed hands.

“You gonna leave me in these?” He held up his cuffed hands.

“Your father can let you out,” she muttered.

Rumple and Belle were in the backroom with Archie and Az monitoring the Mills Mansion through Rumple’s seeing globe, greatly disturbed by the recent turn of events.

“How long does it take for this ‘tea’ Cora has given her to wear off?” Rumple demanded of the couple.

“If she’s had too much it could take a while,” Az confessed.

“It’s like detoxing from drugs or alcohol,” Archie added. “And when she crashes, she’s gonna crash hard, harder than anyone else who’s had it because she’s a mage. Cora has the house warded
but not strong enough that we can’t get in. We get in, grab Regina, swap her out for the construct and get out. Then we take her somewhere Cora can’t track her.”

The bell tinkling above the shop door made them all tense. Rumple sent the seeing globe back to its place on the table and walked out onto the salesfloor to see Emma escorting a handcuffed man into the shop.

“Sheriff Swan, did you get lost? The station’s that way.”

“This…belongs to you!” she shoved Bae at him. “And consider my debt to you paid in full.”

“Bae…” Rumple whispered. “Is it really you?”

“I think we’d better leave you alone to talk,” Belle said softly. “Emma, would you come to the backroom please? There’s something we need to discuss with you.”

Father and son stood face to face. Rumple reached out to try to touch Bae’s cheek only to be disappointed when he backed away.

“Bae, please…..let me talk.”

“What do you wanna talk about Papa? How you abandoned me? How you left me in this world to fend for myself while you lived in the lap of luxury back there…and still do here? Nothing, nothing you say will ever excuse what you did to me!”

“But you’re here. You came back for me.”

“I didn’t want to. I came back so our cousin could meet you and if you hurt her the way you hurt me, you’re never gonna see either of us again.”

“Bae please, you don’t understand. I didn’t want to let you go.”

“But you did. You did!” Bae slammed his cuffed hands down on the counter and shattered it, shards of glass slicing into his hands.

“Bae!” Rumple cried and gestured, releasing the handcuffs. He reached out to take his son’s injured hands in his.

“Not with magic, you bastard! I’ll take care of it myself. Just tell me where the damned medical kit is…if you even have one.”

“It’s on the wall. Bae, please…”

“Don’t touch me!” Bae walked over to the medicine cabinet and opened it, taking out a bottle of peroxide, cloth and some bandages. He cleaned out the wounds and wrapped his hands up.

“I know you came with Emma, to be sure that her bargain with me would be fulfilled but it won’t be…until we talk.”

“You never give up, do you? You’re gonna use her against me, just like you use everyone else. Are you holding our son hostage too?”

“No! I would never hurt Henry.”

“I’m gonna hold you to that Papa because the first time, the FIRST TIME you hurt Henry I’m gonna use that dagger you care so much about against you! You’ve got three minutes. Start talking.”
“Losing you was the greatest mistake of my life, one I have spent so long trying to make right. I thought the only way I could get back to you was a curse...so I created one and made certain someone could break it.”

“Emma. Was us meeting part of your plan?”

“No. That was a coincidence. A happy coincidence because the love you bore for each other gave me my grandson. You will be proud of him Bae. He is a bright young lad. He is the reason why the curse is broken. He…” Rumple sniffled. “He is so much like you.”

“Funny isn’t it? I abandoned him the way you abandoned me, and your father abandoned you. Is that gonna be our legacy Papa? Abandoning our children?”

“No, because we will stop the cycle now!”

“Two minutes.”

“We can’t change the past, but we can make a fresh start. You, me, Belle, Emma and Henry. We can be the family we should be.”

“Who’s Belle?”

“The young lady you just saw. I met her just before the curse was cast.”

“You love her?” Bae’s eyes widened.

“I lost myself when I lost you but Belle…Belle saved me. She brought out the man behind the beast, the man you knew before the curse consumed me.” Rumple summoned his dagger and threw it on the broken counter. “But I am freeing myself of this burden because I will not let it tear our family apart again.” He sighed. “But to do that I must face the one person whose heart is darker than mine. You don’t believe me, do you?”

“I want to. I really want to. Us at that portal’s been the source of all my nightmares for years and I hated you for so long for leaving me here alone but now you’re telling me you’ve spent all these years trying to get back to me, that you had the Evil Queen rip everyone else out of their world to do it?”

“Yes.”

“There was no other way?”

“No. There are greater forces at work than ours Bae.” Rumple sighed. “Do you remember how I used to tell you everything happens for a reason.” Bae nodded. “Everything that has happened with you…with us…has been to serve the will of those greater forces and defying them comes with a price. My price was losing you. Yours was to set Emma on the path to becoming the Savior.”

We could’ve gotten her there together!” Bae protested.

“No, son. You wouldn’t have. Emma had to endure those hard times to become the woman she is now.”

“Yeah…one that hates my guts.”

“But you can change that, Bae. Be the man she fell in love with again. Be the father to Henry that you couldn’t be before. I…I can’t let you make the same mistakes I did….that my father did. Let’s
end this cycle together. We need to be a family again, Bae. It’s the only thing that can save us.”

“What are you not telling me?” he demanded.

With a heavy heart, Rumple began to tell all; the prophecy that forced him to hobble himself in the Ogre Wars, the constant battles he fought with the evil force that had taken possession of his soul and of the horrors yet to come.

“Aramon’s Prophecy. I’ve heard that before.”

“How? Everyone fears it.”

“Not Pan.”

Rumple’s eyes narrowed to slits. “When did you see him?”

Bae’s voice trembled as he recalled his years on that desolate island among so many innocents that had been seduced away from their homes and families to become Pan’s slaves, including the Darlings.

“But there’s one boy in particular Pan’s looking for,” he finished.

“The Truest Believer.”

“Yes. Do you know why?”

“Oh, I do Bae, and Pan will get him over my dead body! It’s Henry. Pan is after Henry because he is a direct descendant of the Ozian Guardians Lurline and Aramon and the Greek gods Hades and Persephone.”

“Emma is descended from the Greek gods?”

“No, son. We are and in one hundred years Henry will inherit all of Lurline’s powers and become the most powerful mage in all the realms. If Pan gets ahold of Henry’s heart, he will absorb all of his powers and kill him.”

“Why?”

“Because that’s the only way he can stay young forever and the magic keeping him young is running out. And now…now it’s time for me to tell you the full truth about him…why we became enemies.”

“You said he betrayed you.”

“He did. Before he became Peter Pan, he was Malcolm McDermott, a drifter and con man from a long line of Scots-Irish warlocks that crossed over into Nonestica centuries ago. He took his new name from the doll he made for his son.” Rumple walked over to the counter and opened a small wooden case. Inside was a straw doll with a little blue coat. “You have your nightmares of my abandoning you at the portal….mine are of being dragged out of Neverland by the Shadow and watching the old bastard that begrudged every breath I took change back into a child again because…’a child can’t have a child, Rumple.’ I SWORE I would never become him and I did….I did the day I let you go!”

“Pan is my grandfather?!” Bae exclaimed. “Why didn’t you tell me after he first came for me?”

“Because you were already starting to see that he and were the same….terrible fathers.”
“No, you’re not the same. Pan’s not being possessed by Alemedia Demonia. You are.”

“No, don’t do this to me again. No more secrets. You tell me everything or we’re done!”

“All these years you thought the seer meant the boy that helps you find me would kill you. Henry.”

“Freeing myself from her comes with a price, Bae. A price I’m willing to pay to keep my family safe.”

“Because I didn’t know I was Lilliana Strogoff’s missing child. My mother sacrificed herself to protect me from the curses that cast a pall over our family, but it was the Will of the OZ that I take the Dark One curse and break it. It must be done before the Final Eclipse.”

“All these years you thought the seer meant the boy that helps you find me would kill you. Henry.”

“Don’t do this to me again. No more secrets. You tell me everything or we’re done!”

“What’s the price, Papa?”

“That’s mine to pay.”

“You’re not dying Papa! There has to be another way,” Bae protested. “Dammit, you’re the king of loopholes!”

“There are no loopholes this time Bae. Unless I and my Ozopov cousins do what must be done our world will be destroyed and Alemedia Demonia may be free to walk the mortal realm. But I want to spend my last days with those I love most.”

“There is no loophole Bae. Unless I and my cousins do what must be done our world will be destroyed. I cannot lose you now, Papa. I just can’t….”

“Belle, this woman you’re with. She doesn’t know does she?”

“She may now that’s been learning how to use her magic. Look after her for me, please.”

“Emma and I…we talked about going to Tallahassee and starting our lives over until I let her go.” He sighed. “She still hates me Papa.”

“It’s not going to be easy, but you need to try Bae. For Henry. He needs you. He needs all of you; you, Emma and Regina. You need to find a way to be a family together.”

“Speaking of family, we need to go to the hospital to visit the couple I came with. Their names are Zelena Strogoff Sabitini and her husband Angelo. Zelena says she’s our cousin Papa, and she knows magic.”

“Then she must be descended from Aramon’s sister.”

“She’s protective of me Papa, so don’t expect a pleasant reception.”

“I would be disappointed in her if she was. We will go to this Zelena and then you, son, need to go
talk to my grandson.”

Rumple gestured and they vanished in a puff of smoke.
When she embraces
Your heart turns to stone
She comes at night when you are all alone
And when she whispers
Your blood shall run cold
You better hide before she finds you

Within Temptation - Ice Queen

Author's Notes: Many of the locations in this chapter refer to the version of Wonderland from the Syfy miniseries Alice, released in 2009. Like the Enchanted Forest, there are also multiple versions of Wonderland. And in the Wonderland scenes there is an Easter egg for the 1985 movie Clue.

Storybrooke, Maine

Nine days prior to the Final Eclipse

Emma would have thought the cloak and dagger tactics Archie was suggesting they undertake were a little extreme were they not about to storm the lair of the Evil Queen. While they concealed themselves behind a bush Cora stepped out of the house dressed in a pantsuit they'd often seen Regina wear and walk down the path leading to the Mills family vault and repository for all the items Regina transported to this land with the curse.

"Still hard for me to imagine you commanding an army," Emma whispered to him while they waited.

"There's a lot no one knows about me. All right. Let's go."

He waved his hand and cast a cloaking spell as the two crept toward the front door of the house, feeling traces of a protection spell cast on it. He disabled it easily and the pair ran into the house and up the stairs to Regina's bedroom. The former queen lay on her bed still asleep from the toxic concoction of Wonderland tea and Ozian poppies. Emma reached for her and tried to shake her awake but to no avail.

"Oh, crap Archie, she's really out of it!" she moaned.

"That's why I need to get her to Wonderland right away."

"You're kidding right?"

He scowled at her. "Do I look like I am?" He waved his hand over the sleeping mayor and she began to shrink. Emma watched with awe when she flew into Archie's hand and vanished.

"What did you do with her?"
"Sent her to Dellia for safekeeping," he informed her. "We don't have much time. I need you to picture Regina in your mind. How she looks, how she speaks, how she acts and make it real."

"Okay…" Emma murmured.

"Now remember the way you just found her. Keep that image in your mind and concentrate."

"Okay…"

Moments later a construct of Regina appeared on the bed.

"Did…did I just do that?"

"Yes, you did. Now let's get out of here before Cora comes back."

"I hope she doesn't see through that construct," Emma muttered as they vanished. They reappeared at Archie's house where a worried Henry and Az waited for them. Henry sat on the sofa with his sleeping mother, holding her hand.

"I knew she was innocent," Henry said to Emma. "But I couldn't tell you 'cause I knew you wouldn't believe me. She's trying so hard to be good but Cora's gonna try and ruin it. Look what she did! She drugged Mom to try to get her to love her."

"I'm sorry I doubted her Henry…but her mother left too much evidence to fool everyone. All we can do now is try to make up for it."

"You and Regina need to work together now for your son's sake but we have to get these teas out of her system first and the only place we can take her is Wonderland."

"Are you crazy? That's Cora's domain!"

"Not Cora's Wonderland," Az clarified. "There are others and the one these teas originate from Archie and I know well. Too well."

"Because Bastinda was trading with them," Archie explained. "Their queen got the idea for her 'teas' from the vapor potion Bastinda was using to keep the Ozians under control. But I have a contact or two in their Resistance army that might know how to cure Regina."

"We don't have any more travel storm tokens," Az pointed out.

"You don't need them," Henry said with a smile and removed his staff from his backpack. "I can get you there."

"What is that?" Emma demanded. "Where did you get it?"

"Henry is the East Guardian and the Keeper of the Staff of Air," Az replied. "But you shouldn't be using it without the proper training, honey."

"It speaks to me. It tells me what I need to do," Henry murmured. He held the staff up and its eyes began to glow. "Speak the name of your destination and you will fly on the dragon's breath."

Az waved her hands over Regina and the former queen shrunk again and was teleported into a small globe. She placed the globe into a cloth bag and stood up, taking Archie's hand.

"Take us to Wonderland Three," she commanded. A white mist emitted from the staff and surrounded them. Seconds later they vanished. Emma stared at her son, her eyes wide.
"Now I want to meet my father," the boy declared. "I know he's here. I can feel it."

Emma panicked. How much did he know and how did he know it?

"How did you find out? Gold?"

"I'll tell you along the way," he said and reached for her hand.

Mills Mansion

Cora was pleased when her daughter awoke having completely forgotten about taking her to the police station and as docile as she needed her to be to carry out her plans. Regina was not aware of it, but those plans did not involve the boy she refused to call her grandson because she knew who and what he was, the Ozian Guardian that would ascend to Lurline's throne on his one hundredth natal year. She was determined to make certain he didn't survive to see his twelfth. There were many throughout the realms seeking the heart of Lurline's successor and few of them powerful enough to extract those powers while the boy was still a child and untrained.

"That boy is mine!" a voice hissed through the mirror in the guest bedroom.

"Not if I get to him first," Cora sneered and laughed. "The sands in the hourglass are dwindling away quickly, Peter and you'll be returned to your old miserable self. Not even the magic from the Scots-Irish warlocks you boast you descend from can stop that."

"We'll see," Pan retorted and vanished.

"Mother? Who were you talking to?"

"Oh….myself honey," Cora lied smoothly.

"Come downstairs. I have breakfast ready."

"You….you….you don't have servants?"

"I don't need them," the construct said and went downstairs to the dining room to wait for Cora to join her. Cora came downstairs a short time later, already planning to make some drastic changes in her daughter's living conditions. A queen having to cook her own meals and clean her own house simply wasn't done. Her daughter would have servants in her new castle and she had the perfect ones in mind…the daughter of her hated rival Eva and that shepherd she married. She would work both into an early grave, a fitting punishment for their robbing her daughter of the crown she'd fought so hard to secure for her.

Storybrooke General

Rumple and Bae reappeared outside Zelena and Angelo's room, an exhausted Dr. Whale waiting for them.

"I was told you are listed as their next of kin on their admission papers," Whale said to Bae.

"I am. How are they Doctor?"

"As well as can be expected after a wreck like that," he said and went on to tell him what had been done for the couple. "You'll be able to see them but only for a short period of time."

Bae nodded, and the pair walked into the room. Bae gasped seeing Zelena's head bandaged and her arm and legs in casts. Angelo's head was also bandaged, and his arm and legs were also broken.
"Zee…" he whispered.

"Oh, don't cry caro," she whispered and held out her arms. He went into them willingly, hugging her as gently as he could. She kissed his forehead.

"I hear a cane….is your father with you Neal?" Angelo asked.

"Yes."

Rumple approached the bed cautiously and when he was close enough Zelena reached out with her good arm and slapped him across the face.

"What was that for, dearie?" he cried.

"Idiota, hai abbandonato tuo figlio!" she snapped.
"Te lo meriti! Sii fortunato, non ti maledico!"

Rumple rubbed his cheek where he could still see her handprint. "Oh, I have no doubt you could curse me. Your aura is one of the strongest I've sensed from someone outside our borders, cousin. And you are correct. I do deserve it for leaving my son in this realm alone. But I am grateful he found someone like you to look after him."

"He is the child I've never had," Zelena murmured.

"The child we've never had," Angelo added.

"You have me curious, dearie. How do you know about us? I assumed no one on this side knew what happened to Aramon once he crossed realms."

"His sister knew. I am descended from her."

"Aye, you do bear a close resemblance to the portrait of her that hangs in the gallery at the Emerald Palace." He reached out and took her hand in his. "I would like to make his dream of uniting this family come true." His hands glowed as he called on his healing magic, repairing the broken bones and easing the pain she felt from the surgery she'd been given to repair the lacerations she'd suffered when the windshield of the Fiat shattered upon the impact with Mendell's car and the broken bones in her arm and legs fusing back together.

"Grazie," she whispered.

"And now, dearie, let's see what we can do for you," he murmured when he approached Angelo's bed. His eyes widened with shock when he stared into the younger man's eyes. "He's been blinded by dark magic! Whose?"

"Baba Yaga," Angelo replied. "Irina Fedorovna. She abducted me when Zelena and I were on our honeymoon in Russia."

"It was my fault," Zelena sobbed. "My parents warned me not to go to Russia because Irina had been waiting for one of Ivan's descendants to return. She kept herself alive all those years feeding on the life force of innocents until I killed her. But…but…but my magic wasn't strong enough to return Angelo's eyesight."

"But yours is, isn't it, Papa?" Bae asked hopefully.

Rumple began repairing the damage to his arms and legs and the cuts on the man's head and chest
before he placed his hands on Angelo's head and began to chant in Ozian, a white mist emitting from his mouth and into Angelo's open one.

"Zelena....Zelena...cara mia...I...I can see!" Angelo exclaimed and blinked his eyes several times to make certain they weren't playing tricks on him.

"Angelo! Angelo, caro mio è vero?"

"Si cara mia, è vero!" he sobbed. "Grazie, grazie!" He shook Rumple's hand gratefully.

Bae held back his own tears. This was what he'd always wanted to see, his father using his powers for good, something that didn't happen often in those early days of the curse. Zelena reached out and took his hand in hers.

"You have forgiven your papa, caro?" she asked him. He nodded.

"Thank you, Papa," he murmured.

"La famiglia è per sempre," Rumple said softly. Zelena nodded in agreement.

"Sem'ya navsegda," she whispered. Rumple returned to her bedside and took her hand in his, their hands glowing the moment they came in contact.

"Zelena, why are your hands glowing like that?" Angelo asked his wife.

"Nothing can hurt us if we're together," Rumple said and held his other hand out to Bae. The moment Bae's hand went into his theirs began to glow as well, bringing tears to the sorcerer's cheeks.

"You mean it's some sort of protection spell?" Bae asked him.

"Yes," Rumple murmured, releasing their hands and hugging each of them. The last portion of his heart had been restored.

They stayed with Zelena and Angelo until the couple went to sleep. As they were walking toward the lobby they spotted Emma walking in with Henry by her side. Bae took a deep breath.

"Go to him son," Rumple encouraged. "He's been waiting for you."

Bae's knees were knocking when he approached the boy, seeing so much of himself in his young face. "H...Henry?"

"Hello Baelfire," Henry greeted warmly.

"Why don't we go somewhere private and talk?" Bae suggested.

Rumple nodded and teleported them back to the Victorian's back patio. Bae and Henry were standing in the yard while a nervous Emma sat at the table with Rumple.

"Ummm...I don't...I don't know much your mom's told you...."

"You didn't know about me." Henry said.

"If I had, I never would've let your mom go to prison. I woulda found a way to support the three of us without having to steal anymore."
"Our story had to play out this way, so Mom could become the Savior."

Bae stared at him. "You sound like my father; do you know that?"

"He's right, Dad. Every happened the way it did for a reason. I don't hate you. I just…I just really want us all to be a family when all this is over."

"I want that too but your mom….."

"Is still mad. Yeah, I know but…you're…you're her true love. You gotta fight for her. Show her you're gonna be the guy she needs. She's strong on her own but her heart has a hole in it and it's been there since you left. You gotta make it whole again. And you gotta stay for me."

"I've heard Archie's been sort of a father figure to you all these years. I don't wanna step on his toes."

"He's always gonna be a second father to me but you're my dad. I want you in my life too. And I really want you and Grandpa to make your peace with each other. He really didn't want to leave you here alone. SHE made him let you go because you were a threat to her control. He can't break his curse without you, Dad. You are the strongest anchor to his humanity…you and Belle. And you're an anchor to mine." Henry reached out and took his father's hands in his. They started glowing and a shield formed over them.

"What the hell is that!" Emma exclaimed.

"That Miss Swan, is the power of love you're witnessing and there is no stronger love than that of a parent to a child. Love is the strongest magic in all the realms and you know firsthand what it creates. It created you and it created my grandson. Come. You still need your magic lessons dearie." He gestured, and they vanished in a puff of smoke leaving father and son alone to talk.

Bae was delighted to discover that he and his young son had many things in common. They both enjoyed reading sci-fi and fantasy novels and comics and enjoyed watching some of the same movies and television shows. The boy had a wisdom far beyond his years as he did when he was forced to survive in a strange land alone. Bae found himself talking about those long, painful years but he wouldn't talk about his life in Florida for it was far from the Tallahassee he and Emma dreamed of.

"So, you went to Neverland to save the Darlings from being taken?"

"I didn't want their family to be torn apart like mine was. Now Pan's trying again, and he has to be stopped. I'm not gonna let him take you Henry." Bae hugged his son tightly. "I don't have magic, but I don't need it to try to protect you."

Henry prayed with all his heart once all the chaos was over he wouldn't need protecting any longer. He hugged his father back, not wanting to let go.

"You wanna go get something to eat. I'm starving."

Henry smiled. "Sure. Granny's has great food."

"Remind me we need to take a road trip to New York sometime. I'll take you to the best pizza parlors in the city and the lady I came here with makes the best Italian pizza."

Out at MacDonald's farm Emma crashed into a pile of hay when she failed to defend herself against one of Rumple's energy blasts for the third time.
"Focus, dearie!" Rumple snapped as she got to her feet and brushed the hay from her jeans. "There's a war coming, and you are going to be prepared to fight it if it kills me." He blasted her again. "Now try to absorb the energy and throw it back at me!"

"I'm trying!" she cried, her hands trembling.

"Try harder dammit!"

"Were you this hard on Regina?"

"Yes! Now again. Focus!" he ordered and threw another energy bolt at her. She stretched out her hands and concentrated, catching it in them and holding it for several seconds before she threw it at him. It slammed into his chest and sent him tumbling backwards.

"I did it!" she exclaimed.

"Finally," he muttered as he got to his feet. "There may be hope for you yet."

He continued practicing with her for the rest of the afternoon. It would take time for her to master defensive magic, but she'd managed to survive through the basics. She was so exhausted by the time she returned to the loft that she passed out on the sofa before Bae returned with Henry and missed seeing her father conduct his own version of the Inquisition with him.

"I know Em and I…well…are complicated right now but I want to try again with her….if she'll have me."

"True love is worth fighting for," Snow murmured. "She still loves you. I know she does, she just needs time. I'll do what I can to help you, the rest has to come from you."

"And you hurt her again I will find you no matter where you try to hide," Charming warned. "Same goes for my grandson. You do right by them or you deal with me."

"I have a feeling I'd be dealing with Papa too."

"I'm not surprised," Charming admitted. "But you and your father have your problems too, don't you?"

"Yeah and we gotta work on them. I'd better get going. He's probably waiting for me."

Bae's mind was racing during the short walk back to the pawnshop, still worried that his father would go back on his word and revert to his dark ways and his own mistakes ruined any chances he had of a future with Emma. Before he had a chance to open the shop door, a young brunette opened the door for him and handed him a cup of tea.

"You must be Belle," he said and took a sip.

"And I am so happy to finally meet you. Your father talked about you so much. He missed you." She led him to the backroom and sat at the worktable, a full course meal sitting out in front of her. Bae was stunned that his father's new girlfriend was so young, but he couldn't deny he found her charming.

"Where is Papa?"

"He'll be here soon. He just had to check on something at the hospital, but he asked that we not wait for him to eat."
The delay in his trip back to the shop had been intentional, Rumple wanting to give Belle and Bae the opportunity to speak in private, to bond as he wished they would. He sat in the waiting room at the hospital observing Bae and Belle through his seeing globe.

Belle handed him a plate of fried chicken and potatoes.

"So, how did you meet my father?" he asked her.

She told him of her desire to summon the Dark One when the Ogres began attacking her father's lands and the deal to become his castle's caretaker in exchange for Rumple's help with the war.

"Your father showed me a side of himself that he was afraid to show others and that's what made me love him. I didn't know he was cursed until Regina told me, but I was certain true love's kiss could break it." She sighed. "I was a little naïve back then."

"So, you kissed him, and it didn't work?"

"Because he thought I was working for Regina. It's what she wanted him to think. We argued, and he released me. I went back to my father, but he sent in the clerics."

Bae's eyes narrowed to slits. "Oh, I've heard of them and what they did to people they deemed under a demon's thrall."

"Papa and Regina concocted a story that I took my own life under their torture and your father believed it. He was devastated because he'd already planned to find me and bring me back to him, but I was already a prisoner in Regina's tower and I was her prisoner the whole time we were cursed. Bae, I know all about your father's curse. I know all about you. Rumple has been completely honest with me about your lives. He's made his mistakes as I'm sure you've made yours, but I don't want to see you remain estranged as my father and I are."

She went on to tell him of their lives after the curse, Bae realizing that his father had indeed changed and the woman sitting across from him had been partially responsible for it.

"Your father won't accept Papa as being part of your life?"

"No. Nor can he do anything to prevent it. I was chosen to be your papa's guardian before I was born but no one decides my fate but me. I decided my future was with him and once we break this curse we're going to live our lives the way we want to…and we want you to be a part of that. You, Emma and Henry."

He sighed. "I don't know if I have a chance with Emma but I wanna try."

"That's all you can do, try. True love isn't easy but it's worth fighting for even if you have to go to the mattresses to do it."

Bae smiled at the Godfather reference. "Now I can see why he likes you. You're nothing like my mother. She was always putting him down even when he was working himself to the bone to support us. She did nothing but hop from one tavern to another until she got mixed up with Hook. I've heard he got executed in Oz."

"He did." She refilled his glass of wine and held out her own. "To a fresh start for all of us."

"To a fresh start." Their glasses clinked.

"Well I see you two are getting along fine," Rumple said when he walked into the backroom and
sat beside Belle.

"Did you wear Emma out?" Belle teased him.

"A bit," he admitted. "Did you have a good time with Henry, Bae?"

"Yeah. He acts like you so much it's almost scary…in a good way." He added.

"He is also in great danger Bae," Rumple reminded him. "And not just from your…grandfather," he said through gritted teeth. "Cora will attempt to use Regina to lure him in, but I have quite the surprise waiting for her that I need your help with Bae. Belle, you know what to do…set the wards."

She blew him a kiss and vanished in a puff of smoke.

"Me? Why me?" Bae asked once she was gone.

"I would ask Archie, but I need him to keep an eye on things in the OZ for now."

"What do you need me to do?"

A hook appeared on the table.

"You have to stab me."

"I have to…WHAT?!"

"Allow me to explain."

Bae had a feeling he wasn't going to like this one bit.

"W…W…Wait!" Rumple cried when Bae held up the hook an hour later.

Bae groaned. "Will you quit fiddling around! This was your idea and I really wish you'd gotten someone else to do the dirty work!"

"Yeah, yeah…okay but I feel safer with you doing it."

Bae raised the hook again.

"No, no, no wait….a little more to the left."

"How is a few more inches gonna make a difference?"

Rumple shifted sideways.

"No, no, wait….not there."

"Papa, time's running out!"

"Okay, go ahead. No, no wait…owww! Dammit Bae!" Rumple groaned and yanked the hook out of his shoulder. "Did ye hae to do it so hard!"

"Tis just a scratch." Bae quoted.

"No, it isn't. My arm's off." Rumple conjured a bandage and pressed it against his bleeding shoulder. Bae smiled widely, pleased that his father had gotten the reference to one of his favorite
movies.
"No, it isn't."
"Well, what's that then?"
"Come on you pansy!" Bae challenged, grinning.
"What?"
"Oh, had enough, eh?"
"Look, you stupid bastard I've got no arms left!"
"Now what're you gonna do, bleed on me?"
They looked at each other and burst out laughing.
"Did we just do our own version of Monty Python and the Holy Grail?" Rumple giggled. "You, silly sod! You got us all worked up!"
"Well, that's no ordinary rabbit! That's the most foul, cruel, and bad-tempered rodent you ever set eyes on! Look, that rabbit's got a vicious streak a mile wide! It's a killer! He's got huge, sharp… eh…he can leap about…look at the bones!"
"Jesus Christ!"
"I warned you, but did you listen to me? Oh, no, you knew it all, didn't you? Oh, it's just a harmless little bunny, isn't it? Well, it's always the same. I always tell them…"
"Oh, shut up!"
"Run away! Run away!"
They laughed again.
"What the heck's going on in here?" Emma asked when she walked into the room to begin her daily lesson.
"Umm, we were just ahhh….getting Papa ready for a trap he's setting for Cora."
"Holy hell Neal! How hard did you whack him?"
"I didn't like it, okay! Really wish he would've gotten someone else to do it."
"Well I didn't." Rumple unbuttoned his shirt to show them the black lines the potion made on his chest. "And now that Cora believes I'm dying my name will start to fade from the decoy dagger and she'll come." He staggered over to the cot and lay down.
"What do you need me to do?" Emma asked him.
He summoned a piece of chalk and handed it to her. "I want you to cast the ward spell I showed you yesterday."
"You don't look comfortable," Emma observed.
"I'm not enjoying what we're about to do dearie. But it must done; and you must all play your parts
to perfection."

"If Cora got hold of the real dagger she could use it to kill you and all of us."

"Were Bae, Henry and Belle not in my life, yes. They are my anchors to my humanity and weaken
the dagger's control. Remember Emma, I am dying. You cannot for one moment let her believe
otherwise."

"I won't."

"Papa, what was in that hook?"

"Dreamshade."

"Are you crazy! You just poisoned yourself with the deadliest toxin in all the realms and
Neverland is the only place we can find the cure!" Bae cried.

"No, it isn't," Rumple murmured. "The cure is ambrosia and it just so happens I have some hidden
away. And Cora is going to bring it to me."

"How?"

"By trying to kill me. Now go talk to Emma and let me rest."

"You better be right about this Papa because you are NOT dying today!" Bae grabbed his father's
hand and held it tightly. "You're not leaving me now when I just found you!"

"I won't Bae. I won't," Rumple whispered. "Now go….go with Emma."

"You be careful Papa."

"Oh, I'll be alright. Go."

He found Emma sitting on the floor in front of the door drawing on it with invisible chalk she
found in the cupboard with many other magical items.

"How is drawing on the floor gonna protect us?"

"Watch," Emma murmured and waved her hands over the line. Seconds later a glowing shield
surrounded the shop.

"Not bad for a few lessons."

"Shut up. I'm concentrating." She stood up and brushed off her pants.

"No, you're not. You're avoiding me."

"Seriously? Your father's in the other room dying from a deadly poison and you're worried about
me avoiding you? You really gotta work on your priorities Neal..Bae…or whatever the hell you
wanna call yourself because you suck at it!"

"Papa is not gonna die."

She ignored him and knelt at the curtain separating the shop floor from the backroom and started
drawing a second line. "Get in there with your father. Go!"
He threw up his hands in defeat and retreated to the backroom. Moments Emma joined them, a second shield covering the entrance.

"Now…we wait," Rumple whispered.

The Tea Shop

Wonderland Three

Archie and Az's travel storm landed a few yards away from the Tea Shop, Wonderland Three's version of the New York Stock Exchange. The trading day was in full swing the moment they walked through the doors, men and woman frantically buying and selling bottles of old and new teas coming out of the Hearts Casino. No one on the tea shop's trading floor cared that people, referred to as oysters, were being taken from the other side of the looking glass, drugged and connected to machines that harvested only their positive emotions, they only wanted the high drinking those emotions in liquid form would produce. Those that did care and wanted to return Wonderland back to a place of logic, reason and rule of law had been forced underground.

Az waved her hand and all activity on the trading room floor stopped, the occupants frozen as she and Archie walked down the hall to the manager's office. The desk chair's back was to them.

"Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Not if you've dosed it with the Hearts Casino's latest flavor," Archie said coldly. The chair spun around, the occupant blinking several times.

"Commander Ozopov, Princess Azkadellia!" he gasped. "Bloody hell, I thought you were dead."

"So did a lot of people."

"Why's the floor so quiet all of a sudden?"

"They're having a moment of silence," Az quipped.

"Hatter, we need to see Wadsworth. Now," Archie said firmly.

The man addressed as Hatter scowled. "He calls himself Dodo now. We've all taken names from those books on the other side and ahhh….we're not the closest of friends."

"You never were but we still need to see him."

"Ah all right, come with me but keep your eyes open. The scarab ships that bring in the oysters are watching us."

"We'll deal with them," Az murmured.

Hatter led them down the street to an abandoned building. A couple stood in front of an old school bus holding shotguns. He reached into his pockets and brought out two blocks of cheese his contact in the Hearts Casino managed to smuggle out of the kitchens.

"Get in," the man said, pointing to the open doors. The trio climbed into the bus. Once the doors were closed the man pulled a lever and the bus began to descend underground. Two more men searched them upon their arrival and took them down a long corridor to an office where a man sat behind a darkened desk.

"Now what have you brought me, Hatter?" he demanded impatiently.
"Put some light on the subject, Wadsworth!" Archie commanded sharply. The man gasped and switched on the lamp.

"Commander!" he whispered. "So it's true….you survived!"

"It's been a long time Wadsworth, but I see nothing's changed around here."

"You know as well as I do how difficult leading a Resistance can be. What brings you here? Rumor has it the Sorceress has been defeated and the Ozopov are back in power."

"Barely back in power," Az said. "We need your help Wadsworth. Someone smuggled the Hearts' tea to the other side and used it on one of the Guardians." Regina appeared on the sofa in the corner of the room.

"Are you out of your bloody mind! The Evil Queen!?"

"She's the Heart of the East, Wadsworth but her mother is trying to turn her back into the Evil Queen with Elizabeth Heart's teas. You know what's coming in our world and Regina is one of the eight people that can stop it," Archie reminded him.

Wadsworth scoffed. "Everyone knows Aramon's Prophecy is just superstition."

"It won't be when the damned crimson moon appears, and it will….in ALL the realms. If the balance is not restored, we'll all be having the worst nightmares of our lives that night as our world dies! We need to get her to the Hospital of Dreams and you're our only way in."

He groaned. "Come along then but you'd better not get me exiled for bringing HER."

"She's been given Ozian poppies. They'll keep her asleep long enough for them to treat her."

Wadsworth grimaced. Caterpillar was not going to like this one bit but as former Ozian himself, he knew they had no choice if this woman was indeed one of the Guardians of the Balance. It was a day's ride to the Hospital of Dreams but thankfully he'd smuggled a few travel storm tokens, omitting the need for horses.

The Hospital of Dreams had many patients, but no one had been expecting to admit the former Evil Queen of Nonestica. They confined the former Queen to a specialized cell created by Archie and Az to block her magic as she went through the long and painful detox process.

"It's good that you've given her the poppies Commander," Caterpillar said. "It will make it easier for us to draw the toxins out of her system."

"How much time are we talking about?" Az asked him.

"A few days at least…and I am sorry, but it is the best we can."

"Do what you have to do Adam and inform us immediately when we can come for her."

He reached out and took her hands in his. "Nothing pleases me more than to see you free and reunited with your love," he said softly. Adam Pillar had been the palace historian before the upheaval and was sent away from the OZ for his own protection after the fall of Central City.

"There's still more work to do in the OZ Adam but its my sister who will have to do it now."

"In my eyes you will always be the true Queen of the OZ," he murmured.
"I thank you for that, but I have to make my own way now." She embraced him.

"Will you stay a few days?"

"I'd love to."

"Your husband won't mind?"


"Arguments I always won," Caterpillar reminded him with a chuckle. "Come. I'll have a room prepared for you."

Mills Mansion

Cora was not one to take chances. The teas had subdued her daughter for the time being, but Regina was a strong-willed woman much like herself and it was possible that she could overcome the influence of the teas but there was one form of magical influence she would not be able to resist. Cora descended the staircase to the lower level of the vault where her trunks were stored. She opened the first one and inside were two boxes. She opened the first one and took out the heart inside, her daughter's heart. With it in her possession, she would ensure that the powers of the Heart of the truest Believer would be hers and so would the powers of the Dark One.

The powers of a goddess, she thought.

Back in Wonderland she'd heard rumors of a powerful sorcerer from Agrabah that had located a spell to change the laws of magic. The whole thing was silly. You could change the past, raise the dead and make someone love you with the right spells but those laws had been put in place because doing so often came with dangerous consequences. Cora had no intentions of changing the past. Her past was what made her the powerful sorceress she had become. She'd mastered raising the dead decades earlier as she'd mastered using hearts to control her victims but the only one whose love she truly needed was her daughter's. She waved her hand over the heart and changed it into a heart shaped pendant that she attached to the chain around her neck.

Regina's construct had just finished cleaning up the kitchen when Cora returned to the house.

"I need to meet my grandson," she informed her.

"That won't be easy, Mother. Emma still has him convinced I killed the cricket."

"Oh, I think they'll change their minds once they search the ship I traveled on. You just have to convince them to do so. Hook is the one who killed the cricket and he is here to kill the Dark One," Cora instructed. "But no one is to know I'm here except Henry. Understand?"

"I understand Mother."

"Now go to the police station."

Cora watched her daughter walk out to her Mercedes, grinning. While Regina was the police station she would be on her way to the clock tower where Regina's heart memories revealed the location of the Dark One dagger.

"Oh Rumple you're slipping," she chuckled and vanished in a puff of smoke and reappeared at the clock tower, casting a protection spell. It led her up the stairs to the clock face. She could see the dagger attached to the minute hand and summoned it to her, stunned that there were no wards
"You've forgotten your lessons darling. Love is weakness."

She held up the blade, stunned to see that his name was beginning to fade.

"Well Hook, it appears you succeeded after all." she murmured. The dose of dreamshade the pirate carried with him from Neverland was potent enough to kill anyone within hours, but she would deliver the death blow and the powers of the Dark One would be hers. She walked down the street to the shop under a cloaking spell, anticipating the moment when all her enemies would kneel before her.

The Hospital of Dreams

Wonderland Three

Though she'd only been at the hospital a few hours in her time, three days had passed in Wonderland Three and the aggressive treatments Regina had been given produced better results on her than other tea addicts that had been in rehab for years. She was awakened on the third day and taken to the dining hall where Archie and Az awaited her.

"What happened to me? Where am I?" she asked.

"The Hospital of Dreams," Az replied. "Your mother gave you a powerful dose of Wonderland Three's teas to attempt to control you. But if you don't believe us, look there." Az pointed to the older woman's chest.

Regina closed her eyes, seeing her mother pouring contents from three bottles into the cup of apple cider she'd been drinking before she'd gone to sleep that night.

"She's never going to change Regina. She just wanted you under her control, so she could use you to help her get what she's really after, the powers of the Dark One."

Her eyes filled with tears. "All I ever wanted was for her to love me and to have my son back. She's so heartless…." She paused.

"Regina, what is it?"

"Her heart….it's part of the reason why she is like this. If I put it back…"

"Regina, it's too dangerous!" Archie warned.

"But I have to try! She's still my mother even after all she's done. Take me back to Storybrooke. Take me back right now!"

"You still need to."

"NOW!" Regina snarled.

Archie sighed and teleported them outside. Az took a travel storm token out of her satchel and tossed it. They all held hands and stepped into the funnel cloud that would take them back to Storybrooke.

Storybrooke Police Station

"...You really expect me to swallow this bullshit, lady?" David demanded angrily, glaring at the Regina construct from across the interview room table. "I SAW you strangle my brother to death and leave him on his office floor like he was trash. "You're getting locked up in a warded cell and
you are NEVER gonna see your son again because it's what you deserve for killing my brother and making sure he never sees his child being born."

"Search Hook's ship. He was glamored to look like me to fool everyone. I was at my house all night that night. I wouldn't kill Archie. He was like a father to Henry. Please, I need to see him. I need to see my son Deputy Molk."

"Not a chance!"

"Search the ship!"

"All right, we'll search it, but you are staying here."

"The hell I am!" She gestured and tried to teleport out. "What!"

She tried again.

David and Edgar laughed.

"Well well well, looks like the Queen's outta magic." David pulled his handcuffs out of his pocket. "Regina Mills, you're under arrest for the murder of Archie Hopper..." He continued to advise her of her rights as he cuffed her, and they took her down the hall to a holding cell and locked her in.

"Mother! Mother, what did you do to me? Mother!" the construct screamed, pounding on the bars of the cell with her fists.

"Mommy can't help you now, Your Highness," David sneered and walked away.

"I'm innocent!" she yelled after them.

"Ya know man she acts so much like her it's almost like she thinks she's real," Edgar was saying to him when they got in their squad car.

"She does think she's real," David said as he fastened his seatbelt. "And that gives us the advantage."

"So are we gonna search the Jolly Roger."

"No, we're gonna look for Tamara. Mendell's here so she has to be somewhere close." He started the engine and pulled out of the lot. While they were at the stop light David's phone rang. "Hello? Son of a bitch! We're on our way!"

"What's up Molky?"

"Mendell's escaped from the hospital."

He floored the accelerator and sped off.

Cora conjured a fireball and threw it at the shield blocking the front door of the pawn shop, grinning when it dissolved.

"Some Savior. She needs a few more lessons," she murmured and went inside, feeling a tightness in her chest.

Regina. My heart. It's in your vault and someone else is there. Go! Go!
I can't! You bound my magic!

Cora teleported the construct into the vault and the moment Regina entered, the construct vanished, leaving only Regina with the box with her mother's heart in her hands.

"Where are you?" she murmured, waving her hand over the glowing organ. She closed her eyes and could see her mother enter the pawn shop with Rumple's dagger in her hand. "No! Mother, no!" she cried and teleported out.

"You two...out of the way!" Cora snapped and waved her hand when she broke through the shield to the backroom making Emma and Bae vanish in a cloud of magic.

"Now what do we do!" Bae grouched, kicking up a patch of dust when they appeared in the woods.

Emma sighed. "We wait."

"A vision told me about you. Told me this day would come. But it didn't tell me everything. It didn't tell me what I really wanted to know." Rumple said when Cora came into the backroom.

"And what's that?" she asked as she sat down beside him.

"Did you ever love me?" Rumple asked weakly.

"Why do you think I had to rip my own heart out?" Cora asked. "You were my weakness," she said as she caressed his face, her hand still feeling like ice on his skin. "You're the only man I ever truly loved." She then stood up with the dagger in her hand. "But love is weakness and power is strength." She raised it, ready to deliver the death blow until he caught her wrist in his hand and squeezed it tight. The dagger slipped out of her hand and fell onto his chest, the ambrosia seeping into the wound on his chest.

"Oh, but that's where you're wrong dearie!" he snarled and blasted her. She slammed against the bookcase and fell to the floor.

"But...you...you were...you were dying..."

"Desperate times call for desperate measures, dearie. Your pirate friend's head is rotting on a pike in Central City courtesy of Commander Ozopov while I set up this little charade for your benefit. You remember him, don't you, dearie? You tried to kill him and place the blame on Regina to lure her back to you but all you did was take a construct made to look like him." Rumple laughed. "But he came back long enough to kick that pirate's ass and remind you it's not wise to piss him off, didn't he dearie?"

"I should've killed that damned cricket when I had the chance!" she hissed.

"Ah but you couldn't because he is after all, an Ozian Guardian. And so am I."

"No...you're lying..." she stammered.

His eyes now glowed fire red. "I am the West Guardian and the keeper of the blade of fire," he said as he advanced toward her. "But you knew that, didn't you? Don't bother trying to deny it. You didn't just want my power. You wanted my grandson's too."

"And I'll have it!" she cried.
"Over your dead body," he sneered.

She rose to her feet and stretched out her hand, throwing an energy bolt at him. He held out his own and absorbed it and threw it back at her. With her free hand she summoned the dagger to her.

"Rumplestiltskin, I command you to stop!" she cried.

He laughed and continued to advance. "The stronger my heart is, the weaker the power of my curse is, dearie. I have all three sources of my humanity back with me and that's nothing more than a trinket in your hand." He gesture and the decoy dagger reappeared in his hand. He sent it back to its box. "And you'll never find the other two because they've already been claimed."

"Rumple, what are you doing?" Regina cried when she ran into the backroom with the box containing her mother's heart in her hands.

"Stay out of this Regina!" he ordered.

"No!" She conjured a fireball and threw it at him. It bounced off the shield he'd thrown up. "We agreed! You'd trap her in Pandora's Box!"

"Regina, what have you done?" Cora cried in horror.

Now do you understand what must be done for your daughter, Cora? See now who she is and what she must become, she heard Rumple ask in her mind. It had been years since they'd communicated in that manner. Cora reached out with her mage's senses and saw the faint light surrounding her daughter, revealing the destiny that awaited her, greater than that of being a queen of any realm.

All magic has its price Cora...and this is yours. The Dark power can't be yours. You never would've been able to control it, it would've corrupted you far worse than it has me and now you must die so that your daughter can be free of the darkness you dragged her into all those years ago. She must become the Heart of the East.

Rumple summoned the box to him and opened it, taking out the heart.

"Rumple, please, don't..." Regina begged. "She can change...we all can."

"No. She can't. And this must be done," he said firmly and began to squeeze. Cora collapsed, and Regina took her into her arms, weeping.

"Mother? Mother!"

"This... should've been enough. You... You should've been enough," Cora said softly. "Had I chosen love...over power," she whispered and reached out to caress Regina's cheek. "From the east she will be the heart of the truest believer...I give her to you now, Rumple. The will of the OZ be done," she gasped and lay still in her daughter's arms.

"The will of the OZ be done," he murmured, letting the dust from her heart fall to the floor at his feet.

"Mother? What's going on? Mother? Don't leave me, please... What am I going to do?" Regina sobbed brokenly.

"Your mother did you no favors before, but she has this time. For once," he added.

"Shut up! You killed her!"
"I did what needed to be done," he said firmly. "For you."

"Liar," she seethed.

"Listen to me!" he growled, casting a freezing spell over her. "You're angry. I understand that. But you must understand your mother was going down a path you COULD NOT follow! She was holding you back. You told me you didn't want to become her, and you were. I had to stop it, I had to stop her the only way I knew how. She had to die so that you could live Regina. Don't you understand? You should've been MY child! Mine. But your mother tricked me and robbed me of that right. Now I reclaim it because I've always loved you like the daughter I never had."

"How can I, without her?"

"Because you have the one thing she didn't...a child that loves you," he reminded her. "She didn't just want my power, she wanted his too and would have killed us to get it. Was that what you wanted? To sacrifice your own son's life because that was what it would have come down to Regina! You couldn't make the choice, so I did. To save your son, MY grandson, your mother had to die. Were it my choice, Emma would be his guardian since you're determined not to prove yourself worthy of earning the right to be the Heart of the East Gate. Ozmalita chose an alternate before and perhaps she can again."

"I will have my..."

"Vengeance? Go on and try dearie. You've already tried to go up against an Ozopov and nearly had your life force ripped out of you." He flicked his wrist and raised her in the air. "But the Strogoff are the more powerful of our bloodline and I will make what Archie did to you look like child's play if you dinna get your head together and stop thinking of yourself and think of my grandson. There's an evil far worse than your mother coming for us and I need you to protect him from it!" He released his grip and dropped her. "Mourn your mother Regina but forget about vengeance. It'll get you nothing but another hole in your heart."

"I want be alone. Please."

"As you wish." He teleported her back to her vault with Cora's corpse in a coffin.

Regina conjured a rose and laid it across the casket.

"I'm so sorry Mother. But you left me, left him with no other choice," she said through her tears. "All I ever wanted was for you to love me as I was, not whom you wanted me to be. And I wanted to be someone other than the Evil Queen. I made myself what I am because I blamed Snow for Daniel's death when I should've blamed you. You took his life. You took our dreams and crushed them when you crushed his heart. I have to make this right. I have to atone for what I've done. I have to serve the will of the OZ no matter what the cost. I have to protect my son...with my last breath if I must."

"That's good because your last breath is coming sooner than you think!" she heard a voice hiss from behind her and turned around to see a couple standing in front of her.

"Who are you? How did you get in here?"

"I've been waiting a long time for this reunion Regina. You haven't changed a bit since the day you took my father away from me," the man said angrily and grabbed her wrist, fastening a leather cuff around it. "And now I'm gonna take everything away from you, away from all you abominations. You don't belong in this world!"
"You're one of them…the Home Office…” she murmured.

"Oh, I'm more than that. I'm the little boy you tried to keep a prisoner here, but my father made sure I got away."

"Owen Flynn…"

"Greg Mendell now," he corrected.


"That cuff blocks your magic. And now you're gonna tell me where my father is before you die."

"Go to hell!"

"You first." He pulled a taser out of his pocket and pressed it against her stomach. She cried out in pain and sank to the floor. "Bag her."

"With pleasure," Tamara said with a smirk and pulled a body bag out of her backpack. They put Regina in the sack and zipped it up then carried her out of the vault and tossed her unconscious body into the back of a van.

"We did it! We finally got her!" Greg exclaimed and kissed Tamara as she started the engine.

"And now we're gonna blow this town off the map," she declared gleefully and sped off.
The End of All Hope

Chapter by cjmoliere

It is the end of all hope
To lose the child, the faith
To end all the innocence
To be someone like me

Nightwish – The End of All Hope

Storybrooke, Maine
Seven days prior to the Final Eclipse

He’d promised her he would given her time alone, but it was a promise Rumple hadn’t intended to keep because he too had his final respect to pay to the woman who had been his second love. He plucked a red rose from his garden and teleported to the Mills family vault, hoping to find Regina still there but when he entered the room housing Cora and Henry’s caskets there was no trace of her.

“Regina? Dearie?” he called out.

Rumple!

Cora?

Rumple, please hurry. Our daughter is in danger!

How am I able to hear you? You’re dead.

I haven’t crossed over yet. I can’t. Not until I’m sure she’s safe. Please! Find her!

In danger from whom?

They’re here!

Suddenly his phone rang. He grabbed it out of his pocket.

“Hello?”

“Papa, you gotta come over to Emma’s place! Something’s wrong with Henry!” Bae screamed into the phone. He teleported over to the loft to find his grandson convulsing violently on the living room floor while his maternal grandparents and parents could only watch helplessly. “Papa, please, help him!”

“Henry, Henry lad…it’s Grampa…” Rumple soothed as he knelt beside the boy and took his hand. The moment their fingers touched a terrifying image appeared before his eyes. Regina was strapped down on a gurney with electrodes attached to her head, legs and arms. A man stood before an electroconvulsive therapy machine, a malicious smile on his lips as he turned up the dial.

“What’s happening to him!” Emma cried.
“It…it’s not him…it’s Regina…and he’s feeling it because of their bond…” Rumple gasped.

“Help him, please!” Snow begged.

“Find Regina!” he ordered them. “It won’t stop until we find her. I’m trying a locator spell, but something is blocking me. Bae, hurry! If Regina dies so does Henry!”

Emma grabbed the keys to the Bug off the table. “C’mon Neal! Dad, Mom, you too!”

Belle, I need you, Rumple sent to her. She teleported into the loft, her eyes wide with shock and horror seeing her grandson in such a terrifying state.

“What do you need me to do?”

“Hold his other hand and chant with me,” he instructed. Their joined hands began to glow, and a protective shield formed over them. “Not this time, not this time,” he chanted.

“Rumple, what’s going on?”

“The damned Home Office…they’re here and they’re attacking Regina, but Henry is feeling it through their bond. The last time this happened the only choice had been to sever it and it CANNOT happen again!”

“Why?”

“Because Henry will forget everything…who he is, who he will be. A severed memory is the price of a severed bond. They’re trying to divide them the way DG and Wyatt are.”

Storybrooke Cannery

“Tell me where my father is, you bitch!” Greg yelled, turning the dial up again. Regina cried out as more currents surged through her body and she could smell burning flesh.

“F…Fuck you…” she panted.

“Goddammit I’ll MAKE you tell me!” He turned the dial up again.

“Never mind that,” Tamara said when she came into the room. “Where’s the diamond?”

“Up…up your ass!” Regina cried weakly. How had they known about the diamond? No one knew about it, even Rumple. Fearing that a Savior would indeed break her curse, Regina had a fail safe built into it that she’d thought of using in the early days after it was broken. All she needed to do was strike the black diamond that had been one of her wedding gifts from Leopold with a dwarf’s pickaxe and it would activate, sucking all the magic out of the town and returning it to the forest it was back in 1983. She planned to cross the town line with Henry and make a new life somewhere else, even without magic while the others perished in the final destruction. Now she was determined to take the location of the deadly device to her grave. The Evil Queen was gone, and the Heart of the East Gate would not allow any more innocent lives to be taken.

“Hit her again,” Tamara ordered. “We can make it stop. All you have to do is tell us where the diamond is.”

“Fry me,” she challenged. “I’m not telling you anything.”

“You will,” Greg said confidently.
“…I need everyone to do a town sweep immediately! Regina is being held captive somewhere and tortured,” Emma bellowed into the radio on her car.

“Greg Mendell’s escaped from the hospital,” David radioed back. “Witnesses and CCTV match the descriptions given by my contact in San Francisco. It’s his girlfriend Tamara. Navarro and I are already doing a canvas.”

“Damn you! Damn you!” Emma growled, punching Bae in the arm while he was trying to drive. “You brought them here!”

“No, I didn’t! Emma, I swear I didn’t know Tamara worked for the Home Office…”

“FIGHT ABOUT IT LATER!” Snow yelled from the backseat. “We have to find Regina.”

“English, Mulligan, Koto you back up Molk and Navarro,” Charming radioed to the other deputies while Snow called the diner to mobilize a search team from there.

“Ruby, go to Regina’s house and get something to pick up the scent.”

“Already on it. Granny, we got trouble again!” she called out.

“Diner’s closed. Everyone go home, get changed and arm yourselves. Two of those Outsiders are on the loose and they’re coming for us,” she ordered. Minutes later people were running to the cars and down the streets to their homes, arming themselves with anything they could find.

Dr. Whale was having problems of his own back at Storybrooke General trying to persuade his newest patients to remain in their beds.

“I’m fine in case you haven’t bloody noticed now get out of my way or you’ll live up to your name…whale!” Zelena threatened and flicked her wrist, sending him crashing into the wall.

“Zee, you didn’t have to be so rough,” Angelo scolded.

“I am sorry caro but I can’t just lay here. That bastard is after Bae and he needs my help. You must stay here.” She summoned her bow and arrows.

“You’re not going without me. You forget I was on my way to becoming a made member in the Gabbano Family before you met me. I can fight.”

A Glock appeared in his hand. “Grazie cara.” He tucked it into the back of his jeans and followed her outside. As Zelena was about to cast a locator spell the Bug sped past them with Bae at the wheel. She gestured and a broom appeared in her hand. “Get on caro and hold on tight!”

“It’s been a long time since we did a broom ride!” he laughed and hopped on behind her. She started humming Elmira Gulch’s theme from The Wizard of Oz as she flew off.

Frustrated with their lack of progress, Tamara left the cannery determined to find the black diamond herself. She understood Greg’s need for revenge, but it was causing him to lose sight of their ultimate goal; to destroy all magical creatures, not just the Evil Queen. She was driving back to the Mills family vault when her phone beeped with a text. She pulled over to read the message from her superior.

Go to the mines. It’s hidden inside Snow White’s casket. Activate it and bring the boy to Neverland before the destruction is complete.
She parked the car a short distance away from the mine entrance, grateful it was deserted. She only had one clip left for her gun and her taser would need charged again before she could use it. As she walked in and got into the lift a map appeared in her hand giving her the exact location of the casket. She lifted the broken glass lid and peered inside, spotting a white velvet cloth bag tucked beneath the pillow. Reaching inside she pulled out a large black diamond. She tucked the diamond back into the bag and took out her phone. “Greg, I’ve got it. Get over here.”

“I’m almost finished.”

“We’re running out of time. The Home Office wants it done now so we can get the boy.”

“I’m on my way.”

Greg threw the switch one last time, Regina’s screams of pain music to his ears and the scent of her burning flesh the sweetest aroma. The volts surged through her body until she lapsed into unconsciousness. He slapped her face several times before he grabbed his bag and ran out of the cannery.

“Henry? Henry?” Rumple cried, shaking his grandson frantically. “No! No! Don’t you dare! Don’t you dare die on me lad! Belle, open his mouth.”

“Why? What are you doing?”

Rumple closed his eyes and began to chant in Ozian, a white mist emitting from his mouth and into Henry’s. The boy gasped and his eyes fluttered open. Belle looked up to see several strands of silver in her husband’s hair.

“What did you do?”

“Gave him part of my life force. I had to. It was the only way. Henry lad, are you all right?”

“Mom…” he croaked. “We gotta save Mom.”

“Where is she lad?”

Belle helped him sit up and conjured a glass of water for him to drink.

“At…at…the cannery.”

“Belle, call Bae. Come on lad. Let’s get you into bed for some rest.” Rumple gestured and teleported his grandson upstairs to his room.

“…They’re at the cannery,” Bae said when he hung up the phone. They had just pulled into the parking lot when Zelena flew past them on a broom.

“Zee, what are you doing here?” Bae demanded.

“We’re here to help,” she insisted. The group entered the cannery and immediately split up with each pair searching a different part of the cannery. Snow and Charming were walking past the office when they spotted a bound Regina on the table.

“David!” she cried and ran into the office, undoing the buckles on the restraints. “Oh, she’s hurt badly. We have to get her help!”

Charming picked the former queen up in his arms and carried her out of the office, encountering Bae and Emma.
“Is Regina okay?” Emma asked worriedly.

“We need to get her some help. We’re taking her to the convent.”

“No, take her to Rumple!” Emma insisted.

“The convent’s closer,” her father disputed.

Emma tossed them the keys to her Bug. “Go. Go!”

She and Bae continued their search, discovering a crude looking electrocution therapy machine. The second she touched it she felt a tinge of dark magic. “Sick bastards,” she whispered. “This machine’s been modified to kill mages and I’d be willing to bet the Father From Neverhell is behind it.”

“You just described Pan and Neverland perfectly,” Bae muttered.

“Son of a bitch! He’s getting my son over my dead body.”

“Ours, Emma. He’s my son too.”

She spun around. “We’re gonna let you see him IF and only if you don’t bail on him like you did me because I swear to GOD if you do it again I will hunt you to the ends of the Earth and kill you. I don’t care if it brings your father’s wrath down on me or not!”

“I think you’d have to get in line Em. Papa’s pretty much told me the same thing.”

“Good,” she growled and pushed the machine off the cart. They continued to search the cannery but could find no trace of Mendell or his accomplice. Two sheriff’s department squad cars were parked outside when they emerged.

“Sheriff?”

“Deputy Koto, I want you English and Mulligan to seal this place off and keep watch in case they come back. Where are Molk and Navarro?”

“Still searching.”

“Alright Neal, let’s go!” She tossed him the keys to the Bug. They got in and sped off downtown.

When Greg entered the mines, he found Tamara waiting for him holding a large black diamond in her hands.

“That’s it?”

“That’s it,” she said with a smile. “All the magic in this town is tethered to this stone, just like all the magic from the place they came from is tethered to an emerald. She set the diamond down on a large rock. “Once we activate this, this place goes back to being the forest you remember and they all die.”

“Pity we can’t go to their world and do the same to that emerald.”

“We don’t have to. It’s going to be destroyed in seven days. Pan’s assured me of that.”

“How do we get it to work?”
She grabbed Happy’s axe off the wall and swung it down hard. “With this!” The moment the tip of the axe touched the top of the diamond it rose in the air and began to glow a fiery red. Unlike the Ozian emerald, the black diamond would destroy Storybrooke in two hours. The emerald would destroy Nonestica in three days with the Enchanted Forest the last realm to fall. “Now let’s go get that boy!”

“….Rumple….Rumple….look outside!” Belle cried. He pulled back the drapes and gazed up at the now night sky, his heart pounding with dread. Just a few moments ago it had been daytime but now the sun had been eclipsed by the moon—a crimson moon.

“No! No! It can’t be!”

David Molk slammed on the brakes of his squad car before he could crash into the back end of his brother’s VW bus parked in the middle of the street.

“Archie, what the hell….?”

“The crimson moon,” he murmured. “It’s too soon!”

“Why’s the moon red, Molky?” Navarro asked him.

“I don’t know…”

Archie gestured and he and Az teleported outside the town line, discovering that it was still daylight there.

“Dellia, what’s happening? Is this it?” he asked worriedly.

Az closed her eyes, opening a telepathic link with her mother. “No…Nonestica is not in danger yet…but we are. Someone has tethered Storyrooke’s magic to a stone similar to Lurline’s emerald and it’s been activated.”

“Who would be crazy enough to…Regina!” he growled, and they teleported back into town, finding Regina now at the loft under the care of the Blue Fairy and Rumple. “What the hell happened?” he demanded, seeing the burn marks on her skin.

“They tortured her. She needs rest to recover her strength.”


“No, she doesn’t. She needs life force. My life force,” Rumple murmured.

“Rumple, you can’t. The more you give, the weaker you become…” Blue reminded him.

“There’s no time. The crimson moon is in the sky.”

“But not for Nonestica. Here,” Az said.

“What?!”

“It’s my fault…” Regina said weakly. “I had a failsafe built into the curse. I…created a tether like the goddess’s emerald and tethered all of Storybrooke’s magic to it. They found it…and activated it….I am so sorry…”

“You silly, silly girl!” Rumple sobbed and opened her mouth.
“Rumple, no!” she protested as a white mist emitted from his mouth into hers. More silver strands appeared in his hair and he fell across her unconscious. “Oh God, why? Why did you do it?”

“Because he loves you,” Belle said softly. Regina teleported herself off the bed and him into it.

“I have to stop it.”

“Mom, what’s going on?” Henry cried. She knelt down and gazed into her son’s eyes.

“The town is being destroyed Henry and it’s my fault.” Violent tremors knocked them all off their feet. “Someone has activated the stone I tethered Storybrooke’s magic to. And soon all this…will be gone.”

“We have to get out of here now,” Archie said firmly.

“Not everyone can cross the line. You know that!”

“Better they live as their cursed selves than die awake,” he argued. “How much time do we have?”

“Two hours,” Regina murmured. “Round up as many people as you can. Get them across the town line.”

“What are you going to do? Can you stop it?”

“All I can do is slow it down, give you more time to evacuate everyone.”

It’s going to kill you. You know that, he sent to her.

It’s my price to pay. Go. Save my son. Save as many as you can.

“Mom if you stay, you’ll die! You can’t!” Henry sobbed, clinging to her.

“I have to,” she croaked.

“Nooooo!” Henry screamed as she vanished.

“Henry, we have to go.”

“Archie we can’t leave her. We can’t. Please…” he begged. “You’re an Ozian Guardian. So am I! We have to DO SOMETHING!”

“Listen to me! The only thing we can do now is survive! Regina used dark Ozian magic to crate that stone and only dark Ozian magic can destroy it, but she is no longer a dark mage. She’s been reborn to the light. All she can do is slow it down and give us time to escape. She’s giving her life for you Henry. Don’t let her sacrifice be in vain.”

Belle waved her hand over Rumple and shunk him then clapped her hands.

“Where did you put Grampa?” Henry asked her. She held out her chipped cup necklace.

“The safest place he can be. With me. Come on. We have to get everyone out of here.”

“All right, teleport everyone to the Town Hall,” Az instructed. Moments later they joined them, hearing voices raised in anger and confusion.

“Why is the moon red as blood? Is this the Apocalypse?”
“Are we having an earthquake?”

“Everyone, please be silent and allow us to speak!” Blue shouted.

“There are Outsiders in the town,” Archie announced. “And they’ve activated a device that’s going to destroy the town. We have to evacuate.”

“Can’t someone stop it?” Granny demanded.

“Regina can only slow it down and she is doing so as we speak.”

“She made it, didn’t she? Figures!” Leroy snorted.

“Enough!” Emma growled. “They tortured Regina almost to death before they got their hands on that stone. I know her. She never would’ve told them where it was. She would’ve died first because she knows it would kill Henry too and she would never let that happen.”

“She didn’t tell them where it was. My grandfather did,” Bae added angrily. “They’re working for him. Pan’s using this as diversion to get Henry but it’s not gonna work.”

“There has to be another way,” Snow insisted. “There has to be another way to stop that stone and save Regina. She’s come a long way from being the Evil Queen and I would not be able to live with myself if we didn’t at least try.” Her eyes widened. “A portal! That’s it! If we send the stone through a portal it stops the destruction!”

“We don’t know it will work Snow. The stone’s sucking all the magic out of the town, isn’t it?” Charming asked.

“Yes,” Az confirmed.

“We only have a few hours. Archie, Azkadellia and I will try to break the memory barrier on the town line but if it doesn’t work your cursed selves will be your only selves,” Blue reminded them.

“Better to stay cursed than dead,” Happy muttered.

“Pack up only your essentials and get to the town line as fast as you can,” Emma instructed. “Molk, English, Mulligan, Koto… go to the line and get ready to herd ‘em through.”

“Yes, Sheriff.”

“Neal, get Belle and Henry the hell outta here.”

“Mom, what are you doing?” Henry cried.

“Emma, don’t you dare…” Bae warned.

“Regina may not be strong enough to hold off that stone by herself. We need more time. I’m going.”

“Dammit, Henry can’t lose BOTH his mothers!”

“Emma, please,” Snow begged.

“I have to do it for Henry. To give him his best chance. Just like you did with me, remember?” She hugged her parents, tears streaming down her cheeks. “I just wish I had more time to get to know you…”
Henry cried into his father’s chest. “She can’t….they can’t…”

Rumple emerged from inside Belle’s pendant. “What is going on?”

Bae quickly brought him up to speed.

“Emma, go to Regina. Belle, Archie, Blue and Azkadellia, with me!” he instructed. “Bae, get my grandson out of here before they find him! The rest of you get your arses to the town line or I’ll teleport you there myself!”

“Come on Snow. We’ll get them moving,” Charming urged his wife.

Rumple, Az, Archie, Belle and Blue teleported to the town line. “We’re going to hit this barrier with everything we’ve got dearies. Blue, stay inside the line with Archie and Belle. Az and I will work out here. Let’s begin.”

“Wait.” Blue whistled and soon her sister fae joined her at the town line. They pulled out their wands and began firing energy bolts at the barrier along with Archie and Belle as Rumple and Az worked from the other side.

“It’s fighting us,” Blue panted.

“Keep going!” Rumple yelled.

“I wanna help! I wanna do something!” Henry yelled from his father’s arms on the other side of the line.

“Henry! Henry get back here!” Bae yelled, seeing his son charge at the town line with his staff in his hand. “Dammit!”

Henry slammed the tip of the staff into the ground and closed his eyes. “The winds of change I summon thee, barrier of memory, I banish thee!”

“Get back everyone!” Rumple shouted as a funnel cloud came spinning toward them. “Henry, what are you doing?”

He smiled. “You didn’t just give me part of your life force Grampa. You gave me memories. Blood memories of our ancestor, Alexander Strogoff, your grandfather and East Gate Guardian. I’m just letting him guide me.”

“Oh, that is brilliant lad!” he whispered.

“Please let this work,” Archie prayed.

The funnel cloud pierced through the magical barrier shielding the town and swept it up inside it. The cloud then began to spin back to Henry’s staff and it was slowly absorbed into it.

“Did it work?” Nova inquired.

“There’s only one way to find out.” Blue handed her wand to her sister fae and stepped across the painted line. “I am Galaluna, the Blue Fairy she declared and summoned her wand back to her. It is safe to cross, my sisters.”

Moments later they heard and saw a fleet of vehicles pull up. Geppetto got out of his car first.

“Is it safe? Can we cross?”
“We can,” Blue called back.

“Start driving through,” Rumple instructed.

The vehicles began to cross using both lanes, the line backed up all the way to Main Street as cracks began to form in it. Those who were in the path of the cracks began abandoning their vehicles and making a run for it to the town line. Trees started sprouting all over town, destroying buildings and homes along with grass and all the other vegetation that had existed prior to that day in 1983. Greg emerged from the mine, smirking with satisfaction at seeing yet another menace to the world being eradicated.

“We gotta go,” Tamara reminded him.

“Not until we find my father.”

“He’s probably dead and buried. There’s no time. We have to find that boy and get him to Neverland! Come on!”

They jumped into Tamara’s car and sped off.

“They’ve escaped!” she cried, slamming on the brakes.

“What?”

“Look!” She pointed to the abandoned vehicles in what was left of the town, slamming her fists against the steering wheel. Then she regained her composure. Capturing the boy was their mission now and they could not fail. She threw the car into gear and sped toward the town line. Regina waited a few minutes before she ran into the mine, feeling all the magic from the town being swept up by the glowing black diamond.

“Regina!”

“Emma, what are you doing here! Go to Henry!” she yelled.

“Everyone’s across the line safe. Come on.”

“But what kind of life will they have out there? This town is all they know. You were right, you know. Everything that's happening, it's my fault. I created this device. It's only fitting that it takes my life as punishment for taking away the only safe haven we had.”

“You’re not dying today,” Emma said firmly.

“I only wish I was strong enough to stop all this. I'm just not. Tell Henry. Tell him I love him,” she sobbed.

“You may not be strong enough, but maybe we are.”

“You’re just learning your magic.”

“I’m not letting you die. Henry needs both of us and I’m gonna make damn sure that happens.” She stretched out her hands and began blasting at the stone, beads of sweat forming on her brow as she concentrated. Regina stood on the other side and blasted it with her own magic. They were throwing every bit of magic they could conjure to deactivate it, but nothing seemed to be working. A powerful shockwave went out, throwing them to the ground. The stone stopped glowing and fell onto the rock
We did it," Emma said as she got to her feet.

"Yes...we did," Regina said hesitantly with the stone in her hand. Once her fingers had touched the stone it shattered. She smiled.

"Whoa! Is that supposed to happen?"

"I don't know."

"Regina...your clothes..."

Regina glanced down to see that she was now wearing the black satin robes of a guardian with an apple on the back, a katana sword at her feet with the image of an apple engraved onto the blade. She knelt and picked it up.

"I am the Heart of the East Guardian, the bearer of the staff that summons the winds of change," she murmured. "And I will protect my son until my last breath for my word is my bond, and you Emma, will stand at my side and guard him with me. The OZ may not have chosen you, but I have. We will both be his mother." She gestured, and Emma’s clothes were transformed into white satin robes with the image of a swan on the back. A katana sword lay at the younger woman’s feet.

“I am also the Heart of the East Guardian and I will protect my son with my last breath for my word is my bond. The power of eight shall become the power of nine,” Emma murmured as she picked up her sword.

"Rumple, what's going on?" Belle asked him once things settled down.

“Stay here. I'll find out,” he said softly. When he appeared in the town he could see the trigger's effects being reversed and the forest turning back into their town again. "From the East she is the heart of the truest believer. You've seized your destiny Regina. Well done dearie," he murmured. "Well done."

"Rumple...the town...is it safe?" he heard Belle ask from behind him.

"It looks like it is, sweetheart." He took her hand in his and they started walking down the street. Everything looked the same yet there still had been a change, the creation of a new guardian. Emma and Regina would protect his grandson together as they were meant to. The power of eight would become the power of nine.

“The town’s safe,” Archie announced to the others. They began walking back to their vehicles and started driving back to their homes while Greg and Tamara watched from behind some trees. They could see Henry and Baelfire in Emma’s Bug, the last car in the line. They waited until the other vehicles were out of sight before they started their car and followed them. As they got closer to the town Tamara sped up and blocked the road with the car and the pair jumped out.

“Dad!” Henry cried as the Bug plowed into the side of the car, unable to swerve in time.

“Henry! Henry! Are you okay?”

“Yeah...Dad look out!” he yelled as Greg reached through the open window and shocked Bae with his taser. Henry opened the door and jumped out when he saw Tamara coming toward him. She removed a bottle from her purse and tossed the contents onto him.

“What…what did you do to me?” he cried.
“Squid ink,” she explained with a grin and fastened a leather cuff around his wrist. “I’ll take care of Neal. Get him to Neverland. Now!” she ordered Greg. He seized the frozen child by his arms and began dragging him to a portal that he’d opened with a magic bean. Greg pulled the terrified boy through and the portal closed.

Tamara stalked toward the unconscious Neal with a gun she’d taken out of her purse.

“I’m sorry Neal,” she said coldly and pulled back the trigger.

“Arriverderci, putana!” Zelena hissed as she swooped down on her broom and threw a fireball just as the bullet discharged from the chamber. The bullet exploded as it came in contact with the fireball, killing not its intended recipient but the shooter. She fell back on the road, her face burned almost beyond recognition.

“Zelena!” Angelo cried frantically. “Henry’s missing! Look!” He pointed to Henry’s backpack inside the car while Zelena tended to Bae. She waved her hand over the spot where he’d been tazed and he opened his eyes.

“Henry…oh my God! Zee, we gotta get to my father! They took Henry!” Bae cried frantically.

Zelena teleported Bae to the backseat of the Bug and Angelo jumped into the driver’s seat. Angelo drove the car back into town while Zelena followed on her broom.

Oz (The Outer Zone)
That same day

“Now it will be your duty to destroy the East and West,” Alemedia, now using DG as her vessel commanded Pan from the other side of the mirror she was scrying from. “Fail and I will make your eternity in my realm as painful as possible. Zero, you will go to this Storybrooke and kill the North guardians and their child while it slumbers in the womb.”

Zero smiled evilly. “With pleasure.” He was looking forward to going another round with Commander Ozopov, only this time he would be the victor.

Wyatt teleported from his hiding place on DG’s desk back to his old cabin where Jeb, Ambrose and Raw were waiting for him. “Jeb, I’m sending you and Elmer to the other side. The Dark One is sending Zero through to try to kill Az and Archie.”

“Father, if she takes control again...”

“I’m fighting her, but I don’t know how much longer I can. Take Xenia with you. Rumplestiltskin has to banish her before her hold on me and Dottie can be weakened enough for us to take back control. And now that Dottie knows what happened between your mother and me…”

“Father...”

“There’s no excusing it Jeb. Yes, I love you mother and part me always will, but I love Dottie too and I’ve betrayed her in the worst way possible. What if my actions bring the Final Eclipse? That’s what Aramon warned us of, didn’t he? That our family’s actions would bring the final destruction of our world. I need to find my heart. It’s the only way I can try to reshift the Balance before Rumple goes to Neverland.”

“What do you need us to do?” Ambrose inquired.

“Go to the Queen…and tell her to prepare for the worst.” Wyatt sighed deeply.
“What do you mean?”

“We have to get everyone out of here before the crimson moon appears.”

“Are you saying we should evacuate the OZ?”

“That’s exactly what I’m saying. You know what’s gonna happen if we stay. We die. This world dies.”

“You can’t give up. There’s still time.”

“Seven days Glitch! That’s all the time we have left. Seven days! And with Alemedia switching back and forth between Dottie and me…we might not make it in time. Go.” He teleported Xenia to the cottage. “Take care of my son, Xennie.”

“I will.” She hugged her future father-in-law. “You take care of my big brother.”

Jeb held back tears as they stepped through the funnel cloud that would take them to Storybrooke. Wyatt teleported himself back to the Northern Island and raced up the stairs to DG’s old suite of rooms. She lay on her bed, encased in ice as she had been that terrible day she’d learned his guilty secret. He took her cold hand in his and pressed it to his lips.

“Dottie,” he whispered. “I know you can hear me. There’s not enough words for me to say how sorry I am.” He leaned forward and kissed her lips to no avail.

“She’s mine…as you are,” Alemedia taunted.

“Not for long,” he growled. “I’ll get her back if I have to go to the darkest part of Ephesis to do so.”

“Soon there will be no Ephesis. Soon I will walk the mortal realm as your mistress. You will all serve me or die. Seven days, Tin Man. Seven days.” She vanished.

Wyatt crawled onto the bed and pulled DG’s cold, frozen body into his arms. “If you won’t come to me, I’ll come to you. In the only place the darkness can’t find us…. ” he murmured as he drifted off to sleep.

The Dream Realm

He found himself walking down the familiar roads that led him back to his old cottage in Elba, hearing music playing and saw DG sitting on the porch sketching.

“Bury all the memories
Cover them with dirt
Where’s the love we once had
Our destiny’s unsure
Why can’t you see what we had
Let the fire burn the ice
Where’s the love we once had
Is it all a lie?

And I still wonder
Why heaven has died
The skies are all falling  
I’m breathing but why?  
In silence I hold on  
To you and I…” a woman’s voice was singing.

“Dottie?”

She pressed a button on the device he now knew from their talks about other side culture was an Ipod and looked up at him with tear filled eyes.

“You shouldn’t be here.”

“But I am, Princess and I’m not goin anywhere until we talk.”

“There’s nothing more to say. It’s my turn to step aside now.”

“We both know you can’t even if you want to.”

“Do you think I want to? I love you! I’ve loved you most of my lives and I’ve been spending as much of this one as I can trying to make up for the mistake I made in letting you go the first time. But seeing you in her arms is killing me,” she sobbed. “But, it’s what I deserve isn’t it? Because I made you watch while I went into Nicolai’s arms. I shouldn’t feel anything at all without my heart, but I still do.”

“If you don’t have heart, you have nothing,” he reminded her. “Dottie, my heart was in my body still beating while I was in that suit, but it may as well have been dead. I thought it died the day I lost my family but then a stubborn young woman came into my life and brought it and me back to life again.” He took her hand and pressed it against his chest. “I took mine out too but it’s missing its other half and you are that other half. It was always meant to be you. Adora will always have a place in my heart but we had our time together. I have to let go.”

A glowing heart appeared in his other hand. “She may have part of our souls, but we have an advantage over her. We have her memories.” He gently pushed her heart back into her chest. She closed her eyes and concentrated, his heart appearing in her hand. Both bore dark spots as they suspected they would, based on their actions as the Dark Ones. She gently pushed his back into his chest and held her hand over it.

“I love you Wyatt but I’m not ready to be with you…not yet,” she confessed sadly.

“I know, but I’ll wait as long as it takes Princess,” he vowed and took her in his arms.

“I am NOT finished with you yet!” Alemedia growled, throwing her glass of blood at the wall. Several mobats screeched and took cover behind the pillars and the marble tile floors cracked beneath the weight of her furious steps as she stalked down the hall to her vault. She reached up and took down on box on the top shelf, expecting to find three hearts inside but to her horror there was only one.

“NO!” she screamed and took out the remaining heart, squeezing tightly. Adora appeared in the room gasping in pain. “Bitch! You tricked me!”

Adora smiled faintly. “You underestimated them sister. Their…love…is stronger than your darkness.”
“We’ll see.”

But first she had to make sure a certain manchild did his duty and destroyed the Strogoff guardians.

Storybrooke
Seven days prior to the final Eclipse

“No….no! Henry!” Regina and Emma screamed, holding their hands to their hearts. They teleported out of the mines and onto Main Street as Rumple and Belle pulled up in his Caddy, Archie and Az in their van and Angelo in Emma’s Bug.

“Regina, Emma, what’s wrong?” Archie asked worriedly.

“They’ve taken Henry!” Emma yelled. “We have to get after them! Tell me you have one of those coins!”

“I’m afraid we don’t,” Az confessed.

“We have to try something, anything!”

“There’s no way without a portal!” Bae moaned.

“Yes, there is,” Rumple murmured and reached into the Bug, pulling out Henry’s backpack. He unzipped it and took out the staff. “This is going to take us to him.”

“How? Only he can use it!” Regina said angrily.

“Not anymore, dearie.” Rumple placed the staff in Regina’s hands. Seconds later the eyes began to glow.

“How are you doing that? What is that?” Emma asked her.

“The Staff of Air,” Regina said softly. “Take us to him. Take us to our son,” she commanded it. A white mist emitted from the dragon’s mouth and formed a whirlpool in the sea.

“Papa, is the Jolly Roger still here?” Bae asked him.

“Yes, why?”

“Because I’m commandeering it!” he said.

“You know how to sail a pirate ship?” Emma’s eyes widened.

“Only useful thing Hook taught me before he dumped me on Neverland and you’re not going there without me. I know every inch of that hellhole.”

“We’re coming too,” they heard Snow and Charming say from behind them.

“No! Mom, Dad, you need to stay here.”

“He’s our grandson,” Charming said firmly. “We’re going.”

“So are we,” announced Archie.

“No, you and Az are staying here with Belle,” Rumple ordered.
“No, I wanna help!” Belle insisted. Rumple pulled her aside.

“The town is no longer safe. Greg and Tamara weren't working alone. Others will follow. After we've gone, follow these instructions. It's a cloaking spell. It'll shield the town, making it impossible for anyone to find.” He handed a scroll to Belle.

“Then how will you find your way back to me? You're not coming back, are you?” she asked worriedly.

“The prophecy. The boy is my undoing, but he's also my grandson. I must save him. He is the key to restoring the Balance.”

“I understand, but I also know that the future isn't always what it seems. I will see you again,” Belle cupped Rumple’s face in her hands and kissed him passionately. “I love you and we are going to be married as soon as you get back.”

“Come on Belle,” Archie said gently. “We have to get that shield up as soon as possible.”

He hated cutting their moment short but he knew time was of the essence.

She nodded through her tears.

Teach her the path of the dragon. She must be ready, Rumple sent to Archie. He nodded.

Rumple gestured and the Jolly Roger appeared in the water.

“Alright, let’s go get Henry,” Regina said and teleported herself and Emma onto the ship. Rumple teleported himself, Bae and the Charmings aboard and Bae took the helm, steering the ship toward the whirlpool. Seconds later it vanished.
Welcome to the jungle, it gets worse here every day
You learn to live like an animal in the jungle where we play
If you hunger for what you see you'll take it eventually
You can have everything you want but you better not take it from me

In the jungle, welcome to the jungle
Watch it bring you to your knees, knees
I'm gonna watch you bleed

Guns N Roses – Welcome To The Jungle

Author’s Notes: You will now start to see some of the events of Season 3 occur in a different order, at a quicker pace and some scenes will not exist at all due to the removal of Captain Hook in a previous chapter. There are also several Archie and Azkadellia scenes that are mentioned but not included. Those missing scenes will be included in their side story, Nemo. Keep looking for it and DG and Wyatt’s side story Cold Heritage on my profile.

Storybrooke, Maine
Seven days prior to the Final Eclipse

A car bearing Minnesota plates sped down the long stretch of road leading to the portals that would take them to one of the six versions of the town known as Storybrooke but they were only interested in the original for the moment. Their mission; to find and destroy Pandora’s Box, one of many devices that opened the gates to Ephesis and trapped its victims in one of the Ozian Hell Realm's worst prisons, the Realm of the Forgotten. Pan knew his son was planning to use that box to trap him and bring him over to the other side to weaken him, however the boy would be in for a nasty surprise. Leaving Neverland would weaken most of his powers but not all of them. Once he stepped foot on the other side he would be able to channel the powers of his Scots-Irish warlock ancestors. His son would have access to those powers as well, but Pan had more experience with them.

"They're casting a cloaking spell," the passenger spoke up, pointing to a glowing dome shield that appeared in the sky. "Step on it, Michael!"

Michael Darling floored the accelerator, praying that the car would get them across the town line before the shield blocked the entrance. Their sister's life depended on it. Wendy had been waiting for over a century to gain her freedom and they couldn't let her down, not when she'd allowed the Shadow to take her to Neverland to try to find their missing friend Baelfire and had been taken
prisoner instead. Michael and his brother Jon also allowed the Shadow to take them in an attempt to rescue her, but they too were Pan's prisoners, only able to gain their freedom when Pan had the heart of the Truest Believer in his possession.

A group of ecstatic Storybrooke residents were waiting for Archie, Az and Belle when they were walking back to his van.

"They did it! They stopped the town from being destroyed!" Leroy cried.


"They stopped the self-destruct device. Those people who came... Greg and Tamara... they kidnapped Henry and they took him through a portal," she explained.

"To where?" Ruby demanded.

"Neverland. More people from the Home Office are coming. We have to stop them, and this is the only way how." She held up the scroll Rumple had given her. "A cloaking spell and to cast it we need fairy dust. Lots of it. The mines. It runs through the walls. We have to dig through to the dust running through the walls and let my magic carry the spell through the town. Archie, Az....I may need your help."

"You can do this honey," Az assured her.

"Mr. Gold entrusted this task to you for a reason. You have to believe in yourself Belle," Blue told her.

"Then let's go! We don't have much time!" Belle flicked her wrist and teleported everyone to the mines.

"Someone wanna explain to me how you and Archie are using magic?" Leroy asked her.

"We'll explain later. Start digging!" she cried.
He picked up his axe. "You heard her boys."

They hammered away at the rocks for what seemed like hours until they finally broke through to a vein containing a large cache of fairy dust. Belle approached the rock and poured the contents of the vial that had been wrapped around the scroll containing the incantation she needed to read to cast it. Then she waved her hand and unfolded the scroll, the text written in Russian Ozian, a language only those of the Ozopov and Strogoff bloodlines could translate. She placed her hands over the vein and took a deep breath.

"I've never cast a spell like this before. What if I do it wrong?"

Archie placed his hand on her left shoulder, Az her right.

"Just concentrate Belle," Az coached. Archie smiled, recalling how patient she'd been with DG during her magic lessons. Belle closed her eyes and began to recite the incantation. The fairy dust began to glow beneath her hands and a bolt of magic shot up out of the rock and through a hole in the cave, forming a glowing shield in the sky above them. The shield descended over the town slowly, severing the rear bumper from the car the Darlings were driving and then finally reaching the ground.

"We made it!" Jon exclaimed. Barely, but they made it. They drove the car into the woods and parked it, putting all their personal belongings into backpacks and continuing into town on foot.

In the mine Belle breathed a sigh of relief. The town was safe. For now.

"Now what do we do?" she asked Az and Archie.

"Now we get you ready," Az said softly.

"Ready for what?"

"To learn the path of the dragon." Archie waved his hand over his umbrella and transformed it into his katana sword.
"Hey, you still didn't answer my question. How do all of you have magic?"

"It's a long story Leroy and one that needs to wait for another time," Archie said.

"So, who's gonna run the town now that Snow, Charming, Regina and Emma are gone?"

Everyone looked at Blue.

"Archie, you and Azkadellia have the most experience. It should be you," she said.

"Hey, wait a minute! Why them? He's a shrink and we have no idea who the hell she is!" Whale protested.

"Her name is Azkadellia Andromedia Ozopov, rightful Queen of the OZ, Whale!" Archie said through gritted teeth, fighting the urge to blast Whale where he stood for insulting his wife. "And I was the Commander of the Ozian Royal Army. Does that answer your question?"

"No, you weren't. You were Snow's advisor."

"I haven't been in Storybrooke the whole time, you idiot!" Archie snapped. "And I have magic now. Did you ever stop to ask yourself how that is?"

"Yeah, how did that happen?" Leroy demanded.

"I'd like to know too!" Ruby exclaimed. "And I'd like to know how Belle has it."

"Why don't we all go to the diner and you can tell us over lunch?" Granny suggested. Belle didn't feel like eating but she didn't want to be rude either. She allowed the Hoppers to take her back to the diner in their van and sat with them at their table, finding their presence comforting but they were barely given time to relax as everyone began firing questions at them all at once until Archie waved his hand and cast a silencing spell and began to tell the story as he knew it with Belle and Az adding in the details they knew.
“So, you’re telling us you are all the stands between our version of the devil walking the earth and our land being destroyed?” Granny demanded once they finished.

“And we only have seven days left to restore the Balance,” Az replied. “Once Rumple neutralizes the first dagger Alemedia’s control over my sister and her bondmate will be weak enough for them to be able to resist her control. The trouble is we don’t always know which one she is in control of. It was Wyatt the last time.”

Belle shuffled her French fries around on her plate, unable to eat them or the delicious hamburger that had been offered to her. All she could do was worry for Rumple. Confronting his past and his father was not going to be easy for him and she longed to be there with him.

“There has to be some way I can help Rumple!” she whispered to the Hoppers. They smiled.

“In the only realm the darkness can’t breach. The dream realm,” Az murmured. “I awoke Archie in his dreams weeks before Emma broke the Dark Curse.”

“She woke me the night before Henry went into the mines. Him going into the mines is what triggered the more aggressive side of my personality to come out with Regina. I never allowed anyone to talk down to me when I was Commander Ozopov and he always comes out when I lose my temper. I’ve always told Henry that giving into one’s dark side never accomplishes anything.” He smiled faintly. “Jeb Mysticos used to say that. He’s the one who taught me how to use my powers. He was also Rumple’s cousin, Belle.”

“Facing his father is not going to be easy for him. He denies it, but I know part of him wishes things had been different between them.”

“Pans going to attack Rumple three ways. Magically, physically and psychologically,” Archie reminded her. “The hardest battle is going to be in his mind. That’s where you come in. You need to be his conscience, remind him of who he is, not who he was.”

“How do I reach him in the dream realm?”

“That’s what we’re going to show you.”

“Would you mind staying with me while Rumple’s gone? I hate staying in that big house alone.”

Az reached across the table and took Belle’s hand in hers. “We’d be happy to, honey. Come on. Let’s get you home. There’s a lot to do.”

Neverland
Seven Days Prior To The Final Eclipse

The Jolly Roger with Bae at the helm emerged from the portal in the middle of the ocean. In the distance Bae could see the island that had been his home for decades and felt a lump rise in his throat. He had as much to fear from its master as his father did but there was also another entity he feared just as much…the Shadow. He alone knew that once they arrived on the island the Shadow would prevent them from leaving by ripping their own shadows from their bodies and sending them to Dark Hollow, its own version of Ephesis.

Bae lowered the anchor and stepped back from the wheel, taking a deep breath. Suddenly he felt a hand on his shoulder and turned around to see his father standing there in a grey dragonscale leather coat, silk shirt and breeches. There were two black lines on his cheeks.
“What’s with the wardrobe change and war paint Gold?” Emma asked. He glowered at her.

“I can’t go traipsing around the jungle in my Armanis, now can I? And yes, Miss Swan, this is a war, one you’d better damn well be ready for because it is going to take ALL of us to get my grandson off this island. Our foe is too fearsome for hand-holding. Neverland is a place where imagination runs wild, especially my father’s and if yours doesn’t then I suggest you get your affairs in order because he will kill anyone who tries to stop him from prolonging his immortality.”

“And once the Shadow knows we’re here it’s going to do it’s damndest to try to stop us from leaving.” Bae added.

“What is the Shadow?” Regina demanded.

“It was the original caretaker of the island until my father took control of it and now uses it to keep the inhabitants from escaping,” Rumple replied.

“Unless you trap it,” Bae added. “That’s how I escaped.”

Rumple stared at his son. “Bae! You know how dangerous that was!”

“I didn’t care Papa. I wanted to get the hell out of here and was willing to try anything. We have to find my old cave. That’s where I hid the means to trap it.”

“Okay, so we find a way to trap the Shadow, grab Henry and get the hell outta here. In and out. Simple.” Emma said.

“I’m afraid it’s not that simple, Miss Swan. You forget my father has a legion of young boys loyal to him and will kill for him if necessary.”

“Well there’s three of us who know magic,” Regina pointed out.

“Then let’s do it,” Snow grabbed her bow and Charming grabbed his sword.

Knowing Felix and his crew often laid traps along the beach, Bae got off the ship first with his father at his heels. The toe of Rumple’s boot caught on a piece of rope and two large tree logs swung toward them. He pushed Bae to the ground and raised his hand and blasted them before they could crush him.

“That was a close one!” Charming exclaimed.

“Watch your step. There are traps all over the place,” Bae said when he got to his feet.

“Snow, David!” Regina yelled and threw a fireball in a hole that opened in the ground in front of them, revealing a set of spikes. The couple breathed a sigh of relief when they landed on a safe surface. She then levitated them out of the pit and onto firm ground.

Neverland
Hours earlier

The portal dumped Greg and Henry onto beach. Henry, still frozen by the squid ink and powerless by the leather cuff fastened around his wrist, was seething with rage. There was nothing he wanted to do more than use his staff to send this man flying into another realm, but his backpack was still in Storybrooke along with his family.
They’ll come for me. I know they will, he thought.

“Get moving.” Greg snarled and pushed the boy forward.

“You’re lucky I don’t have my magic right now ‘cause I’d be using it to blast you into the palm trees!” he snarled, feeling the squid ink wearing off. The moment it did he reached out and yanked the cuff off. Greg’s eyes widened in horror.

“How did you do that? No one is supposed to be able to get that off!”

Henry smiled. “I guess my dear great grandfather isn’t as powerful as he thinks he is.”

“I wouldn’t count on that laddie,” he heard a voice say from behind him and turned to see a boy in his early teens wearing a green velvet tunic, breeches and boots standing on the beach. “Hello Henry. I’ve been waiting for you a long time. I hadn’t counted on my son telling you who I am so that changes my plans a bit.”

“He told me who you are and the only way you’re gonna get my heart from me is by killing me!” Henry sneered, his hands glowing with magic.

Pan threw back his head and laughed. “D’ye really think ye can fight me, laddie? Ye may be Lurline’s successor but ye willna be at full strength until you’re older.”

“Don’t underestimate me,” the boy growled, stretching out his hand and blasting Pan. The older boy flew into the trunk of one of the trees. “I have the memories of all my predecessors and I can access them anytime I wish to now.” He closed his eyes and began to chant in Ozian. Sand began to rise from the beach and formed a funnel cloud that began to spin toward where the elder mage stood. Pan laughed again and waved his hand, the cloud disintegrating.

“This is MY world boy and it lives by MY rules!” he hissed and took flight. Henry gestured and levitated himself into the air, recalling the spell his ancestor Glinda the Good often used and shielded himself inside a bubble. Pan threw a ball of fire at the shield that bounced off it. He cursed in Gaelic. This was going to be more difficult than he thought. The bubble began to rise from the beach and formed a funnel cloud that began to spin toward where the elder mage stood. Pan laughed again and waved his hand, the cloud disintegrating.

“You have to find me first, Henry thought as the bubble flew across the island. He sat down inside it, taking several deep breaths.

Being a guardian is not an easy burden to carry, my young descendant and the burden of being Lurline’s successor is an even harder one.

He looked up and a man’s image appeared in the bubble.

Who are you?

I am Alexander Strogoff, your great-great grandfather but in my second life I was Jeb Mysticos, your distant cousin and tutor of your dear friend Jiminy Cricket. Have no fear Henry. Pan cannot hear us in here.

How are you able to communicate with me and my family can’t?

They can but it’s best that they don’t. Pan would be able to hear communications with the living in the mortal realm. Speaking with the dead in it is a power only you will have, Henry. You must stay safe until they arrive. You are still learning your powers and though he is an arrogant jackass, Pan
did speak the truth when he said this is his world now. He controls it through the dark powers he inherited from the warlocks from Scotland and Ireland. Defeating him will not be easy but that is your grandfather’s test to earn the right to become the West Guardian.

So I just hide out until he finds me? I really don’t wanna be sitting around doing nothing while my family’s gonna be tearing this place apart looking for me. I wanna DO something.

Then you must learn to use the powers you have been given. Let me guide you as I guided Jiminy and so many others. Your grandfather will need you more than ever when the final battle comes.

Pan had searched the entire island and couldn’t find a trace of the boy. He returned to the beach where Greg waited, expecting some sort of reward for delivering Henry to him but Pan wasn’t feeling charitable at the moment. He left him stewing in his anger and returned to Skull Rock.

“The boy will be harder to capture than I thought,” he confessed to the Shadow, glancing up the hourglass. Time was running short. He gestured and a spellbook appeared in his hands, a spellbook he’d been given by one of his own descendants in exchange for lessons in dark magic. He was sorry to see lad go. Jamie McDermott’s ruthless nature rivaled his own, but his voracious sexual appetite had been his downfall. He opened the book and began to read, hoping the spell would be powerful enough to draw the Truest Believer out of hiding.

On the other side of the island Snow, Regina, Emma and Charming were learning the hard way that Rumple was true to his word when he said that Neverland was a place where the imagination ran wild and its juvenile residents were inventive with their traps.

“Good God, it’s like they read The Poor Man’s James Bond and The Anarchist Cookbook,” Emma groaned, referring to two well-known survivalist publications that gave lessons on everything from making booby traps to weapons using common household items.

Bae scoffed. “Em, we were doing this stuff LONG before those books came out. His father glowered at him. “Papa, don’t give me that look. I did what I had to do in order to survive this hellhole.”

“That my cowardice put you in,” Rumple muttered.

“Don’t, okay. Pan would’ve gotten me anyway. It was just a matter of time. But he’s not gonna get my son.”

“He’ll get him over our dead bodies,” Regina snarled.

“Gina, look out!” Emma cried as the queen slipped and fell forward into a pit filled with snakes. The snakes hissed and slithered toward her, bearing their poisonous fangs. The former Evil Queen smirked and shifted into a cobra, hissing back at them. The snakes backed away and she slithered out of the pit and shifted back into her human form. Rumple giggled.

“Didn’t think I remembered that lesson, did you Rumple?”

“Oh, I never doubted you would, dearie.”

“What did she do?” Emma asked him.

“When faced with danger by an animal, always shift into the superior of the species and they’ll back away. Some of them may have magical auras and will seek to become your familiar. I had a cat back in the Dark Castle.”
“I would’ve thought you’d have a dog since you said you’ve befriended a sheepdog or two in the past.”

“No but I’d like one. Pongo is Archie’s familiar. His mate Perika is Azkadellia’s. They look like Dalmatians in their current form, but they are mobat demons half monkey, half bat and born in the darkest realm in Ephesis.”

“Great. Archie has a familiar from Hell and you have the Father From Neverhell.”

Bae burst out laughing.

“What’s so funny?” she demanded.

“I really like that one Em.”

“Now is not the time for jokes,” Regina reminded him sternly. “We need to find our son. Now where is Pan’s camp?”

“We have a long way to go and he’s probably moved it by now.”

Back at his camp, Pan called his second in command to his tent.

“My son and Baelfire are on the island. Bring Baelfire to me immediately.”

Felix grinned. He was looking forward to the reunion with one of his least favorite charges. Baelfire had been clever enough to escape him once before but he wouldn’t be so lucky a second time if Felix had anything to say about it. He set out in search of his target with three of his toughest lost boys. He would make a perfect companion for their other guest, though what she was doing there was anyone’s guess since they really didn’t want girls on the island. Still, no one dared question Pan about it or their shadows would become permanent residents of Dark Hollow.

Pan summoned a seeing globe and waved his hand over it while the spellbook opened. He began to chant in Gaelic as an image appeared on the glass. He could see his son and grandson wandering through the jungle. His son was now twenty years older than he would’ve been had he not stolen Neverland’s magic to retain his youth and Baelfire was not much younger. It was time to pay his son a visit but first he would have to separate father and son. He waved his hand over the seeing globe and dark clouds formed inside it accompanied by thunder and lightning.

“We need to find shelter now!” Rumple yelled over the rising winds.

“That storm came out of nowhere!” Charming cried, reaching for Snow’s hand.

“Rumple, can’t you do something?” Snow asked him.

“I’m trying!” he cried.

“Come on. He may need our help,” Regina said to Emma. Rumple teleported to the top of a hill, Regina and Emma appearing behind him. Rumple blasted at the dark clouds above them and was blasted back by an equally powerful force.

“This Pan is really pissing me off!” Emma growled. “You wanna fight? Come on!” She shook her fist at the sky.

“Emma, that really isn’t a good idea…”

“You got a better one, Queenie?”
“Enough!” Rumple roared. A lightning bolt stuck the ground and threw them off the hill. They tumbled to the ground unconscious.

“Neal! Neal!” Snow and Charming shouted as a fierce wind blew in, pulling the older man away from them. “Emma! Regina! Rumple!”

“Come on. We need to go look for them!” Charming took his wife’s hand and the pair started running through the jungle hoping they would find someone before they too were separated.

Pan teleported to the bottom of the cliff where his son and the two women lay, smiling. The women would be a powerful ingredient to his compulsion spell, the mother who abandoned Henry and the one who nearly destroyed her world and his fragile little mind to have revenge against a little girl for telling a secret. He flicked his wrist and teleported them to another corner of the island. He was going to enjoy torturing them all before he killed them. Now he was alone with his son and it was time for them to have a long overdue chat.
The curse of his powers tormented his life
Obeying the crown was a sinister price
His soul was tortured by love and by pain
He surely would flee but the oath made him stay

He's torn between his honor and the true love of his life
He prayed for both but was denied

So many dreams were broken and so much was sacrificed
Was it worth the ones we loved and had to leave behind?
So many years have passed, who are the noble and the wise?
Will all our sins be justified?

Within Temptation - Hand of Sorrow

Oz (The Outer Zone)
Six days prior to the Final Eclipse

Ekaterina Ozopov Zero had been waiting decades for her revenge. She’d been the firstborn, the rightful heir to the throne of the OZ but she’d lost everything the day her despised sister took her first breath.

“The majestic queen of the OZ
Had two lovely daughters she
One to darkness she be drawn
One to light she be shown
But only one and one alone
Shall hold the emerald and the throne
Only one and one alone.” She recited bitterly.

She waved her hand over the mirror she’d been scrying from and the image of her sister vanished and glanced over at the portrait on the wall above her fireplace, her eyes narrowed to slits. She’d been drawn to the darkness through no fault of her own but her mother’s when Queen Alexandra stripped her of her rightful place as heir to the throne of the OZ and gave it to Lavinia. Lavinia had proven to be one of the weakest rulers the Ozopov bloodline had produced and she’d stripped her eldest daughter of her right to the throne and given it to her spoiled, self-centered second daughter Dorothia.

“Mother?”

Katia turned around to see her son standing there, a travel storm token in his hand.

“Do us proud,” Katia murmured and drew him into her arms. “Destroy the North Guardians and you will finally have the throne you were robbed of by my bitch sister!”

“And you will rule at my side, Mother as you should have before.”
Though he’d been robbed of his rightful place as King of the OZ in his first life, the man who had once been Nicolai Ozopov was determined to reclaim his inheritance in his second by delivering to the dark goddess the hearts of two of the people with the power to destroy her, Azkadellia and Jiminy Ozopov. He was going to enjoy watching the bitch that had been his wife Dorothy and her lover destroy each other and release the goddess from her prison.

Having the soul of one of the OZ’s most powerful kings reborn into her own son was the second greatest honor Katia could have been given. Her first was serving the will of Alemedia Demonia. Nonestica would be destroyed but their goddess had promised them the highest place of honor in the new one she planned to build in the land her parents had come from.

Seconds later a shot rang out and Katia’s fingers were now wet with blood. Her son’s blood. He slumped in her arms.

“NOOOO! Gregory!” she screamed and lay him down on the floor, opening his mouth. Suddenly she was thrown against the wall.

“Try all you want, bitch but you’re not gonna bring him back. I’ve seen to that,” Wyatt snarled as he approached her, his silver pistol in his hand.

“Bastard!” Katia yelled, struggling to free herself and began to chant in Ozian. A puff of red smoke appeared revealing DG, still under Alemedia’s control. She knelt beside Zero and waved her hand over him.

“What have you done?” she demanded.

“Did you forget who is the Keeper of Souls?” Adora taunted when she appeared beside Wyatt. “You may have been able to resurrect him before, but you won’t be able to again because I’ve destroyed his dark soul.”

“Six days Ozmalita. Six days and I’m free to walk the mortal realm again.” She smirked at Wyatt. “And good luck trying to get your precious ‘Dottie’ back. She’s mine now as she was meant to be.”

She laughed, and she and Katia vanished in a puff of smoke. Wyatt leaned against one of the pillars sighing heavily. “Dottie may have her heart back but she’s still hurtin from what we did. And it’s getting harder for me to stop her from taking control of me again.”

“You have to hold her off long enough for Rumple to neutralize the first blade. Then it will weaken her hold on you and Dorothis.”

“If it can be,” Wyatt confessed sadly. “Banishing darkness he’s kept company with for so long isn’t gonna be easy for Rumplestiltskin but I’m not gonna just sit around and wait for him to do it. I got to Dottie in the dream realm once and I might still have a shot at doing it again. And I have to find Katia. Alemedia’s got plans for her and I need to find out what they are.”

“We’ll find her together,” she murmured.

Neverland
Six days prior to the Final Eclipse

Bae awoke to feel the familiar point of a spear poking into his ribcage. He groaned and rolled over to find an equally familiar face looking down at him.

“Welcome home….Baelfire,” Felix taunted.
“This was never my home,” Bae muttered.

“Never expected to see you back here…as an adult no less.”

“Did you really think I would let Pan take MY son without a fight? Better think again!” He spun around and raised his fist in an attempt to strike Felix, but the younger boy’s reflexes were much quicker. He thrust the tip of the spear into Bae’s side. He cried out and sunk to his knees in pain.

“Maybe you should’ve left well enough alone.”

“I’m gonna get him back,” Bae panted.

“You really believe that? You were a lost boy. You know Peter Pan’s not be to trifled with. You know how long he’s been searching for the heart of the truest believer. Do you really believe he’ll just… give him up?”

“Oh I know he won’t….but he’s gonna have one hell of a fight on his hands.”

“From you?” Felix laughed harshly. “Look at you. You’re old and now you’re bleeding all over the grass. Good thing Pan wants you alive otherwise I’d let you here to rot.” He turned the spear upside down and swung it like a baseball bat, striking Bae on the back of the head. He fell to the ground unconscious. Felix let out a loud whistle and several boys emerged from the bushes. “Take him back to the camp and put him with our other guest. Then have his wound treated. Pan wants him alive. Understand?”

They nodded and picked him, carrying him back to camp.

Rumple opened his eyes to find himself marooned on another part of the island. He stood up, brushed the sand from his clothes and glanced up at the sky. Night had fallen on Neverland and another day had come to an end, bringing them one more day closer to the Final Eclipse. There was no more time to waste. He summoned a pile of wood and lit a fire then pulled his dagger out of the inside pocket in his coat. He knew he’d taken a great risk bringing it to Neverland, but it had been an unfortunate necessity. He knelt and scraped the blade across the toe of his boot. A spectre floated out of it and hovered above him. Rumple held out the dagger to it.

“You what to do. Hide it!” he commanded. The spectre flew away, the dagger in its hand. Rumple nodded and sat on a rock in front of the fire then waved his hand in front of it, an image appearing in the flames. He made himself a makeshift bed on the sand and closed his eyes.

“Bring her to me,” he murmured. He felt something soft land on his chest and opened his eyes to a familiar yet haunting sight. A straw doll wearing a blue coat.

“Papa,” he hissed. “Show yerself, ye coward!”

“Now isn’t that the pot calling the kettle black, laddie,” Pan taunted. “I didn’t run away from a battlefield. I’m not running away from who I am.”

“I know who I am!”

“Do you? You condemn me for abandoning you when you did the same to your own son and for the same reason. Power. It’s our addiction Rumple. We can’t live without it.”

“You can’t but I can.”

“Can you?”
“I lived without it for twenty-eight years and still managed,” Rumple reminded him coldly. “You will lose more than your power when that hourglass runs out, Papa. A one-way journey to Ephesis and I hear the accommodations are quite painful!”

“Unless I take the heart of Lurline’s successor.”

“Over my dead body, dearie!”

“We’ll see,” Pan sneered and vanished.

Rumple hurled the doll into the fire, wishing he could burn his memories away with it.

**Storybrooke, Maine**

**Five days prior to the Final Eclipse**

She missed Rumple terribly, but Belle hadn’t been one to just sit around and wait for him to return, not when there was so much that still needed to be done. Archie and Az continued training her and on that day they were going to teach her one of the most difficult lessons, astral projection.

“The dream realm is the only place the darkness cannot breach,” Az was saying. She and Archie were in Belle’s bedroom at the Victorian while the young woman lay on her bed. “It was how I awoke Archie before the curse broke. He always returned to his cursed state when he awoke but his personality began to change back into Commander Ozopov’s.”

“Now that Rumple’s back on Neverland, the place where his darkness was born, the temptation to stay the Dark One is going to be much greater. Your mission in the dream realm is to remind Rumple of the man he is becoming, not the man he was,” Archie added. “Pan is counting on Rumple staying the Dark One because then it will give him a greater chance to kill Henry and take his powers. It will also shift the Balance in the darkness’s favor and make any chance we have of freeing DG and Wyatt impossible.”

Moments later a dark spectre flew through the window and hovered above the bed. Belle gasped and sat up.

“What…what IS that?”

The figure handed the dagger to her. “Hide us. You know what my father will do if this falls into his hands and I cannot let that happen,” it said in Rumple’s voice. “We will return to him when the time is right.”

“But what are you?”

“His shadow.”

“You…you can remove your shadow?”

“It’s painful as hell but yes,” Archie replied.

“There is a shadow on Neverland, some say it’s the spirit of the land itself that’s been corrupted by Pan’s dark magic,” Az added. “Once you’re on the island, it won’t let you leave. How did you get through?”

“I’m the Shadow of a Guardian, dearie. I can come and go as I please. He awaits you in the one
realm the darkness cannot breach. Find him,” the shadow instructed Belle.

She smiled. “I will.” She held up her teacup necklace. “You will be safe in here.” The shadow, still holding the dagger floated into it. “I’m ready. Take me to Rumple,” she murmured as she lay back down and closed her eyes.

**The Dream Realm**

**Five days prior to the Final Eclipse**

“…Rumple…Rumple!” he heard a familiar voice calling and opened his eyes to find Belle sitting beside him.

“You came,” he murmured and reached out to caress her cheek. Then he backed away and rose to his feet. “You’re another one of his tricks.” He conjured a fireball and threw it at her. She held out her hand and caught it.

“Rumple, it’s ME!”

“Of course, you would say that.” He seized her by the arms and dragged her to the fire. “Burn away. Burn away with the rest of my memories!”

She kicked his legs out from under him and tackled him to the ground. “Listen to me. LISTEN TO ME! You are Rumpelstiltskin Strogoeff-Gold. You are the Guardian of the West Gate and the Keeper of the Blade of Fire. And you are the man I love.” She pressed her lips to his. “He can’t touch us here. No darkness can touch us here,” she murmured as she began to untie the laces on his shirt. “I love you Rumple, and I will never stop fighting for you. I’m real and I’ll prove it to you!”

“Belle, what….what are you doing?”

“Fighting for you,” she whispered.

“Are you sure….?”

She nodded.

“Sweetheart, I don’t want to hurt you…but you know I have to when….”

“I know…but I’m not afraid. I could never be afraid of you now.”

He sighed. “This isn’t right the time…or the place.”

“It’s the only time, the only place.”

“Belle, you deserve so much better than me.”

“No one decides my fate but me and I’ve chosen you. I’ll always choose you!” she cried and kissed him again.

“And I will always choose you,” he murmured. “I love you, Belle.”

He gestured and a bed appeared on the sand beside them. He scooped her up into his arms and carried her over to it. This world was theirs, if only for a few hours.
“Belle, are you sure…?” he asked her again. She nodded and held her arms out to him, pulling him onto the bed with her. She felt him trembling as they removed the last of their clothing as he felt her trembling as their fears swept over them like tidal waves. Belle secretly longed to be taller, curvier. Rumple couldn’t help feeling every one of his three hundred years as she looked on his body without the armor of his designer suits and leathers, yet the moment they looked in each other’s eyes and saw the flames of love that hadn’t diminished, those fears faded away and they finally found the courage to continue their journey. As they reached the peak of their passion neither of them noticed that the orange and white lights under their joined hands and surrounding their bodies glowing brighter until the lovers, exhausted and spent, collapsed in each other’s arms and fell into a deep sleep.

The sleeping lovers never noticed the cloud of blue smoke that materialized before them, taking the form of a young girl with chestnut hair, blue eyes and wearing a shimmering silver gown. Rumple stirred and as he was about to awaken, she waved her hand over him, sending him back into slumber and keeping Belle in hers, a small smile on her lips as she gazed down at him and tenderly brushed a strand of hair away from his face as Belle often did.

"We will meet soon Rumplestiltskin, but not yet," she said softly. "You've only just begun to follow the path you must take for your redemption, but the road is long and there are many dangers still ahead but now that you have back one of your strongest sources to light your way you will succeed. You, Belle, are his strongest light, the first to see the man behind the beast and to retain your faith in your love even when he gave you cause to doubt him. You've bound yourself to him now body and soul and in doing so, you have begun the process of banishing the darkness from his heart, but it cannot fully be banished unless he agrees to surrender it. To do so he must defeat its source as a mortal."

“He must succeed, or your soul will return to Ozmalita and other families will be chosen for both of us.” Ambrosia said sadly.

“NO! He WILL succeed Amber! He HAS TO!”

“He’d better! I’ve waited too long to be reunited with MY parents and I’m still in danger while Alemedia walks the mortal realm in her vessels. Now you’re in danger too, not just from her but from the ‘Father From Neverhell’ as your sister-in-law calls him.”

“My father’s not the only one she’s holding. She has your aunt and uncle too!”

Ambrosia sighed. “And driving her out of them will be much harder. That’s why we need Rumple’s curse broken now! The Balance will shift in our favor. You know what you have to.”

The girl smiled evilly. “I’m going be a chip off the old block, dearie. And gods help him when I am. I’m not going easy on him.”

“I almost feel sorry for him….almost.” Ambrosia laughed and vanished.

“You will succeed, Papa. You will,” the girl said firmly as she disappeared.

Belle awoke a short time later, a small smile on her lips as she gazed up at Rumple’s sleeping face. She leaned over and kissed him awake.

“Hey,” she greeted softly.

“Belle?” His eyes fluttered open and widened in shock. “Did I…did we…?”

“We did,” she whispered.
“I wanted to wait…until we were married.”

“I’ve been married to you in my heart for years. It’s only a formality, dearie!”

“Are you…I mean….are you alright?” he asked as he held her closer.

“Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Well ahh….”

“Rumple, please. I know what you’re thinking but don’t. I’m not Milah. I wanted to be with you tonight. I want to be with you for the rest of my life. A woman couldn’t ask for a better man to be her first lover, but you will be my only lover.”

“You couldn’t get rid of me now if you tried.”

“Good!”

“But you cannot stay here. Neverland is a place where the imagination runs wild and there is a chance my father could breach the safety of this realm.”

“He’s that powerful? How?”

“He’s harnessing magic from our ancestors Belle. You know how unpredictable magic is in that world and I know little about it, but he does. He wants Henry and will kill anyone who gets in his way. Me still being cursed…”

“But we’ve gained an advantage tonight Rumple. There’s just one more thing left to do.” She reached into her chest and removed her heart. She waved her hand over the glowing organ and it divided into two pieces, one glowing white hovering above her.

“Belle, I can’t. Not now,” he said sadly.

“Why?” she cried as she put her heart back in her chest.

“It’s not the right time.”

“It may be the only chance we have.”

“I may not able to divide mine…there’s too much darkness in it.”

“You don’t know that!”

“Nor will I risk it,” he countered. “Belle, please. I need you to trust me.”

“I do but I’m not convinced Rumple. You’re talking like you’re not gonna survive this.”

He looked away.

“What aren’t you telling me?”

“I want you to prepare yourself, sweetheart.”

“No.”

“If I die, Wyatt Cain succeeds me as the West Guardian. The Balance must be restored Belle and you are still a Guardian. I want your word that you will not break the circle.”
“Rumple….”

“Promise me!”

She clenched her hand into a fist and pressed it against her shoulder, kneeling. “I give you my word for my word as a Talon is my bond.”

“You’re learning the path of the dragon,” he murmured.

“Rumple, you’re so convinced you’ll be defeated that you’ve forgotten that we have an advantage over Pan.”

“What do you mean?”

“Come with me,” she said, and they vanished in a puff of smoke.

They reappeared in the backroom of the pawnshop. “You have some of the most powerful weapons in all the realms at your disposal.” She took off her chipped cup necklace and restored it to its actual size then opened the cupboard, returning it to its saucer. Suddenly a glowing square appeared on the floor. She pushed back the loose floorboard and took out a box.

“Pandora’s Box,” he murmured. “How did you know it was here?”

A ledger written in Ozian appeared in her hand. “I found this hidden among your books. This may be the best way we have of defeating Pan.”

Rumple kissed her deeply. “I don’t know why I didn’t think of it myself. But I cannot bring it out of our dream. My father’s magic is blocking it. But….there’s always a loophole.”

“What are you thinking?”

“If I can find someone to cross realms safely, they can bring the box to me. Our only chance is a mermaid, but they consider humans their mortal enemies after Tritan’s bride was killed by one of them.” He thought for a moment. “But…I do remember Regina owes a debt to one of his daughters. Now’s the time for her to pay it.”

“She can cross realms without interference from the Shadow?”

“Ariel is kin, so to speak.”

“What?”

“Hades and Persephone weren’t the only defectors from the Greek pantheon. So was Poseidon. Ariel descends from him, but she lost her powers when her father found out she tried to strike a deal with Ursula to become human, or at least someone she ‘thought’ was Ursula only it turned out to be Regina glamored to look like the cartoon version of Ariel’s aunt.”

“Ursula was Ariel’s aunt?”

“Exiled but yes.”

“Why?”

“I’m not sure. Only Ursula and Triton know the answer. But Ariel is our only chance of getting that box here.”

“I can…”
“No! You will stay in Storybrooke.”

“You forget, dearie, that I am YOUR guardian and it is my duty to protect you!” Belle ranted. “If the box doesn’t work, I’m coming here and hitting that manchild son of a bitch with everything I’ve got!”

“You’re not fully trained yet.”

“I will be soon enough.” She thought for a moment. “Rumple, there’s one more thing we’ve forgotten about, something Pan would never see coming.”

“What are you thinking?”

“Aramon’s talisman.”

“But that’s in Oz and I don’t want you going there either because you’d be facing not one but two Dark Ones at full strength.”

"I told you I would never stop fighting for you and I meant it. I’m going to try everything."

He took her in his arms and kissed her tenderly. “I love you Belle….and I don’t want you dying because of me.”

“I don’t believe we will….and you need to believe too. We’re going to win.” She cupped his face in her hands. “Remember who you are. You are Rumplestiltskin Strogoff. You are the West Guardian and you are the man I love.”

“You need to go…before he finds you.”

She gave him one last kiss before the spell was broken and her soul returned to her body.

**Storybrooke, Maine**

**Five days prior to the Final Eclipse**

Belle awoke with a gasp.

“Are you alright?” Az asked her.

“Pandora’s Box. I have to get it. It might be the only way Rumple has of stopping Pan.” She jumped out of bed and dressed herself with her magic.

“He has it?” Their eyes widened.

“Why are you surprised? He has quite a few of your ancestors’ artifacts.”

“Belle, you don’t know what Pandora’s Box really is, do you?” Archie murmured.

“It’s supposed to contain the realms’ darkest evils.”

“That was its original purpose yes, but Hades ‘modified’ it when he stole it from his brother,” Archie explained.

“To do what?” Belle demanded.

“It’s one of the gates to Ephesis and it can only opened by someone from his bloodline. The souls trapped in there go to one of its worst prisons; the Realm of the Unwanted.”
“So Pan goes to hell where he belongs.”

“Belle, if Pan gets that box away from Rumple, HE can send HIM there!” Az cried.

"Then we get him out."

"Once a soul is sent there or to Paradise it belongs to the Keeper and only she can release it," Archie added.

"Then who is this Keeper in case I need to speak to her?"

"Ozmalita Diosa, Lurline and Alemedia's sister...but in her human form she was Adora Cain."

"Wyatt Cain's wife is Ozmalita?"

"Yes, and right now we're not too sure what side she's on because she's created a huge shift in the Balance by trying to seduce Wyatt away from my sister," Az said angrily.

Belle sighed heavily. “I’ll do whatever it takes. I’m sure you would too. I’m going to the shop to get the box. Rumple is sending someone to get it.”

“Who?”

“One of Poseidon’s descendants. She’s the only one that can leave Neverland without Pan or the Shadow trying to stop her.”

“Unless he has someone in here ready to intercept her,” Archie said.

“Archie, I’m going back to the shop with Belle.”

“And I’m going to help David and his crew start searching for any intruders.”

“….Molky! Look at this!” Edgar Navarro stood in front of what looked the bumper of a vehicle laying a few feet away from the town line. “Someone lost their bumper and it’s got Minnesota plates on it!”

“It have a plate number we can run?”

“Yeah.”

“Read it to me!”

David picked up the radio and was reading the numbers off to Terry back at the station when Archie appeared.

“What do we have?” he demanded.

“Bumper off a car. Looks like it was severed off. How the heck can that happen?” his brother inquired.

Archie scowled.

“It happened while they were trying to outrun the cloaking spell. Any hits on that plate?”

“Registered to a Jon Darling from Minnesota. It’s them, Archie. It has to be. The Home Office.”

“All right. Get everybody together and start searching every square inch of this town. I want them
found and taken alive. Understand?”

“And then what?”

“They talk…or we make them talk!” he growled and vanished in a puff of smoke.

Neverland
Five days prior to the Final Eclipse

Time was running short and Rumple had very little of it to waste when the lives of his son and grandson depended on it. He teleported himself to the shore and waved his hands, pulling some of the water out of the ocean and created a small pool in the sand by his feet.

“Eye of Aramon, come to me
Show me now what I need to see!” he chanted.

He was his father in a cave, a spellbook hovering in front of him as he chanted in Gaelic. The words he spoke chilled Rumple to the bone. He could also see a spear coated with blood. Pan held out the spear and chanted louder until a figure appeared on the ground in the cave.

“NO! HENRY!” he screamed.

Pan’s lips curved into an evil smile as he reached into Henry’s chest and pulled out his heart, holding it up in triumph.

“Your growing powers are no match for mine, boy!” he sneered at Henry’s unconscious form.

The Heart of the Truest Believer was his…and now he would walk, not among the gods, but above them.

Storybrooke, Maine
Five days prior to the Final Eclipse

The storm seemed to come out of nowhere. Everyone in the town immediately began to seek shelter as the winds howled and shrieked and rain poured down on them in buckets.

“What’s happening? Where did that storm come from?” Belle shouted over the winds.

“The Balance…” Az moaned. “It’s shifting again….Henry is dying.”

“No!” Belle sank to her knees on the shop floor and began to cry, feeling her lover’s sorrow along with her own.

It’s too late. I’ve failed. I’ve failed! she heard him crying.

No! Hold on Rumple. Hold on. We can still save him. We can still save all of you. Just hold on. Please!
Neverland
Five days prior to the Final Eclipse

Regina, Emma, Bae, Snow and Charming awoke to find themselves tied to the trunks of trees.

“Welcome to Neverland,” Pan greeted with a smirk. “You have the honor of dying in one of my most special places…the Forest of Regret and I’d say all five of you have plenty to regret.”

“Yeah. Not being able to kill you!” Bae growled. “But your time’s coming asshole because I’m not gonna be the one who snuffs you out. My father’s gonna do it for me.”

“Now why would he when I’ve done him a favor?”

“And just what does that mean, manchild?” Regina sneered.

“By killing the boy that would be his undoing as the Dark One.” He lifted up his tunic, a golden light glowing on his chest where his heart world be. “And now I never have to worry about growing up again.”

“Son of a bitch!” Charming struggled against the vines.

“A bit of a tight squeeze, isn’t it Your Highness? It should be. You see, I abandoned my boy here all those years ago and this forest was born from my regret.” He pointed to a tree where two skeletons were tied. “So many parents tried to come here to take back the children they threw away, but it was their own regrets that killed them…just as it’s killing you now because you all threw your children away too.”

“NO! We gave them their best chance!” Snow cried, feeling the vines squeeze tighter.

“By sending a baby through a magical wardrobe alone not knowing where she’d end up? They lied to you, you know. Blue and Geppetto. They lied. They sent Pinocchio through and told you it would only take one.”

“Archie would’ve stopped them!” Charming protested.

“Oh, but he couldn’t because he had his own guilty secret. He accidently killed Geppetto’s parents with one my son’s potions so Geppetto guilt tripped him into going along with their little scheme. Some protector that puppet turned out to be. Abandoned your little girl in a foster home. One of many. You remember that, don’t you, Emma?”

“Yeah well I learned to be tough from that life,” Emma said angrily.

“Not tough enough to keep your own son, were you, lassie?” he taunted. “You left him at the mercy of the system too.”

“Leave her alone,” Bae growled.

“Ah, Baelfire. It’s been a long time, laddie. Welcome home.”

“This was NEVER my home!”

“it’s the only real home you had my boy since my son abandoned you at that portal because he was too afraid he’d lose his power. And then you abandoned your pregnant girlfriend because a former
wooden puppet told you to. Apple doesn’t fall far from the tree, does it?”

“I didn’t know she was pregnant!” Bae protested, coughing. “Shut up you son a of a bitch! Just shut up!”

“How different things would’ve been had you stayed,” Pan taunted. “Oh, they wouldn’t be because you’d both be in jail and Henry would be alone anyway.”

“He wasn’t alone. He had ME!” Regina snarled.

“Ahh, the Queen finally speaks. The one with the most to regret.”

“You know what? You’re right. I have done a lot of terrible things in my life. I should be dead by now from all the regret I’m feeling but I’m not!”

The vines snapped in half. Regina’s eyes were glowing red as she approached Pan. She flicked her wrist and send him flying into the trunk of one of his own trees, the vines wrapping themselves around him. She reached her hand into his chest and yanked Henry’s heart out. “…because it got me my son!”

The vines holding the others vanished.

“Now, let’s go get Henry!”

“You bitch! This isn’t over yet!” Pan yelled.

“It is for us,” Regina laughed and teleported them out. They reappeared on the beach where an angry Rumple waited. He breathed a sigh of relief when he saw the heart in Regina’s possession.

“I don’t understand…how did you do that, Regina?” Snow asked her.

“She’s his Guardian. She can invoke his powers if he’s incapacitated. It’s time to complete that bond, dearie.”

“Papa, we have to save Henry!” Bae reminded him.

“We are saving him Bae,” Rumple said softly. “Are you ready, Regina.”

“I’ve never been more ready.”
His Nasty Habit of Self Preservation

Chapter by cjmoliere

I fear who I am becoming,
I feel that I am losing the struggle within.
I can no longer restrain it,
my strength it is fading,
I have to give in

It's the fear
Fear of the dark
It's growing inside of me,
that one day will come to life

Within Temptation – It's The Fear

Neverland
Four days prior to the Final Eclipse

“Papa, what are you doing? What is she doing?” Bae demanded as Regina handed Henry’s heart to Emma. “Every second we waste…”

“I know that Baelfire!” Rumple snapped. “Now be quiet, lad and let us do what needs to be done.” He gestured and an old leather-bound book appeared in his hand. He opened it and flipped through the pages until he found the one he was looking for then floated the book over to her.

“Please, please let this work,” she prayed and reached into her chest, removing her heart, astonished that some of the darkness within it seemed to be fading. “How…how is this possible?” she whispered.

Rumple was equally shocked yet there was little time to ponder over it. Regina’s free hand was trembling as she waved it over the organ in her hand, tears brimming in the corners of her eyes as it split into two pieces, one hovering above her glowing white. Emma’s eyes widened with shock as Henry’s heart also split into two pieces, one in her hand glowing red, the other hovering above her glowing white.

“What the heck!” she gasped.

“See through my eyes will you
See through your eyes will I
Neither by time nor space will we be apart
Forever at your side will I be son of my heart!” Regina chanted. She took the glowing white piece of her heart in her free hand. “Henry Mills-Strogoff!” she murmured and released it.

“Strogoff?” Rumple whispered.

“It’s the name he’s meant to have, as the OZ wills it.”
The piece floated over to Henry’s heart and merged with it.

“He’s accepted it….he’s accepted me….”

“How can you doubt it, Mom?” she heard him ask.

“Henry! Henry!” Bae cried. “Where are you? Are you all right?”

“I’m at Skull Rock,” he replied and suddenly his shade appeared before them. “Sealed with a lock that only one of you can break.”

“We’re coming for you!” Emma said. “And there’s nothing the Father From Neverhell can do to stop us!”

“But there’s a few pieces of my heart still missing. I need them back.”

“Look!” Snow gasped, pointing at Henry’s heart. It divided again with a second piece glowing white.

“See through my eyes will you
See through your eyes will I
Neither by time nor space will we be apart
Forever at your side will I be mothers of my heart!” Henry’s shade chanted. “Regina Mills,” he said softly, the first white piece floating over to Regina’s heart.

“Always, Henry, always,” she sobbed as the pieces merged. She pushed the organ back into her chest, weeping softly as her son’s undying love swept over her.

“Emma Swan,” Henry whispered, the second piece floating over to Emma. Rumple took Henry’s heart from her and held it gently.

“What…what do I do?”

“Take it, Em!” Bae cried.

“Take it in your hand and press it against your chest. You’ll feel a wee bit of pain when it merges but that’ll pass,” Rumple explained. Emma did as instructed, barely feeling the pain as the piece merged with her own heart. She reached into her chest and pulled hers out, waving her hand over it as she’d seen Regina do, hers dividing in the same manner.

“Do you remember the incantation, Emma?” Regina asked.

See with my eyes will you
See with your eyes will I
Neither by time nor space will we be apart
Forever at your side will I be mothers of my heart!” she chanted, taking her glowing white piece in her hand. “Henry Mills Strogoff!”

The piece floated over to the heart in Henry’s hand and merged with it.

“It’s done dearies,” Rumple murmured.

“I’m at Skull Rock under a protection spell set for only one of you to break but like Grampa says, there’s always a loophole. Find it!” Henry cried and vanished.

“Now let’s go get our son and get out of this Neverhell!” Emma said angrily.
“I will get Henry,” Rumple declared.

“We’re doing this together,” Regina reminded him.

“Then I suggest you make a long-distance call to a certain mermaid I refused to discuss a deal with you about.”

“Ariel? What does she have to do with this?”

Snow snorted. “Rumple, I doubt she’ll want to help us after the way Regina screwed her over.”

“She will. She’s family.”

“You guys are kidding right? The little mermaid’s real?” Emma shook her head.

“Says the daughter of Snow White and Prince Charming,” her father reminded her. “She’s very real. What do you have in mind, Rumple?”

“Emma seems to like calling this place Neverhell but what I have in mind is sending my father exactly where he belongs, and Ariel can get us the item we need to do it. Do the words Pandora’s Box mean anything to you?”

“Yes…it was the place where all the evil and misery in the world was supposed to be until Pandora opened it,” Bae replied.

“It did but when it fell into Hades’ possession, he modified it a bit. It is now a gateway to one of Ephesis’ worst prisons; the Realm of the Forgotten. Only someone with a blood link to Hades can activate it, or so the legend says.”

“And you have it? How?”

Rumple smirked. “One of the few perks of being the Dark One was inheriting the vast collection of magical items Hades managed to steal from his Greek relatives before he made his home in the OZ. Fortunately Pandora’s Box was among those items and it’s hidden in my shop with a lock only Belle can open.”

“Why Ariel, Rumple?” Snow inquired.

“She is Poseidon’s daughter and can cross realms without any interference. Summon her, Regina. Bae, you’ve been able to leave this island before by trapping the shadow.”

“We need to find the cave I hid out in after I escaped from Pan’s camp. It had what we need to trap the shadow.”

“How far is it from here?”

“Not far.”

Rumple held out his hand to his son. “Show me.”

“How?”

“Think of it, son and the magic will guide us. Everyone, join hands.”

The group did as instructed, and vanished in a puff of smoke, appearing inside a small cavern where an angry young woman waited, a dagger in her hand.
“You!” she snarled and lunged at Regina, pinning her against the wall.

“Tinkerbell….” Regina gasped.

“Yes, me. Never expected to see me again did you, bitch? Not after the way you burned me!”

“Tink, Tink, it’s okay. She’s with us.” Bae soothed.

“Like hell it is. I don’t know who you are or how you know my name, but this bitch is the Evil Queen who ruined a lot of lives, including mine when I was trying to do was help her find her true love. And when I when I failed, I was exiled to this hellhole.”

Charming groaned. “Great. She’s not gonna help us now.”

“Yes, she is. Tink, it’s me. Bae.” Bae said softly. “Don’t you remember?”

“If you are him, prove it! What’s the last thing I said to you before you left here?”

“You told me that once I crossed over, I would become the age I was supposed to be in the new land and that was why so many others were afraid to leave. Too much time passed.”

Tink shoved Regina aside and ran to her old friend, hugging him tightly. “Bae! All grown up.” Her eyes narrowed as she glanced over at Rumple. “So, you’ve finally come back for your son, have you? Took you long enough.”

Rumple lowered his head shamefully. “I deserved that.”

“Yes, you did and more for failing in your duty as a Guardian. The Balance is shifting in our favor but more needs to be done. Only four days remain.”

“I must get my family off this rock.”

“Come with us Tink,” Bae pleaded.

“Are you insane? She’ll kill me!” Regina protested.

“We both know I can’t…now,” Tink mumbled. “You, a Guardian. I never would’ve expected it.”

“I am a Guardian and I am not leaving here without my son. He is my true love Tink, not some man with a lion tattoo. Your fairy dust was wrong.”

While the others talked Bae and Rumple searched the cave for the item they would need, a hollow coconut shell with a candle inside it. Disguised as a shadowbox, Pan never suspected that it was also a star map and the means to trap one of his jailers. Rumple noticed a stack of sketches on the table and looked through them, wincing when he found a drawing of a hand sticking out of a portal, hearing Bae’s desperate pleas for him to join him.

“Papa, don’t…”

“I can’t help it, Bae. You were the only good thing in my life, and I let you go…for nothing! I was a coward again.”

“You’re not one now.”

“I can’t be. There’s too much at stake. Henry’s heart must be returned to his body soon.” He smiled. “But Pan can’t take it again. That gives us the advantage.”
“What do you mean?”

“A heart that’s divided cannot be taken or controlled. It is one of the greatest defenses an Ozian mage has against enemies. But if we do not get Henry’s heart back to him in twenty-four hours Jeb Cain will become the East Guardian again. His father is already being given my powers if I fail in my mission.”

“You won’t fail!” Bae cried and picked up the coconut shell. They joined the others outside the cave. Regina and Tink had made a truce of sorts but a new crisis arose.

“What’s happened?” Rumple demanded when they found Charming sitting on the ground holding his arm.

“He…he got nicked on a vine!” Snow cried, pointing.

“Dreamshade,” Rumple hissed. “Regina, summon Ariel. NOW!” He conjured a seashell and handed it to her when they teleported back to the beach. She blew through it several times until a figure poked its head out of the water. The ginger haired woman glared daggers at Regina.

“Hello Ariel. It’s been a long time.”

The woman opened her mouth to speak but no sounds came out.

Regina gestured.

“You bitch! You’re damn lucky I don’t have my powers because I would turn you into a slug!” she yelled.

“You have every right to be angry at me Ariel, but I want to make up for that…if you’ll do one small favor for me.”

“Go to Ephesis and rot. I’m not helping you.”

“But you will help me, cousin.” Rumple said as he approached the shore. “And your friend Snow.”

“Snow!” Ariel cried. “Oh, you’ve found your prince!”

“But he’s hurt Ariel,” Snow said through tears.

Ariel looked up at Rumple. “What do you need me to do?”

Rumple picked up a stick and began to draw a crude map on the sand while Ariel perched on a large rock to get a closer look. “Can you get there?”

“I’ll have to cross realms, but I can make it.”

“The town is protected by a cloaking spell but being my kin you’ll be able to surface within it’s boundaries.” He summoned a seeing globe. “This is the woman you are looking for. Her name is Belle. She’ll be expecting you.” He picked up a sand dollar and waved his hand over it. “Give her this. She’ll know what to do.”

“Eric is in the town, Ariel,” Regina informed her. “If you succeed, I’ll tell you who he is. Finding him is up to you.” She waved her hand and bracelet appeared on Ariel’s arm. “This will give you legs for twenty-four hours. You bring us back what we want, it’ll give you legs anytime you want them.”
“She doesn’t need the bracelet. If you succeed, I will speak to your father about giving you your powers back Ariel,” Rumple added.

“Good luck with that. He still won’t forgive me for loving a human."

“I’ll make him an offer he can’t refuse."

Bae burst out laughing.

“What?”

“Going all Godfather again, Papa?”

“If it gets results, yes!”

Ariel placed the shell into the little satchel she carried and dove into the water.

“Do you think she’ll make it?” Snow asked.

“She has to. Your husband’s life depends on it,” Regina murmured.

“Why?!"

“Because the cure for the dreamshade is in Storybrooke.”

Snow took her husband’s hand and kissed it. “We’re going to get you better David. Just hold on.”

“How long does he have?” Emma whispered to Rumple.

“Twenty-four hours,” he answered grimly.

Storybrooke, Maine
Four days prior to the Final Eclipse

Jon and Michael Darling learned quickly that there weren’t many places to hide in a town like Storybrooke. They took refuge in an abandoned cabin in the forest while keeping a close eye on the Sheriff’s deputies that were scouring every inch looking for them. They’d been given a message that a mermaid would soon arrive in the town to collect the legendary Pandora’s Box.

“Get that box or you’ll never see your sister again,” Pan threatened through the seeing globe.

Moments later they heard voices and threw their belongings into their backpacks, racing out the backdoor just as a group of deputies surrounded the cabin, guns drawn.

“Clear!” David yelled when he and Edgar entered the cabin from the front.

“Clear!” Hildy called when she and Terry entered from the back.

Archie teleported in.

“Someone’s been here. This is still hot,” he said, holding up a bowl of soup.

“I’ll find ‘em! Come on Molky,” Edgar growled and shifted into cat form.
“What do you want us to do Archie?” Hildy asked.

“Keep looking here in case they come back and let me know immediately if you find them,” he ordered and vanished.

“….Y’know, I kinda like the idea of Archie and Az runnin the town. Been quiet,” Leroy was saying to his brothers while they were eating lunch on the shore.

“Yeah…ahhchoo! Well…achoo! Regina’s not gonna give up her throne so easily,” Sneezy reminded him.

“Hello!” they heard a voice call out from the water. Seven pairs of eyes followed her every move as Ariel emerged from the water. “I’m looking for a woman named Belle. Can you help me?”

“Come with me, sister,” Leroy said.

Belle stared down at the hamburger and fries that had been placed in front of her, having no desire to eat it.


“No, no, it’s fine…” Belle murmured.

“That’s the third burger you’ve turned down this week,” Archie said. “I know you miss Rumple.”

“He thinks he’s going off to his death, but I don’t…and I’m tired of sitting around here just waiting. I want to help him. I can’t even reach him in dreams. He’s blocking me. Maybe he doesn’t need me anymore.”

“You can’t think like that.” He reached across the counter and took her hand in his. “I know how difficult it is to be parted from someone you love but you have to keep believing that he’ll come back.”

“I just feel like he doesn’t need me anymore.”

“Excuse me but is there someone here named Belle?”

“Umm…excuse ME but no shirt no shoes no service.” Granny informed the young woman who had just walked into the diner at Leroy’s side.

“Really Granny, your granddaughter wears more revealing outfits than this!” Leroy snapped. She glared at him and returned to the kitchen.

“I’m Belle,” Belle said softly and got off the stool. “Who are you?”

“My name is Ariel. Rumplestiltskin sent me. He has an important message for you.”

Archie smiled from his stool. Rumple’s timing was perfect, as always.

She smiled. “Then come with me!”

She waved her hand and they vanished in a puff of smoke. Archie tossed a stack of bills on the counter and hurried after them.

Ariel took a seashell out of her satchel and handed it to Belle. “Here is his message. Do you know how to get it?”
“I do.” Belle waved her hand over the sand dollar and an image of Rumple appeared before her.

“My darling Belle. The situation on Neverland has become more dangerous than I thought. Pan was able to take Henry’s heart and absorb some of its powers. We only have twenty-four hours to return it before his powers pass to Jeb Cain and Charming has been infected with dreamshade and needs to be given ambrosia in twenty-four hours. You will need to get it from Archie and Az. The second item you will find through the strength of our love. I love you Belle, and you were right. I will see you again.”

“Do you know what he’s talking about?” Ariel asked her.

“I do. Watch.” Belle took off her necklace and waved her hand over it until it turned back into her chipped cup. She carried it over to the cupboard and unlocked the door. Once she placed it on its saucer a beam of gold light shot out of it and onto the floor in the shape of a square. She removed the loose floorboard and took out a small box with Greek and Ozian symbols on it, a large ruby on the top.

“Is that…?”

“Pandora’s Box,” Belle whispered. “This is what we need to defeat Pan.”

“We’ll take that,” they heard a man say from the doorway, a gun in his hand. “Give it to me.”

“Not on your life.”

“Give it to us or we’ll take it!” another snarled.

“Maybe…maybe we should do what they say…” Ariel said timidly.

Jon Darling pulled back the trigger. “Give it to us.”

“I don’t think you heard me. Not on your life. Now I will be taking that!” She flicked her wrist and sent the men flying into the wall, the gun falling out of the elder’s hands. She picked it up. “I take it Pan sent you.”

“Please, just give us the box. We don’t want to hurt you.”

“I don’t want to hurt you, but I will if I have to,” Belle said coldly.

“Well, well, well….look what the cat dragged in,” Archie said when he walked into the backroom. “Belle, say hello to the Home Office. We’ve been looking for you boys.”

“Oh, is that who they are? Well, in that case…” She dropped them to the floor and conjured two chairs, tying them to them with strands of Rumple’s gold thread.

“We have some questions for you and you’re going to answer them,” Archie informed them coldly. “And don’t bother trying to lie because we’ll know.”

“You heard him boys. Start talking!” Belle hissed.

“We don’t want to hurt anyone. We just want our sister back!” Michael cried.

“Try again!” Archie snapped, ready to unleash the Commander on them. “You held a gun to these women, obviously on your master’s orders and you expect us to believe you don’t want to hurt anyone? The truth!”
“It is the truth!” Jon protested.

Belle crossed her arms over her breasts and glared at them. “You have a choice, gentlemen start telling us the truth, or you sleep with the fishes.”

Two chains with rocks attached to them appeared in the room in front of the now terrified Darling brothers.

“Please,” Michael begged. “We don’t want to do this, but we have to, or Pan is gonna kill our sister.” His eyes met Belle’s. “His shadow came for us almost a century ago. We went to Neverland a few times and we enjoyed it for a while but after a while we wanted to come back home. Time moved differently there. We thought we were gone for weeks but we were only gone a few hours. Then one night it took Wendy. She didn’t enjoy Neverland like we did because she learned it’s dark secrets. It was a prison for boys who feel lonely, lost. And they didn’t want girls there. Pan’s been looking for a certain boy, the one he calls the ‘Truest Believer’. He claims this boy is supposed to become a god and Pan wants to absorb all his powers so he can live forever. We tried to bring the boy to him years ago, but we failed. Now he has him and Rumplestiltskin is the only one standing in his way of getting what he wants. Pan’s promised us he’ll release Wendy if we bring that box to him.”

Archie snorted. “You’re fools if you believe that. He’s only telling you what you want to hear. You give him that box he’ll kill your sister anyway and you along with her because you’re expendable.”

“So, here’s an offer I don’t think you can afford to refuse. You help us stop Pan, you can make a new start here and you get your sister back,” Belle proposed.

“You really think you can stop him.”

“Yes, I do,” Belle said confidently. “You said yourself that Pan fears Rumple because Rumple is more powerful whether that manchild wants to admit it or not. Do we have a deal?”

“This is one deal I don’t think you want to pass up,” Archie advised them. The two men thought for a moment.

“We have a deal, but you better deliver, or we will make sure the Home Office levels this town.” Jon threatened.

“They won’t. We’ve made certain of that,” Az said when she teleported in.

Belle tossed the box to Ariel.

“Get that to Neverland right away along with this.”

The sand dollar reappeared in Ariel’s hand.

“Regina…the Queen said there was a prince named Eric living here. His lands bordered Atlantica….what?” she demanded angrily when she saw the look pass between Archie and Az.

“How is that possible? If Eric were here, I would know!” Archie exclaimed.

“Care to elaborate Archie?” Belle demanded.

“Eric’s kingdom was destroyed by King George’s forces before the Dark Curse hit,” Az explained. “He escaped through a portal to the OZ.”
“He was the only one who survived. Cain and Jeb Mysticos found him on the old road and took him to Central City where he went through training to be a Tin Man,” Archie added. “The last time I saw him was when he was acting as a spy for the Resistance.”

“Then why would Regina tell me he was here? She lied to me!” Ariel cried.

“He still could be here,” Belle soothed. “Archie came here later than everyone else. Maybe Eric did too.”

“There’s only one way to find out. Ask Jeb,” Az murmured.

“Ariel, we will find Eric, but you need to go back to Neverland. Now,” Belle said firmly. “The longer we wait, the greater the risk we take in Aramon’s Prophecy coming true. Archie, Az, you need to give her the antidote to dreamshade.”

“Who was infected with it?” Az cried.

“Charming,” Belle replied.

Archie took off his amber pendant and waved his hand over it. A vial of amber colored liquid hovered in the air above him. “Ariel, have them give this to David. It’ll cure him. Hurry. He needs to get it within twenty-four hours!”

Belle waved her hand and teleported them to the beach.

“I’ll give Rumple your message Belle. I just hope we’ll be able to find Eric. I know he’s only human, but I love him very much.”

Belle hugged her. “You will see each other again. True love is the strongest magic in all the realms. If he loves you as much as you love him, he’ll find his way back to you.”

Ariel slung her satchel over her shoulder and dived into the ocean, her heart filled with hope.

Neverland
Four days prior to the Final Eclipse

“….Look after my parents Regina,” Emma pleaded.

“They’ll be safe with me.”

“Talk about irony. Being protected by the same woman who tried to kill us more times than I can count,” Charming said sarcastically.

“Keep it up smartass and I’ll gladly speed up your demise,” Regina retorted earning a glare from Snow.

“Enough, children,” Rumple chided. “Tick tock! Regina, the moment Ariel arrives you give Charming that dreamshade.”

“I’m sorry I’m late!” Ariel called out from the shore. “We ran into a few problems.”

“Did you get them?” Rumple asked hopefully. Ariel removed the vial and box from her satchel and handed them to him. Rumple gave the vial to Snow for Charming to drink.

“Ugh!” he cried. “This…this…smells like…my toilet!” he gasped. “And THIS is supposed to be the nectar of the gods? It even tastes horrible!”
Bae laughed. “So did every medicinal potion Papa made me take. I think he made them that way on purpose.”

“You felt better afterwards, dearie!”

“Mom look!” Emma cried.

“Oh, thank God!” Snow sobbed when the black lines began to disappear and kissed her husband passionately.

“Get a room!” Regina snorted.

“You lied to me! Eric’s not in Storybrooke!” Ariel yelled at her. “Archie said he’s in the OZ and he may be dead!”

“Regina that was cruel!” Snow lectured.

“Eric IS in Storybrooke,” Regina insisted. “I didn’t see him until after I got Henry but he is there. He owns a lobster boat.”

“Christopher is Eric? He doesn’t look like him.”

“I didn’t recognize him at first either but if he lived in the OZ, that explains why. Look what the place did to Archie,” Regina countered.

“Regina’s right Ariel. You’ll find Eric at the docks,” Rumple said. “Go and find him cousin and I wish you luck.”

“Thank you Rumple.” Ariel said.

“Oh, and what I? Chopped liver?” Regina snapped when Ariel vanished. “I’m the one who got her here. Oh well. I suppose I might as well suck it up. Shut up Swan!”

Emma was laughing.

Rumple waved his hand over the sand dollar and Belle’s image appeared.

“Rumple, the cloaking spell is up but someone did get through. Two men named Jon and Michael Darling.”

“Jon and Michael!” Bae exclaimed. “That’s impossible!”

“Pan sent them here to try to steal Pandora’s Box. He’s holding their sister Wendy captive. I’ve given my word that you would rescue her for them Rumple and we would give them a safe haven here.”

“You’re damn right we are. Oh God…she came after me….it’s my fault she’s here!” Bae moaned.

“Wanna explain that Neal?” Emma demanded.

Bae went on to tell them how he became a member of the Darling family and of offering himself to the Shadow to prevent Wendy’s brothers from being taken.

“But that was over a century ago! Pan must be using magic to slow their aging process if they’re grown men now. Wendy would still be the same age she was when I last saw her. Papa, she came here looking for me. I know she did. We have to help her. Please,” Bae begged.
“Alright. Regina take Snow, Tink and Charming and try to find this Wendy.”

“Rumple, though time and space are between us now, know that I am right by your side and that my love will guide you home,” Belle was saying.

Seconds later her image vanished.

“Bae, you Emma and I will capture this Shadow.”

“It’s not gonna be easy.”

“I wasn’t expecting it to be.”

While the others set off for the camp, Bae led his father and Emma through another part of the island known as Dark Hollow, the Shadow’s home.

“Anyone who tried to escape had their shadows ripped out and sent here,” he explained once they began hearing howls and shrieks that sent chills down their spines. “It’s a fate worse than death.”

Once they stepped through the trees a group of shadows flew at them as their master hovered above them, laughing demonically.

“Bae! Oh no you don’t dearies!” Rumple snarled and blasted two shadows attacking his son.

“Emma, look out!” Bae yelped as a shadow dived toward her.

Two others pinned her against a tree and were trying to tear her shadow from her body with little success.

“Didja think it would be that easy,” she taunted, holding out the half of the shell with the candle in it.

“Her shadow is protected!” one yelled to its master.

“And this one doesn’t have one! How is that possible?”

“Keep playing the game for now Rumplestiltskin but we know the truth. You’d rather let the boy die than surrender the powers of the Dark One.”

“He won’t let Pa kill your son Baelfire. He wants to do the honors himself. You’ve seen him do it before, kill anyone who knows his weaknesses.”

Bae shivered, the memory of the mute housekeeper they had flashing before his eyes.

“Don’t listen to them Bae!” Rumple cried. “Emma, light the candle.”

“I’ve seen you risk Henry’s safety before you son of a bitch!” Emma snarled. “He left our son under a sleeping curse so he could bring magic to Storybrooke,” she said to Bae. “He’s been playing us.”

“No! I AM here to save Henry! Bae, Emma, please, you have to believe me.”

“You know the prophecy. A child will be his undoing. That child is your son. He will kill him.”

“No….” Bae moaned.
The candle now lit Emma held the shell up to draw the shadow into it. It screamed in agony as she slammed the top down, trapping it inside, the other shadows forced to retreat in fear and confusion. She stalked over to Rumple, glaring daggers.

“You’re killing our son over our dead bodies Gold.”

“Emma….”

“We’re gonna be watching you,” Bae informed him coolly. “The box. Give it to me.”

“Why?”

“You say you’re here to save my son. Prove it. Give me the box. NOW!”

“You’re making a mistake. This is what he wants…to divide us!”

“The box, Papa. Do you think I forgot what you did to that poor girl? She couldn’t even talk, and you killed her anyway to protect your precious dagger!”

He paled, his hands trembling when he placed the box in Bae’s hand.

This wasn’t over. He would save his family and then he would save himself….if he could.

Concealed behind some bushes, Snow, Charming and Regina felt like they were watching the pages of the classic novel Lord of the Flies come to life. Scantily clad boys danced around a fire waving spears and singing. They could see a large cage on the other side, its only occupant a very terrified young girl who looked to be no older than twelve. Two boys poked her through the bars with the tips of their spears.

“Time for dinner!” one laughed and shoved a small plate through the bars, half of its contents spilling onto the ground.

“Stop, please stop!” she cried.

“Enough of this,” Regina snarled and teleported from her hiding place. “Playtime is over boys.”

“It’s the Queen. Get her!” Felix yelled. Regina waved her hand and they were frozen.

“Looks like you’re stuck, and your precious Pan is otherwise occupied, or he would’ve helped you.”

Snow, Charming and Tink emerged from their hiding place. Tink unlocked the cage and pulled a terrified Wendy out.

“Why are you helping me now?” Wendy demanded.

“I couldn’t rescue you alone. I needed help and it’s finally here.”

“My brothers! Pan will kill them!”

“No he won’t,” said Bae when they teleported in. He ran to Wendy and threw his arms around her. “Oh, Wendy why? Why did you come after me? You should’ve stayed with Jon and Michael.”

“Bae? Bae, is it really you?”

He laughed through his tears. “It’s me.”
“But you look so….old…”

“I know but you don’t know how glad I am to see you! We’re gonna take you back to Jon and Michael.”

“Are they safe?”

“Yes.”

“Please, take us with you!” one of the young boys pleaded.

“Shut up,” Felix hissed.

“We don’t wanna be bad…Felix beats us if we don’t do what he says, or he has the Shadow take us away.”

“Oh, does he now?” Snow growled. “We’ve got a special place for bullies, a little cage worse than the one you put Wendy in.”

“You can’t scare me! Pan will finish you.”

“Don’t count on it, dearie!” Rumple hissed.

“You’re no match for him. You’re too scared to give up your power and every minute you keep Henry’s heart out of his body is another minute closer to getting rid of the one person who can destroy you.”

“Wait a minute!” Charming cried, drawing his sword and pointing it at Rumple. “You’re double crossing us…again! You’re not here to save Henry. You’re here to kill him.”

“You took that potion from Emma and used it to bring magic to Storybrooke when she needed it to save him while he was under the curse!”

“You’re not getting anywhere near MY son!” Regina snarled.

“This is exactly what my father wants; to turn you all against me so we’ll be weaker but it’s not going to work. Tink, Snow, Charming, take the boys to the Jolly Roger. The rest of us are going to Skull Rock and then we’ll see WHO wants to save my grandson!”

A small rowboat appeared in the water. Regina, Bae and Emma climbed in behind Rumple. Bae and Emma picked up the oars and started to row toward a large cave in the center of the island the resembled exactly what it had been named for…a rock in the shape of a human skull. Rumple sat in the back of the boat trying to forget the terrifying images flashing before his eyes, himself trapped in the Realm of the Forgotten and then lying dead on the street in Storybrooke as another curse swept through the town, one that destroyed it and sent everyone back to the Forest. Everyone he loved dying as the Final Eclipse darkened the Ozian skies and the realms fell, Emma and Henry in New York City alone…their memories of their former life gone as if they’d never existed.
Open up your eyes
Save yourself from fading away now, don't let it go
Open up your eyes
See what you've become, don't sacrifice
It's truly the heart of everything

Within Temptation - The Heart of Everything

Neverland
Three days prior to the Final Eclipse

Rumple took a deep breath before he climbed out of the boat and walked toward the entrance to the cavern. As he was about to step through Regina and Emma raced toward it.

“No…wait…!” he cried.

The women were thrown through the air and landed hard on the ground.
"Pan cast a protection spell," he explained.

"There must be a way to break it." Regina formed a fireball in her hand and threw it against the cavern. It began to bounce off the wall, barely missing them.

"Whoa! Careful with that!" Bae shouted.

"Try all you want but Pan's magic is too powerful. At least for you," Rumple said as he stepped through the barrier.

"What...?" Regina gasped.

"How did you do that?" Emma asked.

"The spell is designed to keep anyone who casts a shadow from entering."

"And you don't have one. You were telling the truth about ripping your shadow off." Bae said.

"And Pan knows it. That's why he cast the spell he did. This isn't about keeping you out. It's about drawing me in. He knows I won't give up the chance to finish what I came here to do."

"You really did come here to save Henry."

"I gave you my trust when I gave you that box. Now I need you to give it back."

Bae reached out to hand the box to him. Regina grabbed it back.

"Hey!"

"You'd better come through Gold or I'll make what Pan has planned for you look like child's play. You understand me?" she demanded coldly,

"Well a simple good luck would've sufficed," he joked with a small smile as he walked up the
steps. Once he was inside he reached inside his coat pocket and took out the doll, feeling like the terrified child he'd been centuries before when he first arrived in the cursed place.

All I wanted was a fresh start for both of us but he didn't give a damn about me. All he wanted was to be a child again...a child who couldn't have a child.

"Hello laddie. Oh, I see you've come bearing gifts."

"Where's Henry?" Rumple demanded

"Oh, you mean my great grandson yet you still refuse to remember that I am the seed that you all spawned from."

"Because you're nothing but a coward to me, the sperm donor. Mama made me."

"We both know if that were true I'd already be in that box."

"You don't think I can do it? You let me inside just to...talk to me?"

"No. To see you again. To give you one last chance. Stay with me. Let this go. Let's start over."

"Do you think I wanna be with you? That I could ever forgive you after you abandoned me?"

"I'm disappointed Rumple. After all these years I thought you'd be more...understanding considering you did the same thing to your own son. You traded Balefire for the power of a dagger and I traded you for youth. We're alot more alike than you care to admit."

"We are nothing alike!" Rumple growled.

"Of course we are, and it's nothing to be ashamed of. Neither one of us was cut out to be a father, old boy."

"I regretted leaving my son the moment I let him go. I spent my life trying to find him. And what did you do? You forgot about me," he said bitterly.

"I never forgot about you! Why do you think I call myself Peter Pan?"

"Don't think I believe for a moment its because you care for me."

"But I do. All you have to do is put down that box and you'll see its true. We can make the fresh start you always wanted."

"Oh, I'm gonna make a fresh start. Just not with you," he said with a smile and waved his hand over the box to activate it. To his horror nothing was happening. He tried again. "I don't understand..."

"Because you don't have it!" Pan said triumphantly, producing a second box.

"You switched them!" Rumple whispered fearfully. How had he not realized it?

"Follow the Lady. Still having trouble believing. In Neverland all you have to do is think of something to have it. Even something fake. But the real one... well, let's see what it can do," he said with a smirk and waved his hand over the box. The ruby began to glow and Rumple could feel the box drawing him inside.

"No!" he cried.
"I'm sorry Rumple. You had your chance, The choice was yours."

"You bastard!" Rumple screamed.

Storybrooke
Rumple's Victorian

"..No….No! Rumple!"

Belle's terrified screams woke Archie and Az out of a deep sleep. The couple raced down the hall to the master bedroom to find Belle sitting up in her bed, sobbing in despair.

"Belle, what happened?" Archie asked. Az sat down on the bed and took the heartbroken woman into her arms.

"R...Rumple...Pan switched boxes on him and now he's trapped!" she sobbed.

"Oh no!" Az cried in horror.

Belle rose and reached for her robe. "I'm going to get him out of there. The slippers. Give them to me. I know you have them or a travel storm token."

"You are NOT going to Neverland alone!" Archie said angrily. "And you can't face Pan alone either. If he can trap Rumple, what do you think he will do to you?"

"He won't be able to do a damned thing to me because I'm going after Aramon's Talisman and I'm going to use it on the bastard then find out where he put that box."

"You don't even know where it is!"

"I do," Az said softly.

"Dellia, no! You know what will happen if you step one foot in the OZ again."

Az glanced up at her husband. "Archie, with Rumple trapped in Ephesis, me here and DG and Wyatt under Alemedia's control Pan will take Henry's heart. We cannot let that happen. Not if there is a way to stop it and retrieving Aramon's Talisman may be our only option."

"We only have one travel storm token and the slippers can only take two. You are NOT going to the OZ without me!"

"Once we get the talisman I can get another token from Ambrose."

"But we're taking the slippers just in case," Belle said firmly. "I'll be ready to leave in an hour," she added, leaving no room for argument.

Az and Archie returned to the guest bedroom to dress.

"I don't like it Dellia...it's too dangerous."

"You would've done the same for me," she reminded him.

"I know but….I don't trust anyone in that place not to hurt you when we show up there. Some of them still want my head thinking I was working for Bastinda."
"It's a risk we have to take. Henry needs us. Rumple needs us."

"What are the rest of them doing? His mothers! Unless Pan…"

"That's why we have to go darling. We may be Henry and Rumple's only chance."

In her own bedroom Belle finished filling her sack with an extra change of clothing and grabbed her sword from the closet along with the Walther pistol Rumple had given her shortly after she was released from the hospital. Knowing her lover was trapped, she didn't dare risk invoking his magic to weaken him. He would need all his strength.

"Hold on Rumple...hold on...I'm getting you out of there."

They climbed into Rumple's Cadillac with Archie at the wheel and raced to MacDonald’s farm. They arrived at the farm a short time later. Az took the coin out of her pocket and dropped it on the ground.

"Stand back!" she called out over the rising winds. "And join hands!"

The trio clasped hands as the large funnel cloud formed in front of them.

Az led them toward the cloud and they stepped in, picturing the Grey Gale in her mind. Belle clung to them tightly as the wind picked up and they began flying through the air. They could see Storybrooke disappearing beneath them and as the smoke cleared they found themselves standing on a hilltop with two suns shining in the sky.

Oz (The Outer Zone)
The Gray Gale

"Here we are….the Grey Gale or as the Ancients refer to it…Lurline's Temple. The original one," Az whispered. She'd been to the sacred site only once and that was while she was still under Bastinda's control to retrieve the Ozopov emerald from DG.

"I don't see anything," Belle said.

"You will. The doors will only reveal themselves to those of our bloodline." Az stepped forward and two emerald green doors appeared in the center of the hill and opened. The three travelers went inside.

"This looks more like a burial vault than a holy temple," Belle said, looking down at the spiraling staircase and seeing monuments along the walls.

"It is meant to be both."

Belle approached a pair of white doors and above them written in gold lettering was the name: DOROTHY GALE.

"My maternal line descends from her and Lurline. She was not a mage when she came to this land; she came into her powers later. This is why my powers are not as strong as those of Rumplestiltskin. He is a pureblood. I'm not. She guards the Ozopov emerald, the one that holds the last of Lurline's magic, her very life force. If it is destroyed…"

"It acts like the trigger Regina had in Storybrooke, doesn't it? If you destroy it, it takes the magic out of Oz and destroys it?" Belle asked her.
"I'm afraid it's far worse than that, Belle. Not only will the OZ fall…all the realms will fall…Lurline's magic created them. The only stone that can counteract its effects is the one we're here to find since it harnesses magic from your land, but our emerald will never leave this vault again."

"Thank the gods for that."

"Where is the emerald we're looking for, Az?" Belle inquired.

Az sighed. "Dorothy Gale's crypt."

"But...But how do we get there?" Belle stammered.

"The door to its location and the location of the talisman is here."

She led them down the staircase to the lowest level. Above two stone doors were the words ARAMON STROGOFF and there was not one but two symbols similar to the ones on Belle and Archie's palms on each side of the door. Azkadellia stepped forward and touched one of them and was blasted back. She fell to the floor in front of Belle and Archie.

"Dellia!" Archie exclaimed and helped her to her feet. "Are you all right?"

"Do...Doesn't want me....only a pure heart....can open the door."

Belle stepped forward and pressed her hand against one of the symbols. It began to glow but the doors wouldn't open.

"No...No! Come on...let me in please!" she begged. "You don't understand...I need those stones...Rumple needs them. He's not the monster everyone thinks he is. You have to let me in!" She pounded frantically with her fists. "You have to let me save him. I'm his bondmate...please!" She held her hand against the symbol on the door.

"Left...and right....two locks..." Az murmured.

"Dellia, we're running out of time! We need to get that door open!" Archie cried.

Az glanced at the doors. "Of course! I should have remembered!"

"What?" Belle cried.

She looked down at Archie's palm, seeing the House of Ozopov symbol branded into it. "Two symbols....two locks...one for each half of the bloodline. I can't open it...but you can...together."

"Us?" Archie was puzzled. "How?"

"She is bound to a Strogoff, you're bound to me, an Ozopov. That means you are now part of our bloodline," Az answered.

"Archie, please...just try!" Belle begged, keeping her own palm pressed against the symbol. Archie walked over to the second one and pressed his palm to it. A white light surrounded both of them and the doors opened.

"We did it!" Belle cried and threw her arms around her friend.

"Come inside all of you and claim what you seek," a voice boomed through the marble walls. The four held hands as they entered the final resting place of Rumple's forefather, the man once known in his native land as Ivan Strogoff, proclaimed a god by the Ozians when he won the heart of their
beloved Lurline.

Belle recognized the décor; she'd seen it in photographs and artwork depicting the palace of the Tsar he once served, Ivan the Terrible. The throne he was seated on was an exact replica of the one his master used, wooden with a high, straight back and a pedestal with ivory plates with carvings that depicted crucial events in Ozian history, not mythological events as Ivan's. On the wall above the throne hung a tapestry showing Aramon standing with Lurline and their children, the image so lifelike. Belle recalled Rumple showing her a similar one he made of himself and Bae. She'd never seen it when she lived in the Dark Castle. It was part of the second shrine he had to his son's memory in his chambers in the west wing, the only room in the castle she was forbidden to enter. Rumple often told her he didn't understand where his weaving talents came from, his father couldn't weave anything except tapestries of lies and he never knew his mother. Now she knew.

"Closer, my children," he beckoned. Reluctantly they stepped forward and kneeled before the throne. "Azkadellia, my daughter, you put yourself at great risk returning here. Tell me, why did you?"

"Rumplestiltskin is my kinsman and Belle my kinswoman through his bond to her. I...I know the pain he endures as long as Alemedia holds his soul. It was my pain when Bastinda held mine," Az answered. "His father wishes to possess the heart of the East Guardian and absorb all the magic of Neverland. Doing so will cause an even greater disruption in the balance and it is our duty to stop it. Rumplestiltskin is now a prisoner in the Realm of the Forgotten and he must be released!"

"The man you know as Peter Pan carries within him the blood of powerful warlocks in my native world, many of whom were burned at the stake for consorting with Lucifer. While only a select few of them practiced the dark arts and their deaths were justifiable, the deaths of the innocents were not. Therefore, only a mage with powers equal to his can defeat him....and he must do so as a true guardian, a mortal without magic." He eyed Belle. "Do you believe your bonded can defeat the realms' darkest evils as a mortal?" Aramon inquired.

"I do."

"We'll see."

Ephesis
The Ozian Hell Realm
The Realm of the Forgotten

He was in complete darkness. He buried his face in his hands and began to cry as he imagined what horrible fate awaited Bae and Henry. "I've failed you...again!"

"There is still a chance you can save them," he heard a voice say in the distance. "If you are willing to do what it requires."

"Who's there?" he asked, looking around and seeing no one. "Show yourself!"

He felt a hand on his shoulder and turned to see a young woman with white blond hair, blue eyes and wearing a silver gown sitting beside him.

"Who are you?"

"I am many things to you. I am Hope," she answered softly as she reached up and brushed a tear from his cheek. "You've kept this box all these centuries, surely you know its legends."

"Right now it does contain one of the world's darkest evils...me," he said sadly. "And now the
other...my own damned father...is going to kill my son...and my grandson...and it's all my fault! He'll keep me trapped in here just long enough to succeed...and then he may release me just so I can watch him enjoy his victory."

"You have a way to escape, you just have to believe it is possible."

"I don't know what to believe anymore."

"You don't want to!" Hope said angrily as she hauled him to his feet, shook him and slapped his cheek. "Overcome your fear, Rumplestiltskin! Be the man I know you are! The man Belle loves, the father Baelfire remembers! Or do you truly wish to follow in your father's footsteps now and live for no one but yourself?" she went on shoving him away from her, her hands on her hips and giving him a glare that was as terrifying as his own when he was in one of his rages.

"No!" he cried. "I'm not like that anymore. I've changed."

"Then prove it," she hissed. "Remove your heart!"

Rumple scoffed. "And how is that supposed to help me, dearie? I have removed my heart...many times and it is as dark as my soul from this cursed power I traded my son for as my father was quick to remind me of. Nothing can remove this darkness from me except my death and being locked in here is a fate far worse than my death."

"Yet did you not say in your message to Belle that you could defeat Pan and live?" Hope inquired softly.

"Only if she brought me this box from my shop. And my father switched this one with a fake. He was always good at that...trickery. Follow The Lady," Rumple added bitterly. "And like everyone else I fell for the ruse. He will take my grandson's heart and will kill him, my Bae and everyone else along with them to retain the youth he traded me for. I've failed Bae again and you need not be here to remind me of it! Go!"

"Do you not believe that your son still has faith in you?"

"Why should he? He knows now of the prophecy."

"He gave you this box when you asked him to trust you enough to give it back. By admitting you removed your shadow in preparation to enter the barrier Pan placed around Skull Rock your son could have faith that you came to Neverland to save Henry, not kill him. If that is not faith, Rumplestiltskin, what do you assume it to be?"

"Desperation."

"And what of your grandson? He does not fear you now even when you were cruel to him. Do you doubt he believes you can save him?"

"He doubts all of us because his life has been built around our lies! And that, dearie, works to Pan's advantage. He will use that to make Henry believe he is his only true friend. He toys with words, a skill I learned to use as well."

"And Belle?"

"What about her?"

"Do you doubt her love for you is as strong as yours is for her even after she has sent you proof of
"Proof I'm now trapped in! She'll forget me eventually. It's for the best."

"Is it?"

"I'm done talking. Leave!" he snarled.

"Remove your heart," she ordered again, more firmly.

"If I do it, will you leave then?"

"Perhaps."

Rumple plunged his hand into his chest and grasped the organ, roughly pulling it out. He gazed down at it, frowning. "I don't understand...this...this is not how it looked before."

"When was the last time you removed it?"

"After I...after I threw Belle out of my castle and was told of her death," he confessed sadly. "It was almost completely dark then, with only a small portion still red."

"Yet now, twenty-eight years later, there is only a small dark portion here." Hope indicated a small black spot.

"How is that possible? Once a heart turns dark, the darkness grows inside it until it consumes it."

"It can...unless there is still something or someone that can bring light into its darkness and give it the strength to fight against it and banish the worst of it and in turn strengthen the will of its host. Now, divide its essence."

"Divide its essence?"

"You've tried it before, did you not?"

"Twice. The first time after I let Bae go and after I lost Belle the first time to try to see if she was alive. And nothing happened. Just as nothing will happen now It's too late for me."

"We'll see. Divide it," she encouraged.

"Your name should be Persistence, not Hope," he grumbled.

"Divide it," she insisted.

Rumple closed his eyes, concentrated and waved his free hand over his beating heart, bracing himself for yet another failure.

"Open your eyes."

He opened his eyes slowly, gasping in shock. The dark portion of his heart still lay in his palm while there were three larger pieces hovering in the air, all of them glowing with a bright white light.

"I don't understand...how...?"

"You have three sources of light in your darkness, Rumplestiltskin. Summon them to you now."
Make their strength your own and your strength theirs. A bond in love and blood is strong enough to cross time and space to defeat the darkest of evils."

He reached out and took the first glowing piece in his free hand. "Baelfire," he murmured as he opened his palm and released it. It vanished. He then reached for the second piece, raising it to his lips. "Belle," he whispered and kissed it before he released it, reciting the incantations silently. He gazed at the third piece, unsure if he should keep it with him or take the risk that it would return to him if he sent it to his chosen recipient. Taking a deep breath, he reached for it and cupped it in his palm tenderly. "Henry," he said softly then slowly opened his palm to allow it to escape.

Ephesis
The Ozian Hell Realm
The Realm of the Forgotten

A glowing orb appeared in the throne room, hovering before Belle.

"What is that?" she asked.

"Take it…and discover for yourself what it is," Aramon encouraged. She took the glowing orb into her hands and as she held it, she could feel his love for her within it.

"I don't care how long it takes Rumple, but I will wait for you. And I will fight for you. I'll never stop fighting for you!" Belle vowed as she pressed the glowing orb against her chest near her heart. She gasped as she felt a slight pain and pulled the orb back to see that it was now glowing red.

"See as I see
Feel as I feel
Let our two hearts become one
Not even in death shall this bond be undone!" she chanted and released the orb, hoping that it would deliver her message to Rumple.

"Well done, child. Well done." Two silver boxes appeared in Aramon's hands. He opened the first and took out a tear shaped ruby pendant. "This is my talisman. I am certain, Azkadellia, you are familiar with what it can do."

"Render any mage user powerless for several hours but if you hold it over their hearts, it can take their powers away forever."

"Unless you have this." He opened the second box and took out a square shaped emerald pendant. This stone holds all of my magic, my life force…and it can harness the magic of any realm. It is also where the magic Lilliana took from Rumplestiltskin as a babe is stored. Once it is returned to him, he will become what he is meant to be…if he chooses the right path."

"He will!" Belle vowed, falling her knees. "Thank you! Thank you."

Aramon smiled down at the young woman. "Rise child. Ozmalita chose well. Your love will be Rumplestiltskin's light out of the darkness. You must go and be ready when the time comes."

The group raced out of the crypt and found a small army waiting for them. One of the men raised a gun and fired a shot. Azkadellia sank to her knees clutching her shoulder, her limbs freezing as the squid ink the bullet had been coated with began to work its way through her system.

"Dellia!" Archie cried.
"Archie...you must...get Belle back to Storybrooke!" she murmured.

"I'm not leaving without you!"

"Take them into custody!" the leader ordered.

"You're not taking us anywhere!" Archie snarled and concentrated, slamming the tip of his umbrella into the ground, throwing up a shield over them. The soldiers began firing at the shield at will, the bullets bouncing off it.

"Shit! It's Commander Ozopov!" one of the older guards cursed.

"I thought he was dead!"

"Sorry to disappoint you McKendrick but I'm very much alive. "Now, release my wife or you're going to be getting a very nasty reminder why I wasn't one to trifle with!"

“Take her back to the palace.”

“No one is taking us anywhere now release my wife or so help me Lurline I will tear this forest apart!” Archie yelled, his eyes glowing green.

“And I’ll help him,” Belle growled.

Cracks began to form in the earth beneath the soldiers’ feet. Several screamed and began to run, one of them dragging a protesting Az with them. Archie turned his head sharply and a tree branch swung out and struck the man holding Az in the face, forcing him to release her.

Belle threw a fireball at one of the trucks and it burst into flames. Archie teleported Az to their shield while she struggled to recover from the effects of the squid ink.

“Enough!” they heard a woman’s voice yell and the rest of the solders were thrown against the trunks of trees and pinned there.

“DG…” Az said weakly, praying her sister was now in control of the body, not Alemedia.

“Well well, what have you got there?” she asked, summoning Belle’s satchel to her and taking out the boxes. “Oh, at last! The centuries I’ve spent searching for these and they were right under my nose the whole time.”

“No…” Archie and Az moaned.

“Pity… I can only use this on one of you. But which one…” the goddess murmured as she approached them with the talisman in her hand.

“None of them!” they heard Wyatt snarl and blast her, the talisman falling out of her hands. Alemedia jumped to her feet.

“You can’t hold me back forever, Tin Man!” she hissed.

“I don’t have to. Just long enough. Archie, get them out of here! Now!” he ordered as he continued to blast at DG, a travel storm token appearing in Archie's hand. Belle snatched the talisman and put it back in its box.

“No one’s going anywhere!” DG gestured and Az, Archie and Belle were pinned to the ground. “The Balance will never be restored!”
Wyatt could feel himself weakening.

“DG, for Lurline’s sake, break through and save your sister!” he yelled.

“Deege, please….” Az pleaded and concentrated, shattering DG’s paralysis spell. She got to her feet and began to approach her sister.

“Dellia, no! She’ll kill you!” Archie cried.

Az held out her hand. “Nothing can hurt us if we’re together! Take my hand!”

I’m sorry I let go, Az.

I’m here and I’ll never run away again. Take my hand!

Wyatt out his arms, sword in hand. “You want me Alemedia…come and get me!”

“Wyatt, what the hell are you doing?” Archie demanded.

DG reached out and clasped her sister’s hand in hers and they began to glow.

“Az!” she sobbed. “Oh Az, you shouldn’t have come!”

“I had to, dammit! It’s the only way we can help Rumple!”

“Dottie, go with them.”

“Wyatt,” she sobbed. “Oh, what have you done!”

His eyes met hers. “What I had to, taking as much of her darkness out of your souls and tethering it to mine. She’s taking control again…now you have to go! Rumple is going to need you once he neutralizes that dagger. GO!”

“You damned stubborn tin man,” DG sobbed. “You are NOT sacrificing yourself for me again!”

“I love you Princess. Now get going!”

Archie tossed the token. They could hear maniacal laughter as the funnel cloud formed and jumped into it. Seconds later it vanished leaving Wyatt alone with a group of dazed and confused soldiers.

“Why did you let them leave? If Rumplestiltskin neutralizes the first dagger…” Katia Ozopov said as she stepped out from her hiding place.

“It will make no difference, Katia. I still hold the South.” Alemedia grinned. “Come. There is much to be done.”

The pair vanished in a puff of smoke.

Neverland
Skull Rock

“Something’s wrong. We gotta inside that cave!” Bae cried.

“The moon,” Emma said softly.
“What?”

“The moon is what casts our shadows at night. What if we block it out?”


“We’re going to make it possible,” Regina murmured. “Follow my lead Emma.”

The pair held up their arms and began to chant, pushing the clouds in front of the moon to obscure its light.

“It’s working! I’m in!” Bae exclaimed.

“Now let’s go get our son,” Emma growled, following him through the barrier with Regina close at her heels.

“I’m sorry but you’re a little late for the party,” Pan sneered, tossing Pandora’s Box up and down in his hand while Henry lay unconscious on the ground at his feet.

“What did you do with my father?” Bae growled.

“Put him away for safekeeping of course. And I believe you have something for me, Regina.” He gestured and Henry’s heart appeared in his hand. He set Pandora’s Box down and shoved the heart into his chest. Seconds later he cried out in pain.

“What…what’s happening….” He held out his hands, his eyes widening in horror at the wrinkled skin and age spots.

“You don’t have it all,” Regina boasted and blasted him. As he was lying on the ground she reached into his chest and pulled Henry’s heart out. Before she could unleash her full wrath on him, he vanished. Bae scooped Henry up in his arms.

“Dammit! Where the hell did he go?” Emma demanded.

“Never mind we gotta get Henry the hell outta here!” Bae snapped. Regina grabbed Pandora’s Box while Emma teleported them back to the Jolly Roger. Bae carried his son below deck to the Captain’s quarters and laid him on the bed.

“Don’t let us be too late. Please,” Emma pleaded while Regina gently pushed Henry’s heart back into his chest. His eyes fluttered open.

“You did it…” he whispered. “You did it…together.”

“Henry,” Emma sobbed and threw her arms around him.

Regina graciously allowed Emma and Bae a few minutes alone with their son and sat down to wait for Henry to be ready to be tucked into bed, just as she used to do. As she waited, she noticed something glowing by her feet. It was a small orb. Once it was in her hands a vision appeared before her eyes. She saw herself and Rumplestiltskin back in the Enchanted Forest when she was still a fledgling sorceress under his tutelage.

"You can do four things with hearts. Crush them, control them, use them to uncover truths the mind hides or divide their essence," Rumplestiltskin was explaining. "We've already done the first three. The fourth is a bit...difficult and no one has ever done it successfully in this land, only Oz."

"Splitting a heart in half is the same as destroying it."
"Not quite, dearie. Remember, a heart becomes enchanted once it is removed."

"Then why do it? What benefit does it have?" Regina demanded impatiently.

"The ability to be a strength or a weakness."

"How?"

"Unlike your first three options, you would be dividing your own heart's essence, sharing it's strength with someone else and in turn you would gain part of their heart to use as your strength. Now, if you happen to come across someone who has done this, you won't be able to take their heart...but if you weaken them, you also weaken the one who has the other half. Think of it as a two for the price of one deal."

"The second part sounds more promising. So, how do you divide a heart's essence."

To demonstrate, Rumple reached into his chest and removed his blackened heart, holding in his palm. He closed his eyes and concentrated, waving his hand over it. Moments later he opened his eyes.

"Had this worked, my heart would be divided into two pieces, one glowing with white light hovering above the other here in my hand as it is my half. The other, you would hold in your hand and speak the name of the person you want to send it to. When they receive it, they will see your heart's memories because they show the truths the mind can hide and learn the reason why you've trusted them with this fragile part of yourself. If they press it close to their own heart, it will remove a piece of their heart to return to you and replace it with part of yours. Then you will be able to draw strength from each other across time and distance. By dividing your heart's essence with a loved one, you can combine your strength to defeat an enemy or if one is weakened, it can draw strength from another, essentially weakening that person temporarily. And a heart that is divided cannot be taken."

"I will never need to do that. I'm strong enough on my own."

"We can't. A heart filled with darkness can never divide its essence." Regina smiled. "So you've succeeded at doing the impossible even while trapped, have you, Rumple? I don't need your heart's essence...but Henry does. He needs both of us. Now I can make certain that little bastard never hurts him again!" she vowed as she followed the glowing piece down below deck into Hook's quarters where her son lay on the bunk.

"Mom, what is that?" he asked.

"Take it and you'll see," she said softly. "It won't hurt you. You trust me, don't you?"

"I do, Mom," the boy assured her, grasping the smaller piece in his hand. As he held it he could see his grandfather, his mothers and father standing outside Skull Rock, thrown back from entering.

Henry recalled being with Pan in the room with the hourglass when Pan teleported him away to another room. He hadn't even known his grandfather had come for him or even heard him. Where was he? He held the orb tighter, realizing he was now seeing the events of the night through Rumple's memories. How was it possible?

He now saw his grandfather and Pan standing in the hourglass room while he waited in another, his grandfather holding a small box.
Henry watched with sadness as his grandfather was drawn inside the small box and imprisoned by his own father. No one had ever done anything that cruel to him. His parents and grandparents had their faults, but they all did what they did to protect him.

"Mom, we gotta find that box. Grandpa is trapped inside and we have to get him out!" he cried frantically.

"Not all of him is, my little prince."

"How?"

"What you're holding in your hands is a piece of his heart...a piece that belongs to no one else but you." she murmured.

"His heart's essence," he said. "He couldn't divide it before, but he can now because he's returned to the light."

"I'd do anything for you, Henry. How did you know that's what this was?"

"That's what it's telling me. What he's telling me." He held the orb to his chest until it vanished.

"Now no one can ever take your heart again as yours is now divided too," she said softly. "Get some sleep little prince." She kissed him once more before she went back on deck.

On the deck of the Jolly Roger Bae stood off in a corner alone with conflicting emotions raging through him...elation that he now had his son back safely, remorse that he'd doubted his father and fear that their troubles were far from over. He saw a flash of light beside him and turned to see a white glowing orb. As he touched it, he could see his father and Pan inside Skull Rock and heard their confrontation as if he were witnessing it firsthand. Even as Pan tempted him with survival, his father stood his ground, reminding both Pan and his son that he never forgot the child he abandoned. Bae watched with a heavy heart as Pan trapped his father in the real Pandora's Box while his father held a fake one, crying out in agony. The image was then replaced with another one from his own youth. He and his father were walking through the forest, Rumple carrying his old walking stick in his hand.

"You don't need that anymore so why bother carrying it?" he asked bitterly.

"There's something I want to show you Bae. A lesson I hope you'll remember should you need it."

"If it has to do with magic, you can forget it."

"Pay attention."

"Fine!" he grumbled realizing his father was not going to let the matter drop.

Rumple waved his hand over the walking stick until it glowed. "It's now enchanted. To everyone else it looks like an ordinary walking stick but in my hands or anyone who carries my blood, this stick can be much more." He twirled the stick in the air and a glowing dome appeared over them. "Blood magic, Bae." He twirled the stick again and the dome vanished. "It can also be triggered by thoughts and emotions. If you focus your emotions on an object it will give you what you desire."

"I'm gonna get you out of there, Papa...somehow. We need you." He cradled the glowing orb against his chest, feeling a small stab of pain before he released it. It was now glowing red. It stayed there for a minute or two before it vanished.
"This was all for nothing. They don't trust me. I don't trust me," Rumple said sadly.

"Don't they? Look." Hope said, indicating the three heart pieces that now hovered about the small black portion he held, all glowing a deep red as they merged with it to reform his heart. He gently placed the organ back in his chest, overwhelmed by the emotions emulating from it, the most powerful one being love. He pressed his hand over his heart, sobbing quietly.

"I don't deserve their love...not after everything I've done."

"Yet you have it and now it is time for you to go."

He was about to ask how when he vanished in a cloud of red smoke.

Neverland
The Jolly Roger

Bae retrieved Pandora's Box and walked out to where Emma, David and Snow stood. Waving his hand over the ruby stone that served as the box's lock, it rose upward and a cloud of red smoke billowed out of it. When it cleared a slightly dazed and confused Rumplestiltskin stood in front of him.

"Bae?" he called softly and threw his arms around his son.

"Papa," Bae gently patted him on the back.

"Where's Henry?"

"He's safe. He's safe," Bae assured him.

"I told you I wasn't gonna hurt the boy."

"I know, I'm sorry. I just wish you'd told me about Pan before...when I was a kid."

"Because I didn't want you to know I was as bad a father as he was. Because we're both the same; me and him. Because we both abandoned our sons," Rumple said sadly.

"No, you're not the same. You came back for me, Papa."

Rumple smiled softly and embraced his son again. "You don't know how much I need to believe that now." He tensed as he felt his father's presence on the ship.

"What's wrong?"

"Pan," Rumple said through gritted teeth. "He's here. I need the box, Bae...quickly!"

"Papa, be careful!" Bae begged. "He already trapped you once."

"Oh, don't worry. The only one going in the box now is him!"

He went below deck and saw his father in the room with Henry attempting to rip off the boy's shadow now that he couldn't take his heart. "Blood magic works both ways...Father," Rumple said coldly, waving his hand to activate the box. The magic reached out and seized Pan, the boy screaming as he was being sucked in, but his son was not aware that he'd switched bodies with the
one lost boy whose soul still belonged to him.

"Henry! Henry!" Regina cried frantically when she came down the ladder into the quarters.

"I'm okay. I'm okay!" Henry assured her.

"Are you sure?"

"He's a strong boy Regina. You raised him well," Rumple said not disguising the pride in his voice. He hadn't understood why she needed a child during the curse but now that he knew the full truth, there was no one else he could've trusted to raise the boy all those years but the woman who had been a daughter to him. "I'll stay with him."

"You're sure?"

He nodded. "Just...get us the hell out of here."

"You don't have to ask me twice about that," she muttered and left the cabin. Rumple settled himself in a chair by the wall with Pandora's Box clutched tightly in his hands.

"He's not gonna get out of there, is he?" Henry asked worriedly.

"No. Go on back to sleep. I'll be here." Rumple said softly and settled himself into a chair in the opposite end of the room.

On deck Bae opened the shell and released the Shadow while Emma and Regina blasted it, trapping it on the mainsail.

"Brace yourselves!" Snow called out to the terrified children and Tink as the ship took flight. Many of the children clung to each other while it soared through the night sky for miles and miles until it passed through the magical barrier and suddenly it was daylight and they were once again in the ocean.

"Why so glum?" a boy asked a pouting Felix.

"Why? Why? Pan's gone."

"Is he?"

The boy smirked.

"You switched," Felix chuckled. "But...but I thought losing Henry’s heart weakened you."

"Only temporarily laddie. I don’t need Neverland’s magic anymore."

"Why?"

"Because I’m back in the realm of my ancestors, old friend and the closer I get to the motherland, the stronger my magic will be. We’re going to make this our new Neverland courtesy of the same curse my son created to bring himself here. We just have to get it."

"You will. Peter Pan never fails."

And Storybrooke would be his new Neverland.
Stay with me now I'm facing my last solemn hour  
Very soon I'll embrace you on the other side  
Hear the crowd in the distance, screaming out my faith  
Now their voices are fading, I can feel no more pain  
I'll face it cause it's the heart of everything  

Within Temptation - The Heart of Everything  

Author’s Notes: Lilly Bergmann first appeared in GoldsJRZGirl’s and my stories Regal Mischief and How The Queen Stole Christmas but in reality she is Lilliana Strogoff reborn. This story also references GoldsJRZGirl’s Gold Standard series which we crossed over in Queen.

Storybrooke, Maine  
Two days prior to the Final Eclipse  

Belle, Az, Archie and a dazed DG stood on the dock waiting on baited breath for the Jolly Roger to appear within the boundaries of the cloaking spell.  

"He'd better be worth it," DG muttered. "So help me God he better be worth it!"

"Deege..."

"No, Az. It has to be said. That man was a damned coward most of his life and took the power of the Dark One for what? To puff himself up? I HAD no choice. Neither did Wyatt." She glared over at Belle. "You can make all the damned excuses you want but the truth is he could've stopped this years ago!"

"DG, I know you're upset..."

"You have NO idea how I feel so don't bother to try."

"That's enough Dorothis!" Archie snapped.

"Stop trying to tell me what to do. You're not my father."

"DG, come with me," Belle said, taking her by the arm and leading her away from the others. Archie shook his head.

"Always has to be the center of attention, doesn't she?"

"Archie, don't."

"Dellia, sweetheart, you know it and I know it. We don’t have time for these childish antics of hers. She needs to straight out and help us do what needs to be done or you know what’s coming."

They glanced over at where she stood with Belle.
“I know what you’re going through DG. Believe me I do. I was separated from the man I loved for twenty-eight years but I decided once we were reunited that I would do everything in my power to help him fight his darkness and I have.” Belle took the younger woman’s hands in hers. “And I give you my word here and now that Rumple and I will do everything we can to help you fight for your love.”

“I condemned him to a slow and agonizing death in our first life. I can’t do it again. I have to get it right this time.”

“Then help us fight this battle so we can win the war.”

“I’ll do what I can,” she murmured.

“Come on. They’ll be coming back from Neverland soon.”

Suddenly a portal opened in the ocean and the Jolly Roger reappeared with the Shadow bound to its mainsail. A large crowd had now gathered to welcome the weary travelers home. Snow and Charming came off the boat first followed by Bae, Henry and the lost boys, receiving warm hugs from the friends awaiting them while Regina and Rumple waited on deck.

“Rumple!” he heard Belle call out from the crowd and saw her running toward the boat. Seconds later she vanished in a puff of smoke and reappeared beside him, pulling him into her arms.

“Belle,” he whispered into her hair.

“I told you I would see you again!” she said firmly and kissed him passionately.

“Remind me never to doubt you again,” he chuckled and kissed her back.

"There's something I need to show you," Belle said softly and reached into the pocket of her coat.

"What?"

She took out the black velvet box and handed it to him. He opened it, his eyes wide with shock when he recognized the devices the Dark One had spent centuries seeking. "Aramon's Talisman and the Strogoff Emerald. How...how did you find them?"

"I went to the OZ and got them."

"Belle, are you insane! Please tell me you did NOT go there alone!"

"I didn't and I told you...I would never stop fighting for you. You were trapped in that box and I know these can help you defeat the Dark One."

He nodded. “And they will. Come. We should join the others.”

Bae and Henry waited for them on the dock. Belle embraced her future stepson and ruffled Henry’s hair affectionately.

“My three favorite men in the world,” she said softly.

“Umm….do I call you Gramma now or Belle?” Henry inquired nervously.

The others burst into laughter.

“You can call me anything you like Henry.”
“Yeah but you’re really young and I’d feel weird calling you Gramma but I call Snow and David Gramma and Grampa so…”

“We need to make it official yet Henry,” Rumple reminded him.

“And when are you planning on doing that Papa? When Belle starts getting gray hairs?” Bae teased.

“Smartass.”

“You’re lucky you brought him home in one piece or I would be shoving the handle of my broom where the sun doesn’t shine,” Zelena cackled.

“I love you too, cousin.”

“I can see the resemblances now that I’ve seen Aramon but to be honest he looks a lot more like Alan Rickman.”

“He does?” Rumple and Zelena’s eyes widened. “Belle, you’re pulling my leg!”

“I’m serious Rumple. He does. He spins as you do too.”

“Did he tell you anything…”

“He’s not much of a talker.”

“Bae, if it’s alright with you Belle and I would like to spend some time alone and I think you should spend some time with your son.”

Bae nodded.

“Come by the shop later.”

Bae glanced over to where the Lost Boys were standing. The sheriff’s department officers rounded up the ones from Felix’s crew and were taking them back to their squad cars.

“Not to worry. We’ll find homes for the others,” David reassured him.

“I hope so. Pan treated them all like slaves. They deserve better.”

He turned back to his son. “Now, where can we get a decent meal in this town.”

“Granny’s of course!” Henry cried.

“And I’ve got a buffet hot and ready for you,” Granny boasted. “Now get your butts moving before it goes cold.”

“You coming, Em?”

“Ummm…”

“Go with them Emma,” Snow advised.

“But Mom…I…I don’t know…”

“Honey, give him a chance,” Charming pleaded. “He’s making the effort. You should too.”
“I would give everything I have to have had those kind of moments with you when you were Henry’s age,” Snow added. “He needs all his parents there, not just one.”

She spotted Bae and Henry getting into Regina’s car.

“Regina, wait up!” she called and hurried after them.

DG felt a hand on her shoulder and turned to see Jeb Cain standing behind her along with Raw, Xenia and Ambrose. Ambrose embraced her.

“We’re gonna get him back, doll,” he soothed.

“I hope so,” she sobbed. “He’s lost so much already…”

Now Jeb embraced her. “It’s gonna be okay DgG. Father knows what he’s doing.”

I hope, he thought.

The moment the door closed Rumple flipped the sign to Closed, locked it and walked over to where Belle stood, the hungry look in his brown eyes making her heart race in anticipation of what was to come. It had been days since they’d been together but to her it felt like a lifetime. He held out his arms to her and she went into them willingly, reaching for him and bringing his mouth down to hers.

"I love you," she whispered. "I don't want to spend another day or night without you..."

"You won't," he vowed and carried her into the backroom.

Storybrooke Sheriff’s Station
Twelve hours prior to the Final Eclipse

The prisoners were quiet, almost too quiet but Deputies Koto and English were not complaining. They were attempting to pass the time on their shift challenging their fellow deputies to a few hands of poker.

“Enjoy it while you can man,” Terry chuckled while Jim Koto swept his winnings into his pockets. Seconds later both men were turned to stone as Pan sauntered into the station in the body of one of the Lost Boys.

“Time to go lads.” The cell doors swung open and six very excited teenagers rushed out to praise their leader.


“We have work to do and very little time to do it,” Pan informed them before teleporting them to the Mills vault. The older boys concealed themselves behind the trees while Pan and Felix approached the vault. Pan held out his hand feeling traces of the barrier spell Regina had cast, a spell laced with blood magic.

“Blood magic works both ways Regina,” he chuckled and reached his hand through the barrier with ease.

“How did you do that?” Felix wondered.
“It’s simple really. Regina set this spell to prevent anyone without a blood connection to her from entering but when I held Henry’s heart, I was able to absorb some of his powers. Not much but just enough to break through this.”

They went inside. Felix pushed the caskets of Henry and Cora Mills aside and the pair descended the stone staircase into the room where Regina kept her cache of magical items, she’d brought with her during the curse, but it was the curse itself he was seeking. He took it out of its box and held it up.

“We’re going to make a new Neverland old friend and this is how.”

“Why can’t we go back to ours?”

“Because it won’t be there much longer. I’ve been assured of that.”

“By whom?”

“By me,” the heard a voice say and a puff of black smoke appeared in the room revealing a tall, ginger haired man the mirror image of the famed Commander Ozopov.

“Felix, meet Silas Finster. The true Dark One.”

Felix was aware of this Dark One’s fearsome reputation. The unknown identical twin of the Archie Hopper now living in what was known as Storybrooke Two, Silas had been a Dark One for over a century leaving trails of corpses in every known realm and had a standing contract with the Home Office. It was he they called in when they encountered fairy tale creatures or realms too difficult to destroy. Many in their circle referred to him as their ‘Grim Reaper.’

“The legend himself,” Felix praised. “Have you come to give us a hand?”

“No, I’ve come to cash in the favor I’m owed.”

“And what’s that?” Pan demanded.

“You curse or kill everyone else except for those bleeding hearts that look like me and their women. I want the pleasure of killing them myself.”

“Done.”

“I’ll come back to collect them once the curse is cast. And it had better be cast. If you screw up, I will make a special trip to Ephesis and make you experience one of my masterpieces!”

“I won’t fail.”

“And if you stand there and say ‘Peter Pan never fails’ one more time Felix I will cook your heart and eat it,” Silas threatened. The younger boy wisely held his tongue knowing it was no idle threat. Nor did he want any of his body parts kept as a trophies as Silas was known to do. He breathed a sigh of relief when the man vanished.

“The minute he shows up here again that dagger is mine,” Pan said through gritted teeth. He would take his son’s but he had other plans in mind for Rumple. “Let’s get to the well.”

“But don’t you need the other ingredients?”

“I already have all of them…except one.”
The heart of the thing he loved most.

And that heart was still beating in the chest the boy who stood at his side. His best friend.
Snow’s Loft

“EMMA! Open up! It’s Molk!” Emma heard David yelling as he pounded on the door. A police knock. Loud enough to wake the dead. Emma jumped out of bed and pulled a pair sweatpants on and raced to the door to find him and a frantic Hildy Mulligan on the other side.

“What’s going on?”

“The lost boys! The ones we locked up! They’re out and Terry and Koto have been turned to stone!” Hildy cried.

“Stone? What the hell??”

“Emma, what’s going on?” her exhausted parents asked when they came out of their bedroom.

“The Lost Boys are out. I don’t know how but I’m gonna find out. Dad, you better come with me.”

“We have another problem,” Regina informed her when she teleported in with Henry at her side. “My vault’s been broken into and some items were taken. I’ve already sent for Rumple.”

“What items?”

“The curse and all the ingredients used to cast it.”

“Who…?”

“Pan,” they heard Rumple snarl when he arrived with Belle. “He swapped bodies with someone before I opened the box. He had to. It’s the only way he could’ve gotten those boys out of their cells, turned English and Koto to stone and stolen the curse. Now we have to find out who he swapped with and swap them back.”

“Did anyone call Archie or Az. We might their help.”

“Dellia and I can round up the other boys and have Raw read them. He’ll be able to tell which one Pan’s using,” Archie said when he and Az appeared.

“When we find them how do we switch them back?”

“I can do that,” Rumple informed them. “He should still have the curse on him when I switch them back. Get it and destroy it! That curse can never be cast again. In the meantime Belle and I will look for my father.”

“Be careful Rumple.”

“You too, dearies.”

Once word of the jailbreak got around town everyone in Storybrooke was willing to help capture the Neverland residents. All but the ones that had been imprisoned in their cells were staying in the orphans’ home. The boys were roused from their beds and taken to the diner where Raw waited to read them.

“Boy not among those here,” he said after the last boy was read.
“Ephesis,” DG muttered. “He’s in the box. We have to free him before we can switch them back.”

They quickly teleported back to the shop. Rumple and Belle had already returned, retrieving Pandora’s Box from its hiding place. He waved his hand over the ruby and activated it, a terrified young boy of twelve emerging from the box followed by another.

Emma watched with amazement as the group pressed their arms to their shoulders and kneeled to the man that bore a striking resemblance to Alan Rickman.

“What the heck….?” Bae gasped. “Papa, is it….”

“Welcome my lord,” Rumple greeted his ancestor and Ozian deity.

Aramon smiled and cupped Zelena’s face in his. “I see so much of my sister in you,” he said softly. “And you have done me proud by ridding the world of Baba Yaga.”

“How were you able to escape Ephesis?” Rumple asked him.

“Alemedia’s powers are weakening my boy. But now the time has come for you to fulfill your destiny. You know what must be done.”

Rumple nodded.

“Who is this?” Emma demanded of Bae.

“Emma, meet Aramon. Our ancestor and an Ozian god.”

“For a minute I thought he was Alan Rickman.”

“A man whose work I greatly admire,” the god said. “That is why I have chosen him as my avatar. We will talk again soon but now this boy’s soul must be returned to its proper place.”

Rumple summoned the Book of the Ancients and opened it to the page he needed, chanting in Russian Ozian, a dialect he knew his father would never be able to understand.

Wishing Well

Pan gazed down at the swirling green liquid, smiling evilly. “One more ingredient and the curse will begin.”

“What is the final ingredient?”

“The heart of the thing I love most.”

“Your son?”

Pan scoffed. “No, dear Felix. There are different forms of love, one of them friendship and loyalty and there is no one else that has demonstrated this more than you.”

He placed his hands on the boy’s shoulders. “This sacrifice you make today will make you a hero of all the Lost Boys. We will carry on because of you.”

Felix took a deep breath as Pan reached into his chest and pulled out his heart.

“Goodbye Pan,” the boy said bravely as Pan crushed the heart to dust.

Seconds later a cloud of green smoke billowed out, his laughter echoing through the forest as the
cloud trailed after him.

“To thy rightful place I bid thee return!” he heard Rumple’s voice call out.

“NO!” Pan howled before he was once again back in his own body.

“Hello Papa,” Rumple sneered, blowing on his hand.

“Poppy dust,” Pan growled and collapsed on the cot in the shop’s backroom.

“This should hold him for now. The boy has the scroll. Go!” he ordered the others. He then summoned the box holding the talisman and handed it to Belle.

“It’s time.”

“Rumple, I can’t. Please don’t make me,” she sobbed.

“Is it the will of the OZ.”

“The will of the OZ be…”

“Don’t say it!” he cried. “Too much has been lost already. You are the Heart of the West and now you must do your duty and subdue the Dark One! Belle, please!”

“I love you Rumple.”

“And I love you too. If the Fates are kind, we will have the future we’ve dreamed of together.”

Her hands were trembling as she approached him with the talisman in her hand. “Alemedia Demonia!” she cried, pressing it against his chest. He hissed in pain while the stone scorched his skin, taking away all the powers he’d blessed and cursed for centuries, but he was no longer that cowardly village spinner that took the curse.

“Go to the others. I’m going to have a little chat with my father.”

She was still crying when she cupped his face in her hands and kissed him passionately. “We will have our happy ending!” she vowed and teleported out.

Rumplestiltskin.

"Hope?"

There is not much time. You have one last task to complete before you face Pan. You must remove and divide your heart again.

"Why?"

You know the answer. You always have but have not been willing to pay the price. The only way this town and those you love can survive is with the destruction of the two darkest evils.

Rumple lowered his head and glanced over at his sleeping father. "So the prophecy will come to pass after all. We are the two darkest evils and we both have to die," he croaked.

Sacrificing yourself in the names of those you love, are you willing to pay this price now, Rumplestiltskin?
"Yes," he sobbed.

Prove it. Remove your heart...for the last time.

His hand trembled as he reached inside his chest and pulled out the glowing red organ and recited the spell to divide it. It split into one large piece that hovered above his hand glowing red while the smallest one that remained in his palm was completely black.

The larger piece cannot be returned to your body since it is bound to those you love. It must be protected. Goodbye Rumplestiltskin.

Rumple waved his other hand and a box appeared. He floated the larger piece of his heart over to the box and closed it then recited a cloaking spell over it, making it visible to everyone else except Pan. The box then vanished in a puff of purple smoke. It would reappear to the one person who would understand what needed to be done with it. Now he was left the smaller piece, the last part of him still clinging to darkness. He placed it back in is chest.

Henry was on Main Street, the scroll now in his hands when a box appeared at his feet. He opened it up and saw a heart inside. He gently took it out and cradled it in his hands, hearing Hope's voice in his head.

Protect his heart well, grandson of Rumplestiltskin. When the time is right, you will know what to do.
He heard his parents and other grandparents calling for him. He placed the heart back inside the box raced to meet them.

"Henry!" Regina and Emma exclaimed, embracing their son. Once they released him, he handed the scroll to Regina. Once her hands touched it, magic surged through her and she collapsed to the ground unconscious.

Regina saw herself in a dark room, a blond haired woman in a white gown facing her.

"Who are you?"

"Who I am is not important at the moment. What is important is what must be done."

"I can't lose my son...I can't..." Regina sobbed.

"If the curse of the Dark One is not broken, losing your son will be the price you will have to pay to destroy this new curse Pan is unleashing."

"What do I have to do?"

The woman waved her hand and Regina could see Henry standing there, a box in his hand. "Inside that box is Rumplestiltskin's heart while the heart of the Dark One remains with him. Both this heart and the child must be protected."

"I'll protect my son with everything I have!" she vowed.

The other woman smiled. "I have no doubt that you will, but you must not allow the curse to send everyone back to the Enchanted Forest."

"Aramon's Prophecy. We can't stop it, can we?"

"There is a chance, but you must still be prepared for the worst," she cautioned before she
vanished.

Rumple stood over his father as he came awake.

"Hello, Papa," he said coldly.

"Thought you'd kill me in my sleep, laddie. I guess you changed your..." He, sat up, glanced down and saw the cuff locked around his wrist. "Oh, wait. I see. You've taken away my magic. That's why it's so easy for you to strut around and pose now, isn't it?" he scoffed.

"I wanted to talk to you. I wanted you to see me and think about what you've done," Rumple said.

"Of course. To look at my son here at the end and really see him and think about what might've been. Is that what you want? Because I do. I remember looking at you... the littlest babe. Helpless and all mine. Those big, big eyes full of tears... pulling at me... pulling away my name, my money, my time, just like that bitch of a mother of yours did before she dropped you on my damned doorstep and took off. Pulling away any hope of making my life into something better for myself. This pink, naked, squirming little larva that wanted to eat my dreams alive and never stop! How old are you now? A couple hundred? Can't I be free of you?"

"Oh, you will be. In death." Rumple picked up a sword from the counter. Part of him thought his father would at least try to think about it, that part of him that was still the frightened little boy who needed his Papa but his father would never change. He wanted to retain his youth and his son was simply a reminder that he was a man in a child's body and it wouldn't last forever.

His father was grinning. "Then, one last lesson, son. Never make a cage you can't get out of." He tore the cuff off his wrist with no effort at all and held it up while Rumple gazed at him in shock. "I made this cuff, you know. Doesn't work on me. But on you..." he taunted, making the cuff appear around Rumple's arm. "Down, boy!" he snarled, using his magic to toss his son into a shelf. "Let's see how you do without magic!"

Rumple groaned as his head throbbed with pain from where it came in contact with the back of the shelf and attempted to crawl over to where the sword lay when his father kicked him in the stomach.

"I've come too far for this. For them!" he cried.

"For your son? No. It's too late. Soon, that fine green smoke will fill their lungs and fog their brains. Not like the rest of this town. I'm not just going to take their memories. No. Because of their special meaning to you, I'm going to take their lives. And you won't do a thing to stop me. Do you know why? Because without magic, you are right back to where you started. The village coward!" Pan taunted before he left the shop.

Regina could hear someone calling her and opened her eyes to find Emma shaking her.

"Emma...stop...I'm all right! Where is Henry?"

"I'm right here, Mom."

"Henry...do not let that box out your sight no matter what. Do you understand?" Regina whispered urgently as she threw her arms around him again.

"Henry...what's in that box?" his father asked.

"Rumplestiltskin's heart...part of it," Az answered.
"Why did you faint like that?" Snow asked worriedly.

"I saw what needs to be done," was Regina's answer.

"Are you going to be okay, Mom?"

"The important thing is that you will," she said softly.

"No he won't," Pan announced when he approached them, waving his hand and taking the scroll from Regina's hands.

"The cu..." Archie started to say before they were all frozen.

"Curse," Pan finished as he held it up. "Look at you all. A captive audience. I could play with you like a pack of dogs, couldn't I?" he taunted. "I think I'll start with these two." he said as he now stood before Bae and Belle. "Hmm. You both look so adorable. Hard to tell who to kill first. No, it isn't. You. You first." He pointed at Bae and was about to strike when he felt himself being pulled back.

"Stay away from them!" Rumple hissed.

It was time to end it. The most painful part was facing the ones he loved the most to say his goodbyes, even more painful to see them standing still unable to move or speak but their love for him made him stronger than he ever had been before.

"How about this? The worm has teeth," Pan taunted. "What, are you here to protect your wuved ones?"

"I'm not gonna let you touch any of them."

"Oh, I'd like to see that."

"Oh, you will. Because I have a job to finish, and I have to do whatever it takes. No loopholes. And what needs to be done has a price. A price I'm finally willing to pay," Rumple said bravely. He glanced over at his paralyzed son. "I used the curse to find you, Bae, to tell you I made a mistake. To make sure you had a chance at happiness. And that happiness is possible. Just not with me. I accept that."

"Pretty, pretty words," Pan was sneering.

Rumple ignored him. "I love you, Bae. And I carry a part of you with me...just as part of me will always be with you..."

Bae's cheek twitched and inside he was screaming, not wanting to lose his father now that they'd finally reconciled.

"Oh don't worry. You'll be reunited...in death." Pan laughed.

Rumple ignored him and glanced over at Emma. "Forgive my son Emma. He made a mistake, just as I did all those years ago. Forgive him for yourselves and for my grandson. Find the Tallahassee you dreamed about together. This is the last thing I'm asking of you."

A tear slid down the Savior's cheek.

Now his eyes met those of his young grandson, the box containing what was left of his heart in Henry's hands, visible to all but Pan. "You will be a great man and a great sorcerer someday,
Henry. You will be the man I wanted to be all those years ago of that I am certain. You were raised well." He smiled at Henry and Regina then walked over to where his cousin stood beside her bondmate. "I'm sorry we didn't have more time to get to know each other, cousin but I leave you in good hands. Bury the sorceress in the past and become the woman you were meant to be."

"Archie, be a comfort to my family. They'll need you now more than ever."

I give you my word for my word as a Talon is my bond, Archie sent, reciting the ancient oath of the lost order.

Now Rumple looked over at Belle, his own bondmate, horror and despair in her beautiful blue eyes. "And I love you Belle," he said as he fought back his tears. "I never thought I could love that way again until that day I came to your father's castle. You saw both sides of me and even when I gave you plenty of reasons to leave; you came back and fought for me. I will see you again...just not in this life as we hoped and I'll wait for you...in the next one. You made me stronger, strong enough that I now know what I have to do and can do it...without fear anymore. You all have. By believing in me even when I no longer believed in myself."

He faced his father again with grim determination. He had to succeed for his family. He no longer had a chance but he would give them one.

"Stronger, yes. But still no magic," Pan reminded him. "You removed it and the Dark One powers with that talisman, remember?"

"Oh, but I don't need it. You see, you may have lost your shadow but there's one thing you're forgetting." Rumple pointed out as he regained his composure.

"And what's that?" Pan sneered.

"So I have I," Rumple declared triumphantly. "I sent it away with something to hide." He raised his hand, willing his shadow to answer his call. The black specter flew toward him and placed his dagger into his hand and remerged with his body. He grabbed his father and held him to him, the blade of the dagger poised behind Malcolm's back, directly over their hearts.

"What are you doing?" Pan demanded as he struggled to free himself.

"Fullfilling the prophecy and protecting my family! You see, the only way for you to die, is if we both die. And now... now, I am ready!" Rumple snarled as he plunged the dagger into his father's back and through his own chest where what remained of the Dark One's essence was stored and twisted it to banish her back to Ephesus where she belonged as his father pleaded with him to stop, promising him that they could have their happy ending.

"Ah but I'm a villain and VILLAINS DON'T GET HAPPY ENDINGS!" he snarled and twisted the blade.

A gold wave shot out from around them and all across Storybrooke, knocking everyone who stood in front of them off their feet, Henry still cradling the box containing the remaining portion of Rumple's heart in his arms protectively. The light surrounded father and son and as it cleared Rumple held his aged father's now still form, sobbing quietly and giving the man he once loved so much a kiss farewell on the cheek as he pulled the dagger out. He gently lowered Malcolm to the ground and closed the older man's eyes. "T...The...darkest of curses by a Strogoff was taken...and with my sacrifice...in the names of those I love...let this curse and all those created by it at last...be...broken!" he whispered and slumped to the ground beside his father, the front of his suit stained with his own blood and his father's. The dagger fell out of his hand and there was a blank
space where his name was once engraved.

Boston, Massachusetts
Two hours prior to The Final Eclipse

“No….NOOOOOOOOO!”

It was a nightmare unlike any Dr. Lilliana Bergmann ever had before, her screams waking her daughter and bringing her running into her bedroom.

“Mum….Mum!” Cassandra yelled and began shaking her. “Wake up! Wake up!”

“My son,” Lilliana wailed. “My son…”

Cassie frowned. It had been years since her mother dreamt of the stillborn baby she’d given birth to when Cassie was only two though she lit a candle every year on his birthday. She glanced over at the calendar. His birthday was still a few months away.

“Mum….please wake up.” Cassie shook her again more forcefully and slapped her cheeks. Lilly’s eyes fluttered open.

“Cassie…what….what happened?”

“You were dreaming about him again,” Cassie replied softly. Lilly sat up and took a sip from the glass of water that was on her nightstand.

“I’m alright darling. Go back to bed.”

“Ummm…are you sure.”

“I am, now go on.”

Cassie hesitated for a moment or two before she retreated to her own bedroom, her eyes narrowed to slits when she realized she wasn’t alone.

“I thought I told you to get out of here before she wakes up!” she snapped at the man lounging in her bed.

“Kinda kinky isn’t it?” he teased.

“Victor I swear to the gods if she catches you, I’ll be hacking your corpse into pieces! Now go back to Storybrooke!”

He reached for her and pulled her onto the bed with him. “Not without a kiss goodbye first.”

Cassie sighed. Whale always wanted more than a kiss goodbye and she never could say no to him.

Shortly after Lilly had fallen back to sleep a cloud of silver smoke appeared before her bed.

“The darkest of curses by a Strogoff was taken and through his sacrifice in the names of those he loves, his curse and all those created by it have at last been broken,” Adora recited, caressing Lilly’s hair. “Your son has fulfilled his destiny Lilliana and the first blade has been neutralized but his work is not done. The crimson moon will darken our skies in two hours and the Final Eclipse will begin. Your son must unite the Guardians and save our people!”

She glanced over at the closed bedroom door, smiling. “Your Meredith will one day stand at the
North Gate in another realm, but she must prove herself worthy of the burden and your heart awaits you in Storybrooke Five. He will find you Lilliana. He will find you the time before the realms unite. And your dear friend Loki will reunite you with your son.”

“She won’t remember any of this you know. And how am I supposed to reunite her with her son?”

“Your great-grandson has something, or should I say someone Zorinda wants,” Adora informed her companion. She bowed respectfully to the elder Norse God.

“The other Regina. The one my great-grandson deaged and gave to Snow White to raise,” Loki clarified.

“She will stand at the South Gate as Meredith will stand at the North.”

“Zorinda lost the right to be the South Guardian when she took the first dagger,” Loki reminded her. “How can you be certain her daughter won’t make the same mistake? Regina in that realm was just like the one in this one, only worse thanks to Zorinda or Cora as she chooses to call herself now. There will come a day when Regina will remember her former life. My great-grandson’s spell is not foolproof.”

“We all have to walk in the darkness for a time before we find our way back to the light.”

Loki glared at her. “Lilly has suffered enough in BOTH her lives! You’d better do right by her from now on Ozmalita or you deal with me! I don’t give a rat’s ass WHAT pantheon you’re from. She’s very precious to me as was Glinda, her dear mother. When I think of what was done to her…”

The god turned his head away. The Ozian demigoddess had fancied the elder Norse god in her youth and a rather embarrassing incident had forced her to become his student for a time. She had taken the name ‘Glinda The Good’ in honor of the mentor who had always reminded her to be good when she’d been known as ‘Glinda The Naughty’.

“I am sorry Loki…my sister…she was not pleased that I resurrected Lilliana after Alemedia resurrected Zorinda.”

“Lurline has as much of a dark streak in her as Alemedia and perhaps the Final Eclipse will be a blessing to the realms and rid them of both!”

“Loki!”

“It’s the truth and you know it, Ozmalita. Persephone was the only one who could keep those two hellcats in line, and they’ve become just like their father without her calming influence. I’m not saying I’m a saint, but they’ve done worse than I ever could and their offspring have done no better. They can’t blame Demeter. She cursed them yes, but they’ve never had the willpower to overcome it. My dear Lilly is the rare exception and gave her first life for it. So, mark my words, Ozmalita, the man you’ve chosen to be her bondmate damned well better be worthy of it!”

“Would you like to meet him?” she queried.

“You know I would! Take me there. Now!”

Storybrooke Five (Gold Standard Verse)
Two hours prior to the Final Eclipse
It was early in the evening when they reappeared in the home of Doctor Archibald Hopper. The therapist sat on his sofa with Pongo at his side sipping a cup of tea watching an old movie on television. Adora waved her hand over them and they drifted off to sleep. She then reached into Archie’s chest and removed his heart, casting its memories onto the mirror above the fireplace.

“Now do you find him worthy?” she demanded of her companion.

He nodded. “It’s still too long for her to wait. Seven years!”

“It will be worth it Loki,” she promised him as they vanished.

Storybrooke, Maine
Two hours prior to the Finale Eclipse

"Papa!” Bae cried out, running to his father's side and pulling him into his arms. "Don't leave me again...please! You said you wouldn't break another deal with me, remember? You promised me! Don't break our deal again!” he screamed as he shook his father frantically.

"Rumple," Belle sobbed as she fell to her knees beside him and kissed his cold lips. "I love you...come back to me...please come back to me," she begged. "You told me there was only one future you were interested in...the one with us together...and I don't want a future without you..."

Now, Henry! the boy heard a frantic voice calling in his head. If the rest of his heart is not returned to his body to restore the piece inside him back to what it was before the Dark One Curse, he will die!

In their grief they hadn't noticed Henry coming forward and moving them aside, the remaining portion of his grandfather's heart in his hands.

"What are you doing?" his father cried.

"His heart. He only destroyed the piece that held the Dark One's power. We have to put the rest of it back in to restore it back to what it was before the Dark One Curse now or he'll die!" The boy pushed the heart back into Rumple's chest, covering the spot with his hand then reaching for his father's hand, placing it on top of his, joined by Belle's, Az's and Archie's.

"He's not breathing!" Belle sobbed.

"We need DG," Az whispered.

"Summon her, Dellia! Quickly!" Archie cried.

"The North Guardian summons thee
Dorothia Ozopov appear now before me!" Az called out.

A puff of blue smoke appeared beside Rumple's still form and a dazed DG materialized. "Az, are you...oh he’s done it! He’s neutralized the first blade!"

"Quickly DG...join us and FOCUS!" her sister ordered.

"Please, please don't let him die!" Belle wailed. "I'll do anything. I'd give my life if I had to!"

"Az...what if we gave him part of our life force like Mother did with me?" DG suggested.
"It might be our only chance Dellia. We could've saved our daughter had we known we could do it. We don't have much time before his soul crosses over and his powers pass to Wyatt." Archie reminded her.

"Hold on Rumple. Hold on," Az whispered and looked up at the others. "Do you know what we're asking you to do?"

"Take it! Take as much as you need but save my father!" Bae begged.

"Take mine too!" Belle added.

"And mine!" put in Henry.

"Mine too," Regina murmured, kneeling beside the man that had been a second father to her. "You're not dying today Rumple."

Wyatt, please….we need you. Complete the circle, DG sent.

Oz (The Outer Zone)

"Part of myself I give
Now by my will let him live!" Wyatt chanted and opened his mouth, blowing on the seeing globe he was using to view the events in Storybrooke.

Storybrooke

Az held out her hand and conjured a small orb. She waved her other hand over it and Bae, Belle, Henry, Regina, Archie and DG's mouths opened, emitting a white mist that floated over to the orb and was absorbed into it. She lowered her head and breathed onto the orb until it glowed with bright white light. She placed the orb on Rumple's chest.

"Part of ourselves we give
Now by our will let him live!" she chanted, the others following suit.

Rumple's eyes fluttered open.

"Papa!"

"Rumple!"

"Grandpa!"

"Bae...Belle...Henry," he murmured, raising his hand and wrapping it around their joined ones.

"Oh God, Papa you had us so scared. We thought we lost you!" Bae sobbed.

"I'm not allowed to die by any other hands but Regina's. She said so," he quipped.

"And I meant it too, you imp! You think you were gonna get off that easily? I think not!" Regina scolded, giving him an Evil Queen glare.

"You're back to your old self I see," he muttered. "Bae...could you help me up, please?"

"Making jokes when you nearly ripped my heart out Rumple! I could just...just.." Belle ranted.
"Just what, dearie?" he inquired.

She choked back a sob and cupped his face in her hands, crushing his mouth with hers. He wrapped his arms around her and pulled her down to him. Regina quickly covered her son's eyes.

"Mom, they're just kissing!" he protested.

"While lying on the street in broad daylight. Get a room!" she cried.

Suddenly a white mist appeared on the street revealing Hope wearing regular clothes now instead of the silvery gown. She approached the embracing couple, a small smile on her lips.

"Welcome back Rumplestiltskin," she said softly. The couple broke their kiss and turned their heads in her direction.

"Rumple...who is she?" Belle asked softly.

"Hope," he murmured. "How did you escape the box?"

"I was never a prisoner there. I merely appeared because your heart called to me. And now that you have destroyed the Dark One's essence, you have been given a second chance to be the man you always wanted to be and you will retain your magic, in a limited form. Be aware, using it will extract a price from you physically and you can only be healed through the strength of those who are bound to you by love and blood so wield it with caution."

"I will," he vowed while his son lifted him to his feet. He grimaced as the familiar pain shot through his leg. He waved his hand and his cane appeared in it. He gripped it with one hand while he drew Belle back to his side with the other. They walked over to where the dagger lay. It vanished.

"Please tell me that's a good sign!" Bae begged.

"Alemedia Diosa has returned to Ephesis, or at least part of her has," Hope said. "And now Rumplestiltskin, it is time for you to reclaim your birthright as it is your grandson's time to claim his."

The angel gestured and the box containing the Strogoff Emerald appeared in her hands. The lid opened and the square shaped pendant floated out of it. He reached out and took the emerald pendant in his hands, power surging through it that brought him to his knees.

"Now you are once again Rumplestiltskin Strogoff, Guardian of the West Gate, bearer of the blade and the keeper of fire." She pointed to the ground where a sword lay in place of the dagger, the symbol of a spinning wheel in flames engraved into the steel. He kneeled down to pick it up and once he did his clothing changed into black silk robes with the image of a spinning wheel in flames on the back.

Azkadellia stepped in front of him, changing her own clothing into green silk robes, her symbol engraved on the back. "I am the North Guardian, bearer of the emerald of the land."

The moment Henry's hands touched the staff he could feel his own powers stirring. His clothing changed into grey silk robes with the image of funnel cloud on the back and he started to speak in a more mature voice. "I am the East Guardian, bearer of the staff and I shall summon the winds of change and travel."

DG's clothes transformed into blue silk robes with the image of a chalice on the back. "I am the
"South Guardian, bearer of the chalice of the waters of rebirth." she proclaimed.

"Will we meet again?" Rumple asked Hope.

"Perhaps...but in a different form and only if you continue on the path you're now on," she said cryptically.

"Do you ever give a straight answer?" he asked impatiently. "It would save us all a lot of trouble, now wouldn't it?"

"You can't always get what you want," she sang.

"Ummm...am I hearing things or did she just start singing a Rolling Stones song?" Bae asked Emma. The angel ignored him while Rumple gave her his worst Dark One stare. She gave one back.

"She did. What's up with that anyway?" Emma asked her.

"Well, are you going to answer me, Hope?" Rumple pressured.

"I've given you enough clues that will eventually lead you to the answer. Follow the path you're on and you'll have the answer in time," she replied. "I must be going now."

Instead of disappearing into a mist, the angel started walking down the street.

Meanwhile back in the town square, the residents of the town were still attempting to process everything they'd seen. The Dark One had been willing to give his own life to save them all. They weren't sure whether they should be pleased with this turn of events or worried that sooner or later the other shoe was going to drop and all hell would break loose again.

"Rumple, do you know what Hope meant when she said she'd see you again?" Belle asked him.

"No."

"Then answer us this, Papa: Why'd she sing a Rolling Stones song? Some kind of inside joke?" bae asked.

Rumple snorted. "I have no idea. She's a strange one."

Suddenly his cellphone started ringing and his son burst into laughter as he heard the chorus of the Rolling Stones "Sympathy For The Devil" as his father's ringtone. Rumple pulled it out of his pocket and looked at the display but there was no number listed.

"Oh, very funny!" he shouted at the spirit who was no longer in sight. "There's your answer Bae. She's mocking my music taste although how she would know about it is beyond me!"

"What's to mock about the Stones?"

"I'm not surprised you have 'Sympathy For The Devil' as your ringtone. It suits you," Regina said sarcastically.

"Yours should be Evil Woman," he retorted.

"Everything's back to normal around here all right," Emma grumbled. Hope turned a corner and once she realized no one was looking, she took her true form, or at least what it would be years from now. Her blond hair was now brown and her eyes the same blue shade
as her mother's. She waved her wrist in an elegant manner as her father and a small Ipod appeared in her hand. She inserted the earbuds into her ears and scrolled through the playlist until she found his favorite song, singing along.

"Pleased to meet you
Hope you guess my name
But what's puzzling you is the nature of my game..."

As she sang the final line, she vanished as quickly as she appeared.

"It is over isn't it?" Bae asked his father.

“Oh my God what’s happening? It was daytime, now it’s night!” Emma exclaimed.

Seven pairs of eyes gazed up at the now night sky, their hearts pounding with dread.

“When the crimson moon darkens the skies
That is the time when our world dies…” Rumple recited.

The Final Eclipse had begun.
When the crimson moon appears in the skies
That is the time when our world dies

Aramon’s Prophecy

Author’s Notes: As with chapters past, this one also references The Gold Standard series by GoldsJRZGirl and our crossover work How The Queen Stole Christmas

Elba
Oz (The Outer Zone)
Two hours prior to the Final Eclipse

His sacrifice bought them some time, but Wyatt feared deep in his heart that it hadn’t been enough. The first blade would be neutralized yet it would only make a slight shift in the Balance. Midnight was approaching and he had to remain in control of his body long enough to stop Katia Zero from destroying the stone Lurline had tethered her life force to. The moment the goddess took her last breath, the destruction would begin and at the stroke of midnight the following day Nonestica would be nothing more than a distant memory for those fortunate enough to survive it.

When DG and the others escaped through one of the few remaining portals Wyatt sought refuge at his cabin in Elba, keeping watch over them through his seeing globe when he wasn’t trying to hunt down Katia and the other Sons and Daughters of Shadowlands.

Having so much of his soul under the control of the Dark One had its advantages and disadvantages. It gave him full knowledge of Alemedia’s plans to destroy Nonestica in hopes that she would at last be able to escape the prison she’d been placed in by her father centuries ago and walk the mortal realm in her own right, but he had his doubts she would succeed. Hades was subdued yet he was no fool. And Wyatt, as long as his soul remained trapped in her darkness, was preventing the circle of Guardians from being completed.

Temple of Shadows
Two hours prior to the Final Eclipse

“The time has come my brothers and sisters for us to do as our mistress commands and DESTROY Lurline and all her followers!” Katia shouted from her pulpit. “Do her proud and we will take our place in her glorious kingdom…fail and we will perish. Now go!”

She watched them leave, a small smile on her lips. The years of waiting she’d been forced to do would at last be worth it once she took her rightful place as Queen of the new OZ, a new OZ that embraced the darkness rather than subdue it. She summoned the pickaxe she’d taken from the abandoned mines in the Enchanted Forest and teleported herself to the site of Lurline’s original
temple. The heart of the goddess remained in safe keeping behind those walls but not for much longer.

Temple of Lurline
One hour and thirty minutes prior to the Final Eclipse

Wyatt sat on the floor of the High Priestess’s chambers cradling the bruised and bloodied corpse of the woman who had been a second mother to him from the day he met her. Alana Kantrine, High Priestess of the Temple of Lurline had always been fiercely loyal to her goddess, defending her until her last breath.

“I’m sorry, I’m sorry I was too late,” he sobbed.

“You must hurry Wyatt,” he heard Adora advise when she appeared beside him. “There is not much time left. If Katia gets to the emerald…”

“I know,” he croaked. “But she was your GRANDMOTHER, Adora! She gave her life for your sister!” He glanced over to where Callux and Medira Benu lay. “As did they.”

Adora conjured a globe and waved her hand over it. Alana, Callux and Medira’s bodies vanished in a puff of blue smoke and floated over to it.

“The others….Adora, they killed them all.”

“I know,” she sobbed. “I must take them to their place of rest.”

“If it’s still there,” he added bitterly. She glared at him.

“You are all that stands between this world’s destruction and its salvation. Now do what must be done!”

Grey Gale
Twenty minutes prior to The Final Eclipse

Lavinia and Ahamo dismounted their horses, two glowing green doors appearing before them. Lavinia held up her hand, the circular marking on her palm glowing as the double doors opened. Ahamo took his wife’s hand and followed her inside, recalling his last visit with DG.

She placed the stone on the pedestal, clenched her arm into a fist, pressed it against her shoulder and knelt as a final sign of respect to the eldest of their clan.

“…Rumplestiltskin, now that your memories of your Ozian heritage have returned you should be aware that there is a second prophecy regarding the Eclipse and I have begun to see signs that this prophecy may come to pass.”

"Now that you have the Strogoff Emerald in your possession it now will only harness the last of the Ozian magic you carry inside you as well as the magic you have inherited from your ancestors from that land leaving our emerald the only one that still holds the magic and life force of our common ancestor Lurline, the bringer of magic to Oz, Wonderland and the Enchanted Forest. Our emerald is hidden inside the vault of my ancestor Dorothy Gale. Word has reached me that there will be an attempt to locate it and destroy it."
"My life force is fading quickly but I will use all the strength I have left to protect the emerald. If I fail the realms will fall. In my carelessness I have destroyed any chance my own people have of survival from the destruction that will come. If you can locate portals to Wonderland and the Enchanted Forest the combined magic of your magic along with that of my daughters can force your emerald to hold it open long enough to allow people to escape before all the realms are destroyed. I wish you luck, dear cousin...and I thank you with all of my heart for I know you will come to love my daughters as your own, especially my Azkadellia. Her own journey to return to the light after being lost for so long in darkness has been a painful and there is no one else who can bring her more comfort and give her hope more than you and her dear Archie.”

She took a deep breath.

“My Azkadellia, had I known the dangers you faced so long ago in that cave I never would have allowed you to become their prisoner. I was such a fool. I should have tried harder to free you. Instead I sent you away, but it was also the will of the OZ that I do so for you and Archie to grow to love each other as the bondmates you were chosen to be. I leave your heart in safe hands now my Azkadellia. I love you. I know I do not need to ask you to continue to protect and love my daughter, Archie. You have already proven that you will do so no matter how great the dangers you face in your lives. Give my angel the loving family she never had.”

“My DG, sending you to the Other Side with no memories of us was the second most difficult choice I had to make as mother, but you too have come far in your journey against the darkness. You have fought the darkness before and defeated it. Now you must do so again, but this battle will not be as easy for the darkness you face is the darkness that has been rooted in you from your first life to this one. You now know that love is the strongest light against it. Use it my angel. Use the love your father and I have for you, your sister has for you and banish the darkness back to its origins! Reclaim the love you lost in your first life and live it, my angel!”

She glanced over at Ahamo, “Darling, there are some things I must say in private.”

He nodded and left the room.

The moment he was gone Lavinia activated the spell again.

“My darling daughters, among my many sins as a mother, queen and wife, I fear my greatest was withholding certain truths from you. Now those truths must be spoken.”

She paused.

“The fault for Bastinda’s release is neither yours nor Azkadellia’s my DG. It is mine. It is mine because I was not at a council meeting as I claimed to be. I was with a man, a man you know well and that man, that man my DG is your real father.”

Tears streamed down her cheeks. “I do love your father, my Azkadellia but I also loved this man too and it was difficult for us to end our affair once Archie learned of and confronted us with it. I know concealing this truth was difficult for you Archie, but you did so not only to protect Azkadellia but DG as well and I thank you for that.”

“Forgive me, Ambrose. We made a vow many years ago that we would take this secret to our graves, but I must now break this vow. Too many secrets have been kept already and this is what is giving the darkness its power over our child. She must use it now to return her soul to the light.”

“DG, even if Ahamo knew the truth know that he still loved you as if you were his own and you must NEVER forget that. A spell of mine may have given you his artistic gift but not his love. That you earned. Continue to carry it with you my angel.”
“I love you my angels.”

The double doors opened again and Ahamo returned, also in tears.

“You heard?” she whispered.

“I knew,” he said sadly. “I wasn’t a fool, Vinny. I just had a hard time accepting it.”

“And you still love me?”

“I wasn’t faithful all those years in the Realm of the Unwanted either,” he confessed. “I think part of it was because I was so angry at you over Ambrose, but the other part was my fear we’d never see each other again. I don’t want the last hours of our lives spent regretting our mistakes.” He pulled a gun out his pocket. “We’re going to spend them fighting for this realm.”

She handed him the stone. He tucked it into his pocket and followed her down the hall to their daughter’s original burial vault. The first Dorothy’s spirit no longer resided there now leaving Lavinia the only member of her bloodline left to guard the precious stone within its walls. She pressed her palm against the marking on the door to the second vault and it opened. Inside was a simple marble pedestal and on it a box. Lavinia opened it and took out an emerald shaped heart. The Heart of Lurline.

“Your kin begs of thee
Share thy power with me!” she chanted.

The heart shaped stone began to glow as did she as part of its power was absorbed into her body.

“Vinny, what are doing?”

“What I have to,” she replied. “Wyatt has most of the Dark One’s essence tethered to him. I cannot allow it to escape…but by doing so…” She paused. “I condemn those who stayed behind to death.”

“What are you doing?”

A small portal appeared on the wall.

“Give me the stone,” she ordered. Ahamo reached into his pocket and handed her the stone. She tossed it through the portal and quickly closed it. She then returned the stone to its box and they exited the crypt.

“Now nothing can enter the OZ…nor can it leave.”

“That’s what you think. Hello Lavinia,” Katia greeted as she sauntered into the crypt flanked by two of her disciples, a pickaxe in her hand.

"You don't understand....if you destroy the Heart....you'll die....we'll all die!" she cried.

"No more of your lies, bitch. Open the vault or your husband dies.”

"Don't do it, Vinny!" Ahamo shouted.

"Darling..."
"You're the Queen of the OZ. Your responsibility is the safety of your people!" he reminded her.

"She's the queen of nothing now," another added coldly and fired his gun. Ahamo sunk to the marble floor with a bullet hole in his chest. Lavinia moaned in anguish and tried to get to her fallen husband's side and was pulled back. "Now you open the crypt!"

"No!" she said firmly. "Kill me if you wish but you will never enter that vault! Katia....please....think about this."

"I already have," she said angrily. "You have brought enough misery to this land and it ends now. Hold her!" She uncorked the vial of Lavinia's blood she'd taken earlier and threw it on the Ozopov family symbol lock on Dorothy Gale's tomb while her disciples held Lavinia. The circular markings began to glow, and the double doors swung open while the queen looked on in horror. The magical lock had recognized the blood of one of its own and would allow the intruders entrance. The queen, without her magic now could do very little to prevent it yet she would try. Remembering the fighting skills she'd learned from Ambrose, she brought her foot down hard on the toes of one of her captors, forcing him to release her and spun around, kicking the other in his groin. Their guns fell to the floor. She picked one of them up and fired, killing both men. Lavinia Ozopov was not a violent woman by nature, but she would shed as much blood as she had to in order to save her realm and the people still in it.

She managed to shoot two of her captors dead and followed Katia into the tomb where the Heart was kept.

“KATIA NO!” she screamed. Katia stood over the emerald, the pickaxe poised and ready to strike.

“Are you going to kill me now, sister?” Katia inquired smugly.

“I will do what I must. To save the OZ,” Lavinia said coldly, her finger poised on the trigger. She gasped when she felt a hand being plunged into her back, her eyes wide with horror when she heard Wyatt’s laughter in her ear.

“Brave to the last,” Alemedia taunted, squeezing the fragile organ, forcing her captive to face her. “Too bad it’s all for nothing.”

“Wyatt, please.....fight her!” she sobbed. “Do it...do it for DG...for the OZ!”

“Dorothy,” he snorted. “I’ve been waiting centuries for the moment when I can make that bitch watch while I crush her cold heart to dust for what she did to me...to EVERYONE who has ever loved her. That girl has rivers of blood on her hands. And now...now she’ll have your blood too. Destroy it!” he commanded Katia.

“Katia,” Lavinia sobbed. “Whatever she’s promised you, it’s a lie. You’re going to destroy us all if you destroy that emerald. Please, do the right thing now!”

“Are you honestly going to listen to that nonsense, Ekaterina? Have you forgotten that she is the reason why you spent all those years in exile and that you’d still be a poor exile without me? I gave you everything you have and now it’s time for you to prove your loyalty to me. Destroy that stone. NOW!”

No! Wyatt screamed, fighting to regain control.

Lavinia’s heart was shoved back into her chest. Wyatt pulled his gun out of his pocket and fired a single shot. It struck Katia in the chest. She fell over the pedestal and knocked the stone to the ground. Lavinia picked it up and carried it back over to the pedestal and then to Wyatt’s horror she
picked up the pickaxe and brought it down. The stone split into two pieces and a bloodcurdling scream echoed through the walls, out across the realms until it was suddenly silenced.

“Lavinia, what have you done!” Wyatt cried.

“Your will is done, Mistress.” Katia in Lavinia’s body said as she knelt at the feet of her mistress’s vessel.

Wyatt howled with rage and fired again, this time killing his intended target, but it was already too late. Cracks began to form on the floor in front of him. He screamed as he fell into one of them.

Storybrooke, Maine
12:00 AM

“Wyatt!” DG screamed. “I have to get him! I have to.”

Henry summoned his dragon’s head staff and slammed the tip of it into the concrete. Nothing happened.

“Something’s wrong! I can’t open a portal to the OZ!”

“Keep trying!” she pleaded.

“I AM!” he yelled. “Grampa, what am I doing wrong?”

Rumple placed his hand over his grandson’s.

“Chant with me Henry,” he instructed and began to chant in Ozian. “It’s sealed off! It’s sealed off!”


“Everyone in here. NOW!” Rumple commanded. Regina, Emma, DG, Archie and Az gathered around them, placing their hands on Rumple and Henry’s chanting in Ozian. A small portal opened on the street. It remained open long enough for an object to fly out of it and closed again.

“Our stone!” Az whispered.

“It has to be a message from Mother or Wyatt. Az, activate it!” DG demanded. She created a large puddle in the middle of the street. Az skipped the stone across the puddle and Lavinia’s image appeared in the water.

“…Rumplestiltskin, now that your memories of your Ozian heritage have returned you should be aware that there is a second prophecy regarding the Eclipse and I have begun to see signs that this prophecy may come to pass.”

“It’s already here!” Emma muttered, earning glares from everyone.

"Now that you have the Strogoff Emerald in your possession it now will only harness the last of the Ozian magic you carry inside you as well as the magic you have inherited from your ancestors from that land leaving our emerald the only one that still holds the magic and life force of our common ancestor Lurline, the bringer of magic to Oz, Wonderland and the Enchanted Forest. Our emerald is hidden inside the vault of my ancestor Dorothy Gale. Word has reached me that there will be an attempt to locate it and destroy it."
“Katia,” DG hissed. “It can only be destroyed by someone with a blood connection to Lurline and she’s the only one who would do it!”

“How?” Rumple demanded. “Think, Dorothia! You have more access to Alemedia’s memories than I do. How does she plan to destroy it?”

“She needs something strong enough to break a gem.”

“A dwarf’s pickaxe!” Regina whispered. “The same way Greg and Tamara activated my trigger! But where can she get one?”

“The Enchanted Forest,” Snow replied. “You brought all of them over except for one….the one that belonged to their brother…the one who died.”

“But I don’t understand….did the Eclipse start already or is it going to?” Bae inquired.

“We have to assume that it already has, son.”

“So why are we just standing here! We have to DO something!” Belle cried.

"My life force is fading quickly but I will use all the strength I have left to protect the emerald. If I fail the realms will fall. In my carelessness I have destroyed any chance my own people have of survival from the destruction that will come. If you can locate portals to Wonderland and the Enchanted Forest the combined magic of your magic along with that of my daughters can force your emerald to hold it open long enough to allow people to escape before all the realms are destroyed. I wish you luck, dear cousin...and I thank you with all of my heart for I know you will come to love my daughters as your own, especially my Azkadellia. Her own journey to return to the light after being lost for so long in darkness has been a painful and there is no one else who can bring her more comfort and give her hope more than you and her dear Archie.”

“Form the circle!” Rumple shouted, summoning the Strogoff Emerald from its box at the shop. “It may be too late for the OZ but the other realms are still in danger. We have to get everyone we can out of there before midnight!”

“Bring them all...here? Is that possible?” Regina wondered.

“We’re going to MAKE it possible!”

“Wyatt,” DG sobbed.

“Don’t let his death be in vain DG. Focus,” Az commanded softly. “We need you to make this work.”

Loki’s Palace
Asgard
12:30AM

Loki rarely had nightmares but when he did, they were bad ones that left him wondering if they were even dreams at all and this one was scaring the living daylights out of him. He’d seen the movie The Wizard of Oz but his dream was more like the Armageddon of Oz. He could hear the screams of the people as the they tried to run while a massive tsunami swept through Central City, destroying buildings and burying the city in thousands of feet of water, leaving no chance of escape. Just when he thought it was over, he watched a volcano exploding with burning hot lava pouring down the hillside directly into the path of a small town. Once again, he could only observe in silence as people attempted to flee from the burning river only to be swept up in it, screaming in
agony as they burned alive. His own screams of terror and violent thrashing woke his wife out of her own slumber and she shook him awake.

“Loki, Loki! What’s wrong?”

“Nonestica is dying,” he replied somberly. She threw her arms around him and held him close as he wept into her shoulder, his tears joining those of the gods in every pantheon, all of them unable to do anything but watch…and hear the screams of the dead and dying.

Boston, Massachusetts
12:30AM

Lilly was uncertain whether she was hallucinating but nothing she did could silence the screams or cease the terrifying images passing before her eyes.

“Stop, stop…please stop!” she moaned, her hands clutching her head. “Please…..please my son….save them….save them!”

“Mum! Mum! Open the door,” she heard Cassie yelling from the other side followed by a crash as someone threw their weight against it. “Victor, break it down!”

“I’m trying! Hold on Lilly! We’re coming!”

“Hurry!” Cassie pleaded.

The door swung open and Cassie and Victor ran into the bedroom finding Lilly thrashing about on the bed, babbling incoherently.

“She’s burning up! Cassie, we have to get to the hospital right now! There’s no time to wait for an ambulance. Go start the car!”

She ran out of the room and grabbed his keys off the table.

“Only my son….can save them now…” Lilly muttered.

“What’s wrong with her?” Cassie demanded as Victor placed her in the backseat.

“She’s delirious. We have to get her fever down. Floor it!” he ordered.

“Hold on, Mum. Hold on!” Cassie chanted as she sped away.

Wonderland (Enchanted Realm Five)
Gold Standard Verse
1:00 AM

The Queen of Hearts poured herself a glass of sherry and raised it to the image she was viewing on the mirror in her throne room.


“What are you celebrating Mother?” her eldest daughter inquired when she walked into the throne room. Cora glared at her.

“Where is our guest?”

“Where I left him. His prison. Relax, Mother. He’ll never be able to get out.”
“He’d better not Zelena. He’s too dangerous on the outside.”

“You never answered my question. What are we celebrating?”

“Take a good look daughter.”

Zelena gasped. “Is that….Nonestica? Your old world?”

Cora smirked and took a sip of her sherry. “It is, indeed, dear. Were I still Zorinda Strogoff, the First of all Dark Ones, I would’ve had the honor of destroying it, but I will enjoy seeing it disappear into oblivion!”

And bide her time until the time the worlds collided, and she could make her second dark mark on history.

Baltimore, Maryland 2:00 AM

Isaac Wallace was accustomed to hearing his phone ring at all hours of the night. He sat up in bed and turned on the lamp before answering it.

“Wallace.”

“Isaac? It’s Tony. Our scanners picked up something you need to see. Turn on your computer!” he heard his friend order on the other end of the line. He got out of bed and walked over to his desk, moving his mouse to wake his computer out of sleep mode. He blinked his eyes several times to make certain his contact lens-less eyes were not playing tricks on him.

“Mass destruction activity in Nonestica?”

“Oz is already gone! It’s starting in Agrabah now. A whole realm wiped out in thirty minutes! This can’t be the work of the Home Office! What the hell’s going on Jiminy?”

“It’s not Geppetto,” Isaac said, referring to his friend by his original name, something he only did in private as Geppetto often did.

“Then what’s going on! Why is Nonestica being wiped out?”

“Because it was prophesized to be five hundred years ago.”

“I thought that was…”

“…Only a legend. No. It’s not. The scanners picking up anything else?”

“Yeah. Portal activity. A lot of it!”

“Where?”

He heard several mouse clicks.

“Most of it in Nonestica but the rest is all over the map here.”

“I’m pulling it up now.”

“What’s going on?”
“People are trying to get out of Nonestica before it’s destroyed. What the hell are they doing in Storybrooke One? Sitting on their asses? They need to open a portal there now because Nonestica’s weak magic is scattering the survivors to the four winds! You and Pinocchio keep an eye on it. I gotta call Seattle. One of the largest portal drops was there. You see any spikes here you get out there and pick ‘em up!”

“Okay Jiminy. Will call you later.”

Isaac went into the kitchen to brew himself a pot of coffee. It was going to be a long night.

FBI Field Office
Seattle, Washington
3:00 AM

Special Agent Baelfire Weaver added another set of crime scene photographs to the already thick folder full of shots displaying the work of what the press had started to call ‘The Cosplay Killer’ but he knew the killer’s victims weren’t just people dressing up as fairy tale characters. They WERE fairy tale characters from a land that had long since been destroyed by the terrorist group known as the ‘Home Office’, a group his family spent decades trying to bring to justice.

“We’re gonna get ‘em,” he heard his wife Emma say when she handed him a cup of coffee.

“I hope so,” he muttered and took a sip. Seconds later his phone rang. “Weaver. Wait…hold on. Em’s here so I’m gonna put you on speaker.”

“Bae, there’s portal activity all around Seattle,” he heard Isaac say on the other line.

“Why?” Emma asked.

“Nonestica is being wiped out as we speak.”

Emma reached out and grabbed Bae’s cup to hold it steady before he dropped it.

“Is it them? Are they destroying Nonestica like they did our world?” the former princess demanded angrily.

“No. This isn’t the Home Office. This time. That prophecy you’ve all heard about? This is it. Nonestica is being wiped out and the survivors are being scattered across the country because its magic is too weak to direct the portals to Storybrooke One. You need to intercept the ones headed your way before those bastards find them.”

“I’m gonna call Mom and Dad. They’ll wanna help,” Emma said and took out her phone.

“We’re on it. I’m gonna get off here and call Papa to get him up to speed. You have any idea where exactly those portals are opening.”

“Sending you the coordinates now.”

“Mom and Dad are on their way over,” Emma informed him. Bae nodded while he dialed his father’s cellphone number.

Hyperion Heights Police Station
“Weaver! Your phone’s ringin!” Officer Killian Rogers yelled to his partner while he pounded on the door to the men’s restroom.

“So answer it, dumbass!” Bobby Weaver yelled from the other side of the door.

“Rogers.”

“Where’s Rumple?” Isaac demanded.

“In the john.”

“So, tell him to zip up and get his ass down to Seattle. Nonestica is being wiped out and there’s portals opening up there. You need to get the survivors off the streets before the Home Office finds them!”

“Holy shit….Weaver! Hurry up! We got portal activity!” Rogers yelled. The door opened and an irritated Weaver emerged.

“What do you mean, ‘portal activity’? Gimme the phone!” Weaver snatched the phone out of his partner’s hand. “Yeah.”

“The prophecy has been enacted.”

A former Dark One himself, Weaver needed no explanation.

“The weakened magic is messing with the portals people are trying to use to escape. How many of them opened up here?”

“Ten so far. I’ve already called your son.”

“I gotta call the girls. They’ll wanna help us grab ‘em up before the Home Office does. I’m sure they’re watchin.”

“They’re opening up in different places all over the States Rumple. We need the Guardians to redirect them to Storybrooke One.”

“Well what the hell are they waitin for?”

“I don’t know. Do what you can. I’m calling everyone in on this.”

“Okay. We’ll call you back when we finish roundin’ em up.”

Kelly and Roni’s
Hyperion Heights, Washington
3:45 AM

Roni Weaver Hood grabbed her baseball bat from underneath the bar counter while her husband turned off the lights and locked the doors. It was the first time they’d ever closed the bar early but desperate times called for desperate measures and their patrons would be back the following night. Once they were outside her sister Kelly pulled up in a Jeep and rolled down the window.

“Papa said there’s an open portal a few miles away. We gotta hurry!” she cried. The pair jumped into the Jeep and they sped off.
“Where’s Robin?” Robin demanded of his ex-wife.

“At Papa’s with Belle, Alice and Gideon,” Kelly explained and turned on her CB radio, hearing her father’s voice.

“Make a right at the next light, Kelly.”

“I can see it! It’s still open! There’s at least fifty people there!”

“We got buses coming. You armed?”

“Papa, what am I again?”

“Over and out, Captain Weaver dearie,” he chuckled.

“Regina, get my duffel bag out of the backseat and load,” Kelly ordered, using the name her sister hadn’t used in decades.

“Jesus, Kelly! You brought enough guns for an army.”

“That was the idea. Come on. We have to get these people to the hotel so the fairies can take care of them. They’re the only ones left from our world that have magic.”

“All but one,” Roni murmured.

“She’d still help if she could.”

Portland, Maine
4:00 AM

“…Pinocchio should be pulling up in a few minutes.” Isaac was saying over a speakerphone while a woman was tossing clothes into a suitcase.

“You’re sure no portals opened here?” Tracey Connor was asking once she finished packing.

“We haven’t seen any. Most are on the West Coast, primarily Washington. Hold on Blue…I just got a message from Weaver. They’ve taken the survivors they’re rounded up to Nova’s hotel.” Tracey heard a car horn beep outside. “That’s Pinocchio now. We’ll see you at the airport.” She picked up her suitcase and went outside to where Pinocchio waited.

“These are the days when you really wish you had magic, eh Blue?”

“It is but there’s no time to dwell on it now. I’ll do what I can without magic. Come on. Jiminy’s waiting.”

Seattle, Washington
4:15 AM

“Once that you’ve decided on a killing
First you make a stone of your heart
And if you find that your hands are still willing
Then you can turn a murder into art
There really isn’t any need for bloodshed
You just do it with a little more finesse
If you can slip a tablet into someone’s coffee
Then it avoids an awful lot of mess
It's murder by numbers, one, two, three
It's as easy to learn as your ABC's...." Silas Finster sang while his victim whimpered from behind the duct tape covering his mouth. He picked up the crowbar and swung it like a baseball bat, his victim pitching forward.

"Now if you have a taste for this experience
If you're flushed with your very first success
Then you must try a twosome or a threesome
You'll find your conscience bothers you much less

Because murder is like anything you take to
It's a habit-forming need for more and more
You can bump off every member of your family
And anybody else you find a bore
Because it's murder by numbers, one, two, three
It's as easy to learn as your ABC's...." he continued to sing while he threw the body into his van. He returned to his lawn chair, grinning when a portal opened and three terrified women stepped out.

"Hello ladies," he greeted warmly.

"Where are we?" one of them asked.

"A land without magic," he replied. "Come, sit down and have some coffee. You must be exhausted after your long journey."

"Now you can join the ranks of the illustrious
In history's great dark hall of fame
All our greatest killers were industrious
At least the ones that we all know by name...." he whistled while he dumped a bottle of sleeping pills in the thermos of coffee he brought with him and brought it back to where the women were sitting. Ten minutes later they were asleep.

"But you can reach the top of your profession
If you become the leader of the land
For murder is the sport of the elected
And you don't need to lift a finger of your hand
Because it's murder by numbers, one, two, three
It's as easy to learn as your ABC's...." he sang as he pulled a machete out of his duffel bag.

Wonderland
6:00 AM

"We have to go, now!" Cyrus shouted.

"Go where?" Anastasia asked.

"Storybrooke," Will spoke up. "It's the place I told you about. It's where the Queen of Hearts' daughter sent everyone to with her curse. Dig, rabbit, for the love of the gods!" he cried.

The rabbit scratched into the air, opening a large portal. On the other side of it he could see the familiar town he dug into the middle of a short while ago. "Hurry. It won't stay open for long!" he pleaded. Cyrus grasped Alice's hand in his and jumped through, landing on a hard surface. When
he looked up, he saw a middle-aged man with graying brown hair standing over him, a pendant with a glowing emerald stone in his hands. There were two women and a boy with him.

"Where are you from?" he asked.

"Wonderland. Please, help us!" Cyrus pleaded. The man released the pendant and joined hands with the two women and boy, their hands glowing. The pendant hovered in the air before them.

"How many of you are there?" the man asked.

"I don't know...."

"We'll hold the portal open as long as we can, the rest of you come through quickly!" the man called out.

"Who is that?" Alice asked.

"Rumplestiltskin," Anastasia replied.

"The Dark One!? He'll kill us!" Will exclaimed.

"No, I think he's here to help," Silvermist said.

The rest of the survivors formed a line and began jumping two at a time into the portal and reemerging in the middle of a strange place, Anastasia and Will being the last two. Rumple released DG and Azkadellia's hands and the emerald returned to his hand.

"You're the last Strogoff?" Anastasia asked him.

Rumple nodded then focused his gaze on the white rabbit. "We need your help now. The Enchanted Forest is going to be destroyed as well. We need you to dig the portal and we can hold it open."

"Where do you need me to dig?" the rabbit asked. Rumple joined hands with Azkadellia, Henry and DG, and the emerald floated between them, harnessing their combined magic to widen the portal and hold it open. They were tiring but they knew they couldn’t falter. Too many lives depended on it.

"It’s working Grampa! Our magic is redirecting the other portals here!" Henry called out as portals began opening all over town.

"There’s one open to the Enchanted Forest!" Charming told them.

"Regina, hold that portal open!" Rumple instructed his former apprentice. "Archie, hold the one open to Agrabah, quickly! There are still people trapped and it only has a little time left before it’s completely destroyed!"

"Nova, I want your team to help Archie," Blue instructed the fae. "Regina, what are you doing!" she cried as Regina jumped into the portal open to the Enchanted Forest.

"Hold it open. Robin, Robin, hold on! I’m coming!" she cried.

"Dammit Regina," Emma growled and began to blast at the portal to hold it open.

10:30 AM
“Rumple! We’ve lost Agrabah!” Archie yelled.

“And Wonderland,” he said sadly, joining Emma and Blue at the open portal to the Enchanted Forest. It was the last last realm left.

The Enchanted Forest
10:30 AM

“Everyone start going through. Now!” Regina ordered. Although only a few of them had any idea what their final destination was, they were too terrified to argue with the former Evil Queen.

11:45 PM

“Regina, come out of there! We’re running out of time!”

“I have to make sure everyone is out!”

“Your magic won’t work there now! Come on!”

Suddenly she saw a man in a green leather tunic and breeches running toward her carrying a little boy in his arms.

“Regina!” he cried.


"We can’t hold this open much longer...." Rumple mumbled weakly as he, DG, Henry and Azkadellia struggled to stay on their feet while their energy was being drained. Archie quickly grabbed his wife’s hand.

“Bound heart and soul are we
I surrender my power to thee!” he chanted.

Belle grabbed Rumple’s hand.

“Bound heart and soul are we
I surrender my power to thee!” she chanted.

"We need everyone who has a drop of magic in them to hold this portal open....NOW!” Rumple commanded. Emma and Anastasia moved into the circle while the fairies flew over them, pointing their wands and sending their magic into it.

Regina grabbed Roland out of Robin’s hands and held him into the portal.

“Someone get him!” she cried.

Charming reached through and took the boy from her hands.

“Regina get out of there!” Snow pleaded.

"Hold on Regina! We’ll get you out of there!” Rumple called back over the howling wind.

Regina shoved Robin through the portal as cracks began to form on the ground in front of her.

"Grandpa, we gotta hurry, the ground’s getting ready to collapse under her!” Henry cried frantically.
Robin dived to the ground and stuck his hand inside the portal. "Regina, my hand...can you reach it!"

"You're too far away.....Robin....tell Roland and Henry I love them. "

"You can tell them yourself," he said sticking more of his body into the portal.

"Robin, no!" Regina screamed.

"Just a few feet more and I can reach you!"

Charming fell on the ground behind Robin's feet and grabbed his ankles. "Robin, I've got you...try to reach her."

"Not close enough..."

As he moved further into the portal he started dragging Charming in with him.

"We need to make a chain, quickly!" Snow shouted, falling to the ground behind her husband to grab his feet. She was followed by Ruby, Baelfire, Little John, Mulan, Phillip, Cyrus, Will, Eric, Raw, Ambrose and Jeb. Ariel rabbed a long length of rope from the back of Eric's truck and tied one end of it around the flagpole, the other end around Jeb's ankles to anchor them.

"Robin, can you reach her now?" Jeb called out.

"I've got you!" Robin cried grasping Regina's hands in his.

"Robin, please there isn't enough time. Save yourself!" Regina pleaded.

"I'm not letting you go!" he said firmly.

"And I'm not letting you die, Mom!" Henry yelled.

"Pull!" Charming shouted to the others lying on the ground. The dwarves joined Ariel at the end of the human chain and helped them pull the others back away from the portal. Inside it, the earth split under Regina's feet, her castle crumbling into a fiery lava pit as she hung in the air, her hands clasped tightly in Robin's. "Close the portal...we're out!" Robin shouted to the magicians in the circle.

They released each other's hands and fell to the ground in exhaustion. The emerald floated back to Rumple's hand. Belle kneeled beside her husband and helped him sit up while Ambrose assisted DG and Archie saw to Azkadellia. Henry ran over to where his mother lay entangled in Robin's embrace and hugged her while Will tended to Anastasia.

"Mom!"

"Henry...Henry..." she sobbed as she embraced him.

"We did it, Mom. We saved them."

She looked up at the newest residents, many of them crying and clinging to each other. She stood up, brushed the dirt off her clothing and smiled faintly before she too collapsed from exhaustion. It was now midnight. The Final Eclipse was over and for those who’d survived the effects would still be felt for years to come.
This Town Ain't Big Enough For All Of Us

Chapter by cjmoliere

Hyperion Heights
Washington
One day after the Final Eclipse

It had been a long day for the former residents of what was once known as Enchanted Forest Three, but the lack of sleep and constant consumption of energy supplements had been worth it knowing that hundreds of refugees from the now extinct Nonestica were safe and sound.

“Has anyone heard anything from Storybrooke One?” Belle Weaver asked her husband over lunch.

“I called Molk, one of my counterparts there. He said all the mages there are out cold from exhaustion and probably will be for a few days. They were able to get the portals redirected back to their town and barely got everyone they could out before Nonestica was completely destroyed,” Isaac replied before Bobby had a chance to. “No one left behind in Oz survived. That much we know for sure. Molk said someone on that side sealed it off. Only thing that got through was an enchanted stone with a message from the late Queen.”

“Our killer was busy last night too I’m afraid,” Bobby spoke up.

“How many did he get?” Bae demanded.

“Ten. He must’ve been staking out one of the portals. Crime scene corresponds to a set of portal coordinates Isaac gave us.”

“I want that bastard. I want him bad!” Bae snarled.

“And if he is one of our counterparts the people coming out would’ve trusted him,” added Emma.

“We all have to be on high alert. He’s not done.”

“I’m afraid the only way we’re gonna stop him is by killing him,” Rogers predicted.

“This is the worst Dark One that has ever existed. Many of us still had a conscience when we took the curse but this one, he or she has fully embraced the darkness.”

“So, the Dark One can be a woman?”

“The first one was. Her name was Zorinda Strogoff. She’s the aunt of the Rumple in Storybrooke One,” Bobby clarified. “And now there are two Dark Ones in Storybrooke One. They are Wyatt Cain and Dorothea Ozopov. Now that Nonestica has been destroyed they have to either contain Alemedia or kill her.”

“Kill a goddess? Is that possible?”

“Nonestica being destroyed proves you can. Lurline tethered her life force to it. Once she died, it died. Killing Alemedia is not so easy but Wyatt and Dorothea have one hell of a score to settle with her so they just might be able to do it,” Belle said. “I don’t envy them one bit. It’s gonna be a nasty battle.”
“True because we’ve never had two Dark Ones fight each other before and that is exactly what they have to. In the meantime, we need to get our refugees settled in.”

Boston, Massachusetts
That same day

Lilly awoke to find her daughter and Victor Whale sitting beside her bed.
“Mum, you scared us half to death!” Cassie cried.

“What happened?”

“You were running an unusually high fever Lilly and we had to put you on ice to cool you down,” Victor explained. “You were also ummm…hallucinating. Trouble is, we can’t find anything in your lab work that explains it.”

“Are you saying I was under some kind of spell?” she demanded.

“I don’t know. Or having a psychotic break.”

She frowned. “I know what a psychotic break is Victor and I was not having one!”

“Mum, you have been under a lot of stress. We all just woke up from a curse…”

“Cassandra Willhemina Bergmann, I was NOT having a psychotic break! It had to be some kind of spell though for the life of me I have NO idea why someone would’ve done that to me. I don’t live anywhere near Storybrooke!”

“I might ask Rumple about it and see what he says.”

“I’m fine, Victor.”

“But Mum….”

“I’m fine!” Lilly insisted firmly.

Cassie shook her head. Her mother was far from fine but damned if she could convince her of it!

Enchanted Forest Two
(Canon-verse)
One day after the Final Eclipse

There was a new resident in what once was the Evil Queen’s palace, her identity a closely guarded secret, but in Oz, her name and image struck terror in the hearts of all its citizens. They breathed a collective sigh of relief when she suddenly decided to leave her palace in the Emerald City. No one knew where she went, nor did they care. She was another realm’s problem now.

A mobat demon flew through the open window of the Queen’s chambers.

“Did you get what I need?”

Yes, Mistress.

“Show me.”

The demon held up a talon covered in blood.
“That’s her blood? The Queen’s?”

The demon nodded enthusiastically.

“Hmm, lovely.” She grabbed a vial off the dresser and held it out, allowing the precious substance to drip into it. “And now, now I shall get my revenge!” She replaced the stopper and shook the bottle.

You will, Mistress?

“Of course I will. The Queen may be evil but I’m wicked.” She turned to face her reflection. “And wicked always wins!”

“With a little help…of course!”

She gasped, nearly dropping her precious bundle.

“Well, that’s a new look for you! You were in a girl’s body the last time. The Dorothy from your world I believe.”

“And now I’m in this one,” Alemedia said as she lounged on a chaise in Wyatt’s body. “Hello again, Zelena. I see you’ve made yourself at home…in your sister’s home.”

“It should’ve been mine!” she snarled. “Instead our mother left me in a damned basket in the middle of nowhere and a twister took me to OZ while Regina got everything she ever wanted! I want to go back and change it. I need to change it.”

“All you need are the proper ingredients dear. But one of them is in Ephesis at the moment.”

“Rumplestiltskin is dead?”

“Oh, I am sorry. I know how much you cared for him,” Alemedia taunted and laughed.

Zelena snorted. “The stupidity of a lovesick girl!”

“You didn’t do so well with my father either, did you?”

She flinched. “No, no I didn’t. Why are you here other than to torment me?”

“The only way to get what you want is to resurrect one of my Dark Ones.”

“And how am I supposed to do that?”

Alemedia waved her hand and a strange looking key appeared in it. “With this. You get Rumplestiltskin’s son to touch that key and you can have your revenge.”

“And what price do I have to pay for this favor?”

She grinned. “Nothing but to continue to be as wicked as you are.”

“That won’t be difficult!” Zelena cackled.

Oh I know it won’t….Mother, Alemedia thought gleefully. Resurrecting her mother, the weak hearted Persephone Diosa into the worst version of herself had been the goddess’s ultimate revenge. As Zelena, Persephone would unleash chaos on the second realm she and her beloved Hades had created, shifting the Balance further into darkness. And if she succeeded in travelling through time, the possibilities would be endless.
“Do you think she will?” Silas demanded when she teleported out of the castle.

“I bound her memories but not her powers, Silas. She’ll succeed.”

“If they don’t kill her first.”

“They can’t.”

“Oh?”

“You’ve been a Dark One long enough to realize that only a god can kill another god.”

“But in the OZ…”

“Katia did not break the emerald. I did.”

“You took over Lavinia’s body long enough to do it and had Cain kill her.”

“She’d outlived her usefulness.”

“When is my brother going to get the dagger?”

“Before the last of your life force fades. You can amuse yourself with your killing in the meantime.”

“I find the hunt more thrilling than the kill. Nonestica’s demise has given me an endless supply of game to hunt,” Silas laughed and vanished.

Storybrooke, Maine
One day after the Final Eclipse

Although she was exhausted from her ordeal Regina knew that as mayor, it was her responsibility to see that the new arrivals in her town were taken care of. Emma volunteered to drive her, Robin and Roland back to her home on Mifflin Street after she awoke so that she could at least change her clothes, get something to eat and some rest though she herself was exhausted. She called the television station during the drive informing them to interrupt regular broadcasting in two hours so that she could speak directly to the citizens explaining the situation and ask for aid for the survivors of their land’s destruction. She also called Rumple to tell him that they would also need to call an emergency meeting of the Mage Council to discuss any magical ramifications of the day’s events on their town. He, Az and DG were also exhausted but they agreed to attend, and he asked Belle to start making the necessary calls on his behalf while he was still talking to Regina.

After Belle hung up the phone she sat down beside her bondmate her eyes filled with tears. "All those people in Oz...." she croaked. "Men...women...."

"I know," he said softly as he wrapped his arms around her. "Thank the gods Lavinia was able to warn us what was happening so we could at least get people from the Enchanted Forest, Agrabah and Wonderland out."

"It shouldn't have happened!" Belle cried. "She knew what destroying that emerald would do...she knew!"

"She died trying to stop it from being destroyed. A land built through magic cannot survive without it." He stood up and retrieved his overcoat from the rack. Once they stepped outside Bae got behind the wheel of the Caddy.
“Papa, you should be resting.”
“Later, Baelfire. There is work to be done.”

There was already a large crowd assembled at the town hall when they arrived. A large table was set up on the stage where the members of the mage council as they were now calling themselves would be sitting along with the officers of the Storybrooke Sheriff’s department. Regina pounded her gavel to call the meeting to order.

“As you all know, a terrible tragedy occurred last night. Our home, Nonestica, has been destroyed.” She sighed. “I brought you all here by my curse knowing that once you awakened some of you would long to return home but now, now that is no longer possible. We must now carry on with our lives in this world.”

“Yeah but this town ain’t big enough for all of us now!” Leroy protested.

“That is why we will be expanding the town’s borders and anyone who wishes to leave and start anew may do so. The town line barrier will no longer affect you. Many of us have lived in this land long enough that we can make the adjustment. Our new arrivals however, cannot. I am asking everyone to help me help them have a comfortable transition into live in this new land they find themselves in.”

David raised his hand.

“Deputy Molk?”

“Madam Mayor, not everyone who escaped Nonestica was brought here. I was contacted last night by one of my counterparts from the third Enchanted Forest. He and his team picked up a high level of portal activity in Washington. They were able to pick up everyone they could find but he also told me portals opened all over the map. We still have people missing.”

“Wait…there’s more of us?” Happy asked.

“Nonestica was the original of six worlds my ancestors Hades and Persephone created,” Rumple spoke up. “The other five run parallel to it and in them we may be leading the same lives or different lives. In some cases, we may not exist at all. Parallel Storybrookes exist as well, their entrances hidden by cloaking spells outside our town line.”

“So why weren’t these other worlds destroyed?” Ruby wanted to know.

“Lurline tethered her life force to one…Nonestica. The tether was an emerald like the one that I wear only mine is a small piece from the original stone. The original stone was called the Heart of Lurline,” Az added.

“Destroying the Heart of Lurline is what destroyed Nonestica. And unlike Regina’s trigger, the Heart of Lurline was not easy to destroy because it contained the life force of a goddess. We assumed my aunt Katia would be the one to destroy the stone, but we were wrong. Alemedia did it herself. Only a god can kill another god and Alemedia killed Lurline, using my mother’s body,” DG confessed.

“How do you know that?” Granny demanded.

“Because I see it. I am still a Dark One.”

People began backing away from her.

“So…with Lurline gone, what happens now?”
“Lurline’s powers have passed to her successor and when the time is right, he will take his rightful place on the throne of Paradise.”

“If I don’t kill him first!” Alemedia snarled, once again in control of DG’s body her hands glowing with magic.

“Out! Everyone out! Now!” Rumple ordered. People jumped out of their seats and ran for the doors, screaming and nearly trampling each other trying to escape until Archie and Az teleported them out.

“You can try,” Henry challenged as he stepped out from behind his parents and slammed the tip of his staff into the floor. “Her powers have passed to me, Alemedia Demonia and though I may be a child now, I won’t be later.” Pandora’s Box appeared in his hand. “To thy prison I banish thee!” he chanted, waving his hand over the stone. A cloud of red smoke surrounded DG and pulled her inside the box, the goddess screaming out her age.

“What did you do? She still has my sister!” Az cried. “Bring her back.”

“He can’t!” Archie protested.

“Dammit, Archie I can’t lose her again!”

Archie gripped his wife’s shoulders and forced her to look at him. “Dellia, listen to me! DG is a greater threat to us now that Nonestica has been destroyed. I’m sorry but….but there’s no other way….we have to contain her until we find a way to neutralize her blade.”

“She won’t want to….without Wyatt,” she sniffled.

Emma and Baelfire stared hard at their son holding Pandora’s Box in his hand.

“Papa, what did Henry mean when he said Lurline’s powers passed to him?” Bae demanded. “Does it mean what I think it does?”

“It does indeed son.”

“Our son is a…god?!” Emma exclaimed.

A puff of silver smoke appeared in the town hall revealing Adora. She clenched her hand into a fist and knelt before the boy.

“I give you my word that I will serve and protect you until my last breath, my lord for my world as a Talon is my bond,” she recited.

“Oh, come on! Stand up Ozmalita! I’m just a kid!”

“You are Lurline’s successor, Henry Alexander Dioso,” she declared. “And on your hundredth annual you will ascend to the throne of Paradise but while you are young you are still in danger. The circle must be completed.”

“It can’t be without Wyatt!” Az reminded them.

“That’s why I sent DG to Ephesis,” Henry said. “It’s where he is.”

“So he’s still alive,” Rumple murmured.

“And the curse placed on him and DG is still active. The curse’s point of origin is in Ephesis and
that is where they have to break it.” He sighed heavily. “If they can.”

Until then all they could do was wait…and hope for the best.

Storybrooke, Maine
Two days after the Final Eclipse

The convent and school gymnasium had been transformed into temporary shelters as they had been when the Ephesian Wraith ravaged the town a month earlier. The fairies and faculty were doing their best to make certain everyone had comfortable beds while the staff at Granny’s diner was working around the clock to provide plenty of food for everyone while Archie teleported from one end of the town to another offering counseling services to those who needed it. The Storybrooke sheriff’s department was also working overtime, the former officers of the SFPD having more experience dealing with crisis situations. They began keeping a list of who arrived through the portals and if anyone was separated.

“We were lucky we got those portals redirected when we did,” David was saying to his brother and Az. “No one who came through our portal got separated but Isaac says there’s at least sixty families with members missing from the portals that opened up there. He’s got a team looking for them and he also told us something interesting….when I came here my counterpart from Enchanted Forest Six got sent down to the Bay. I may have to call him and bring him up to speed if his curse has been broken.”

Archie’s eyes widened. “So we’re twins there?”

“Yeah…and lead almost similar lives…so far.”

“Has there been any Home Office activity in Storybrooke Six?” Emma demanded.

“Not yet but Wallace and Weaver are keeping an eye on it while they get their refugees settled in.”

“Call him again and tell him we need his reports on that portal activity, dearie. He’s gonna need our help finding everyone and we’ll need to set up safe havens outside the town line,” Rumple instructed.

“Rumple, you should rest…” Belle insisted.

“There’s no time now sweetheart. There is too much work to be done.”

That evening Regina went on the news pleading again for the town’s assistance with the refugees. Jasmine, the former Sultana of Agrabah and Anastasia and Will of Wonderland also addressed their people, reassuring them that they would be safe in their new home. Will, a former resident of Storybrooke himself was familiar with modern technology and he and his queen had been in the process of modernizing Wonderland when the disaster struck.

"What's going to happen to us...now that Pan is dead. He was using his magic to keep us alive," Jonathan Darling asked worriedly, indicating himself, Michael and Wendy. "We should be dead now."

"He was just telling you that, so you'd do his bidding," Rumple said. "The only magic he was using was freezing your aging process as he did with your sister, the same process that worked here during the Dark Curse. Both are undone now, and you'll age normally, Wendy being the only exception because the process was started when she was younger than you are now."

"Is it possible to make me older?" Wendy asked.
"Are you sure that is what you want?" Rumple asked softly.

"Yes."

"Rumple, don't you think you should rest first? You've been doing so much magic already," Belle asked.

"Sweetheart, the Darlings gave my son a home and a family when he thought he no longer had his. I owe them a debt and I must repay it," Rumple said as he took her hands in his. "If what Hope says is true, once the spell is completed, I'll be needing that rest anyway."

"I know but you've barely had time to...."

"Mourn my father? I mourned him years ago. This needs to be done Belle."

Realizing any further arguments with him would be futile, she nodded. "Whatever happens, I'll be with you every step of the way, but it doesn't stop me from worrying."

When they returned to Rumple's shop, he retrieved an old spell book from the shelf and handed it to Belle. She opened it to the page he needed while Bae made Wendy comfortable on the small cot in the backroom his of shop with Jonathan and Michael kneeling beside her.

"How old do you want to be, Wendy?" Rumple inquired.

"I'm actually the oldest...we're two years apart so I will need to be two years older than Michael," Wendy explained.

"And I stopped aging at twenty-one," Michael added.

"All right. Close your eyes Wendy and when you wake up you will now be twenty-three," Rumple instructed. "Michael, Jonathan, we'll need you to step aside for a few minutes, please." Rumple instructed and began to chant in Ozian. The others stared in awe as her body began to change from that of a prepubescent teenager into a young woman around Belle's age.

"Do you feel all right, Wendy?" Rumple asked her.

"I feel fine Mr. Gold. Thank you," she answered in a more mature voice and held out her arms to her three brothers. "I don't feel any different. Do I look different?"

"Not much," Bae admitted.

"Rumple!" Belle cried out as Rumple sank to the floor. She kneeled beside him and helped him sit up. "Dammit, I told you to rest and you should've listened to me instead of being so damned stubborn!"

"Not even married...and you're already acting like a wife," he muttered.

"All right everyone hear this: you need magic or a solution to any problem, you go bother Blue, Regina, Az, Archie, Emma or Tinkerbell because Rumplestiltskin is NOT leaving his bed until he gets some rest...is that clear?" Belle asked as she glared at the assembled company. Having never seen the beauty in such a rage, the others were too terrified to argue with her.

"Wow Papa, she's got some temper on her!"

"Oh, you haven't seen the worst of it yet," he said while Bae and Belle helped him to his feet and led him outside to his Cadillac and smiled as he remembered their spats back in the Dark Castle.
To his surprise Belle got in the driver's seat. "Ahh, sweetheart...maybe Bae should drive," he suggested.

"I know how to drive. Ruby taught me."

"Should I be worried?" he quipped.

"Rumplestiltskin, if you make one snide comment about women drivers you will be going home in the trunk or sleeping with the fishes," she threatened while Bae watched him, his belly aching as he doubled over laughing.

"You even fight like a married couple!"

"Always have," Rumple murmured.

Belle smiled. She didn't need the words or the ring...she already felt like they were married. They did everything a married couple was supposed to do, except have a child. Part of her hoped she already was carrying one.

"Grandpa...can I come over to visit you...when you're feeling better?" Henry asked.

"You can visit me any time you want, Henry."

"How about tomorrow?" Belle suggested.

"Really?"

"Of course."

Although it was a short drive to Rumple's house, he was already asleep by the time Belle pulled into the driveway. She got out of the car and walked over to the passenger door, giving him a kiss to wake him. He smiled.

"I didn't make any comments about your driving," he reminded her.

"No, you didn't. Let's get you to bed," she said softly as Bae helped him out of the car and upstairs to his bedroom. He sat down on the edge of the bed.

"Neal, would you mind waiting downstairs?" Belle asked.

"But...Belle..." Rumple protested.

"No, it's okay Papa. You need to get some sleep." Bae insisted and left them alone in the room. Rumple started unbuttoning his shirt.

"No, darling, let me do that." she reminded him gently as she helped him undress, feeling tears brimming in the corners of her eyes when she saw the knife scar on his chest. Once she had him dressed in his pajamas, he lay back on the bed and was asleep again as soon as his head touched the pillow. She kissed him softly on the lips and went downstairs to fix some tea. She also wanted to have a talk with Bae. They hadn't gotten a chance to have a heart to heart and now she felt it was time.
"Is he asleep?" Bae asked her.

Yes. Would you like some tea?" she asked softly.

"Umm...coffee will be good. Not much of a tea drinker," he said.

Belle returned to the living room carrying a tray with two cups on it as well as some finger sandwiches. She set the tray on the coffee table and handed one of the cups to Bae while she took the other. It had a chip in it.

"Now then, are you going to honor your father’s wishes and fight for Emma?" she demanded, her eyes meeting his over the rim of her cup.

He gasped, nearly spitting out his coffee. “You go for the jugular, don’t you?”

“I learned from the best,” she said with a grin. “But you haven’t answered my question.”

“I want to…I really do…and not just for Henry but…I’ve…I’ve got a history.”

“Emma may find it hard to understand now but you had to be separated all those years ago for her to be set on the path to become the person she is now.”

“And Papa had to lose me to set him on the path to become what he is. Strangely enough, my son is the one who helped me understand that. My son...the god.” He exhaled sharply. “I’m still not used to that one! But Belle, I’m not just talking about that time in Portland. I have a past somewhere else….with someone else.”

“Tamara?”

He shook his head violently. “I think I was drawn to Tamara because she looked like this woman I’m talking about. Molk’s wife would know who she is.”

“You’ve met her before you came to Storybrooke?”

“Beth lived in Miami during her first two marriages. Molk’s her third husband.” His eyes narrowed. “And I’m beginning to think it wasn’t a coincidence I ended up there either.”

“Why?”

“Because I think I found some of Papa’s relatives there….from Pan’s side. They had the same last name he did…and one of them told me there was a history of witchcraft in their family. Beth was married to Jamie McDermott, the actor.”

“Whom Rumple suspects was using dark magic on her to keep her under his control before he was shot by the police. Were there any other relations?”

“He has a sister named Channon, his mother Catriona and gram Fiona. Fie and Cattie live in Scotland. Plus there’s another cousin from England…he’s kinda off the grid. And we know Zee is his cousin on his mother’s side.”

“I have a feeling finding this family is on your father’s to-do list once we get everything settled. Just how serious is the history you have with this other woman?”

“Very,” Bae murmured. “I was thinking about marrying her but she….she didn’t think she was good enough for me. Belle, if my father finds out what I was doing in Miami he is going to kill me!”
“Bae, you weren’t involved in anything else illegal…were you?”

He didn’t need to reply. The expression on his face spoke volumes.

“You’d better tell me all of it.”

An hour later Belle sat back in Rumple’s chair, her knuckles white from holding her teacup with so much force.

“You need to tell Rumple. Right away.”

“He’s gonna kill me!”

“Would you rather he found out from someone else: like this Detective Rivera or Willie Roasch?”

“NO! Rivera would twist it and Roasch would try to kill me again.”

“I won’t tell him…for now…but I suggest that you do Baelfire Strogoff-Gold and soon! Now then, we’re going to talk a little more about the Emma situation and what you’re going to do to fix it.”

“I can’t.”

"You sound like your father. Having trouble believing you deserve to be loved, but you do. Maybe if you give Emma time, she'll realize you belong together."

"There's too many hurt feelings between us, Belle. The only thing we can do is be friends for Henry's sake."

"I just hate to see you give up."

"I know it feels that way to you but not me. I screwed up so much with my life that I don't think I'm ready for a relationship right now. I need to spend some time getting to know Papa again...and Henry."

She smiled. "Well, you know I'm here to help with that. I'd like you and Henry to come over for dinner tomorrow and if you want to bring someone...perhaps Emma, that would be wonderful."

"You're not going to give up on that, are you?"

"No. I'll keep on you until you have your own true love."

He laughed. "My father is going to have his hands full with you."

"Oh, he's used to it by now. Which brings me to another question: are you all right with us being together? I know I'm not your mother."

"Right now, you're being more of a mother to me than she was," Neal said. "You've brought back the man my father used to be, the man I loved before it all went to hell and I'll be forever grateful to you for that."

"His love for you did that too, Bae. He never stopped searching for you. He never forgot you. He did all of this for you."

"For us," Bae corrected. "I'm glad now he doesn't have that damned prophecy hanging over his head anymore and he can start being a grandparent to Henry. The cycle has to end somewhere."
"And it has," Belle confirmed. "We all need to let go of the past and start thinking about our futures, just like I told him so many times."

When Belle returned to the bedroom to check on him, he was just as she left him. She made herself comfortable in the chair beside the bed and opened a book. An hour later she too was asleep.

"No....no.....Bae....Belle....Henry!"

Belle awoke when she heard Rumple crying out in his sleep, his arms and legs thrashing about wildly. She crawled onto the bed and reached for him. "Rumple, Rumple...darling, please wake up...it's just a nightmare."

As soon as her hand touched his chest, he opened his eyes and threw his arms around her. "You're here.....you're alive..." he sobbed.

"It was just a nightmare, darling," she soothed.

He gasped in horror as he gazed out the window and saw a bright green light in the sky. "The curse....he's cast it!" he cried frantically. "We have to leave here or it will kill us all!"

"Darling, darling....the curse was stopped when he died." Belle assured him.

"But...the light..."

"What light?" she asked.

"Don't you see it!?" he demanded. "It's right there...." he said, pointing out the window.

Belle glanced in the direction he was pointing but saw nothing. She cupped his face in her hands and kissed him softly. "It's going to be all right, darling. Go back to sleep."

Thinking it was merely the aftereffects of his nightmare, Rumple lay back down, still holding Belle tightly to him.

Bae froze where he stood when he saw a bright beam of green light in the sky while he walked with Tink, Wendy and her brothers back to Granny's. "What the hell is that?" he mused.

"What's what?" Tink asked. She didn't see anything.

"You don't see that? There's a light in the sky."

"I don't see anything, Bae."

"I guess I need to get my eyes checked then," he muttered as they walked back to Granny's Bed and Breakfast.

At first Henry thought his eyes were playing tricks on him but when he opened them again, he could see a bright beam of green light in the sky.

"Mom, are you seeing that?" he asked Regina.

"Seeing what, honey?"

"That green light."

Regina glanced up. All she could see was a clear sky much to her relief. "I don't see anything
honey. We've all had a difficult day. Days…”

Henry frowned. Why wasn't she seeing it when it was bright enough to light up the whole town even when it was dark? There had to be some answers in the Book of the Ancients or somewhere.

“Henry Dioso summons thee
Aramon Dioso, appear now before me!” he chanted. A puff of black smoke appeared revealing the former Ozian god. Henry clenched his hand into a fist and knelt before his ancestor and superior.

“Rise child,” the god answered.

“The light.”

“The final battle his begun but its climax must be fought here. The two Dark Ones must neutralize their blades before the stroke of midnight on the fourth day after the final eclipse or Alemedia will be free to wander the realms in her true form,” the god announced. “If they succeed, in one hundred years’ time they will take their rightful places on the dark thrones.”

Henry’s face paled. “DG and Wyatt will rule Ephesis?”

“They have been chosen to ascend to the dark throne as you have been chosen to ascend to the throne of light, child. You and the woman that will become your true bondmate.”

“But my mothers…..”

“Your mothers’ task will be to protect your heart, to prepare it for the day when you divide it in a union of heart, body and soul.”

“Who is my bondmate?”

“She will reveal herself at the proper time. Now Henry, you must prepare the others for the battle to come.”

The god vanished.

“DG, you cannot fail this time!” Henry cried as he gazed into a seeing globe. “You can’t!”

Storybrooke, Maine
Three days after the Final Eclipse

Rumple sat on the edge of the bed the next morning with the chipped teacup and a long gold string he spun himself in his hands. Calling on his magic he shrunk the cup down until it was the size of a small pendant and transformed the gold string into a chain. He attached the cup to the chain and smiled. The door burst open and Belle walked in, glaring at him. Damn. He'd forgotten that having part of his heart inside her gave her the ability to sense when he was using too much magic and draining himself. He closed his hand, concealing the necklace from her view.

"What the hell are you trying to do?” she snapped. "Kill yourself?! You know you shouldn't be using magic yet! What do I have to do to make you listen? You stay in that bed until I say you can get up and NO MAGIC!”

"It was a simple spell," he protested.

"For what? What may I ask is so damned important that it can't wait until you're recovered?"
He opened his palm revealing a gold chain with a small object on it. "Well most men do this on their knees and with a diamond ring but I'm not most men...and I'm not allowed to get out of bed," he added. "I told you before the only future I was interested in was the one where we were together. I still am." He held the necklace out to her. "Will you marry me, Belle?"

"Yes," she whispered, taking the chain in her hands.

"Ohhhh...you made me a mini chipped cup!"

"Umm...about that...well...it is the cup, my sweetheart," he said nervously. "I just redid the spell we had on it earlier."

"That's what you used magic for?"

"Yes." He braced himself for her anger. Instead she threw her arms around him and kissed him.

"Don't use anymore. The sooner you get better, the sooner we can be married." she murmured.

"As you wish," he said, and he pulled her onto the bed with him and kissed her.

"Your lunch!" she protested.

"Already having it," he quipped as he started undressing her. She giggled and swatted his shoulder.

"Grandpa!" he heard Henry calling from downstairs just as they had discarded the last of their clothes. "Belle? You here?"

They froze.

"Oh my God...please don't let him come up here yet..." Belle pleaded as she crawled out from underneath him and wrapped herself in the sheet. "Rumple, where are my..."

"I don't know where I threw them," he cried. "Where are my pants?"

"Over here..." she said and tossed them at him. "Oh no, I can hear him coming up the steps!"

"Dammit," Rumple grumbled as he struggled to pull his pajama pants on. "Belle, are you dressed yet?"

"No...one of the buttons on my sweater popped off and I can't find my bra!"

"Then I'll just fix it..."

"NO magic!"

"Sweetheart, unless you want our grandson to see us half naked and scar him more than he already is can we please make an exception?" he pleaded. "Or you do it! You know how!"

"Grandpa! Belle!" Henry called out from the end of the hallway.

"Tick tock, dearie!" Rumple cried urgently.

"All right!" Belle groaned. She waved her hand and both were back in their clothes. Belle ran to the door to open it while Rumple hobbled back into bed. "In here, Henry," she called out.

"Hi Belle," he greeted then walked over to the bed and embraced his grandfather. "Hi Grandpa."
"Hello, Henry."

"Was I interrupting something?" the boy inquired, grinning when he noticed some lipstick marks on his grandfather's neck.

"What? Umm...no...why would you ask that?" Rumple stammered.

"Because you guys look as nervous as Grandpa David and Grandma Snow did the day Mom and I got back to her place and found them in bed in the middle of the day...and they were kinda naked so they were probably having sex."

Belle buried her face in her hands and giggled.

"Aren't you a bit young to know about that?" Rumple demanded. "What are they teaching in that school!"

"We don't get sex ed til seventh grade but it's all over TV."

"I'll be having a discussion with your parents about your television watching habits, Henry Mills Strogoff-Gold," Rumple said firmly while Belle struggled to control her laughter. He glared over at her.

"It's okay if you were ummm...doing that."

"We are not having that discussion yet!"

"When did you have it with Dad?"

"When he was thirteen...and you still have two more years to go!" Rumple reminded him. "Why don't we go downstairs and see what Belle made us for lunch," he suggested, desperate to change the subject.

"Now that Pan's gone and his curse is too, do you think we'll be able to bring back all the happy endings?" Henry asked him once they were gathered in the dining room.

"Ummm...Henry....some of them are already happening," his grandfather reminded him.

"What about yours?"

"Mine?"

"Yeah. You're the beast and you're supposed to be with Belle. You are but....not married yet."

Belle smiled. "Your grandfather proposed a bit ago and I've accepted."

"You did?" He glanced down at her ring finger. "Where's your ring?"

"I did something a bit different....she's wearing it," Rumple answered.

"Oh! You made her cup into a necklace because its your symbol. That's so cool!" Henry exclaimed. "Did you tell my dad yet?"

"We're going to tell him at dinner tonight so..." He imitated zipping his lips. "Ummm....he told me he's bringing someone over....is that okay?"

"Your mother?" Rumple asked hopefully. Reconnecting with Emma was something his son wanted
desperately. It was also his wish.

"Ummm...no. Tink."

“I won’t have my son making Tink a rebound girl. And she is a nice girl...for a fairy."

"Rumple!" Belle swatted his hand while Henry chuckled. He enjoyed seeing this lighter side of his
grandfather and he saw that Belle brought that out of him more than anyone else. The three of them
spent most of the day talking and when it came time to get dinner ready Henry surprised them by
pitching in.

"Mom taught me how to cook some stuff," he said proudly and rolled up his sleeves. "What do you
want for dessert?"

Rumple smiled. "Surprise me."

"All right, but you gotta leave the kitchen."

"I do know how to cook."

"Yeah but you'll ruin the surprise."

"I'm being thrown out of my own kitchen," he complained and retreated to the living room to read
the newspaper while he waited for Bae and Tinkerbell to arrive.

Despite his prejudice against fairies, Rumple noticed that his son and Tinkerbell seemed to be
going along well, much better than he and Emma did. The best he could hope for was that Emma
and Bae could come to some sort of agreement with Regina that the three of them could share
custody of Henry.

"Papa, I know I really shouldn't bring this up now but...something strange happened last night."

Rumple tensed. "What, Bae?"

"You too?" Henry asked.

Rumple glanced over at his grandson. "Something happened to you too, Henry?"

"Yeah....I saw a weird green light in the sky."

Belle and Rumple's forks dropped to their plates with a clang as did Bae's.

"You too!" Bae exclaimed.

"I saw the light...but Belle didn't." Rumple answered.

“I summoned Aramon. The light was coming from Ephesis. Aramon said the final battle was
starting and the end of it had to be fought here. He said that DG and Wyatt have to neutralize their
blades before midnight tomorrow night or…”

“Alemedia will walk the earth in her true form with no prison to bind her,” Rumple finished. “DG
and Wyatt have to fight here where Alemedia’s powers can be contained. If they succeed, in a
hundred years they will ascend to her throne.”

“Wait a minute…they’ll become gods?” Bae exclaimed.
“Yes. This was the second prophecy Lurline and Alemedia feared and it was this one, not the Final Eclipse as we all believed that got Aramon stripped of his powers and locked in Ephesis. He knew two of his descendants would be powerful enough to defeat Lurline and Alemedia and they were hoping their grandmother’s curse would wipe them out before they could.”

Belle sighed deeply. “I just wish we could all get a day off from this.”

“We’re Guardians, dearie. We don’t get a day off,” Rumple reminded her.

Tink was silent through most of the meal but while Henry and Bae challenged each other to a video game in the living room Rumple and Belle took the young fae outside for a chat.

“What do you have feelings for my son?” Rumple inquired.

“We’re friends,” she replied.

“But do you wish to be more than that?”

“I don’t know. I’ve never thought of Bae that way. He was just a child when I met him. Thinking of him differently would be a bit strange, don’t you think?”

“It has happened. Look at Archie and Az.”

“That’s different. They’re bound to each other.”

“Tinkerbell, I am going to be frank. It was my hope that my son would reconcile with Henry’s mother but if that is no longer possible….then you have my blessing if your feelings change at some point.”

She smiled. “Thank you Rumple. But as I said before, it may be a bit awkward at first.”

“True love is always worth fighting for,” Belle said softly. “If it’s not Bae then maybe there is another man out there for you.”

“Blue…Galaluna…she forbids it!”

“You let me deal with her, dearie.”

Archie’s Office
Three days after the Final Eclipse

“…My darling daughters, among my many sins as a mother, queen and wife, I fear my greatest was withholding certain truths from you. Now those truths must be spoken.”

“The fault for Bastinda’s release is neither yours nor Azkadellia’s my DG. It is mine. It is mine because I was not at a council meeting as I claimed to be. I was with a man, a man you know well and that man, that man my DG is your real father.”

“I do love your father, my Azkadellia but I also loved this man too and it was difficult for us to end our affair once Archie learned of and confronted us with it. I know concealing this truth was difficult for you Archie, but you did so not only to protect Azkadellia but DG as well and I thank you for that.”

“Forgive me, Ambrose. We made a vow many years ago that we would take this secret to our graves, but I must now break this vow. Too many secrets have been kept already and this is what is giving the darkness its power over our child. She must use it now to return her soul to the light.”
“DG, even if Ahamo knew the truth know that he still loved you as if you were his own and you must NEVER forget that. A spell of mine may have given you his artistic gift but not his love. That you earned. Continue to carry it with you my angel.”

“I love you my angels.”

Archie cradled his bondmate in his arms, offering her what little comfort he could as she viewed her mother’s final messages to her and her sister.

“Mama, Papa…Vinny…” Ambrose moaned, burying his face in Raw’s shoulder while his other arm was around Xenia while she mourned their parents.

“Queen needed to tell truth to help DG and Az,” Raw murmured. “And Callux and Medira with Mistress Alana in Paradise.”

“DG, please….don’t let Mother’s sacrifice be in vain….restore the Balance!” Az pleaded through her tears.

It was now midnight and only twenty-four hours remained before the realms’ greatest evil would be released.
In Our Hearts Lies The Truth We Seek

Chapter Summary

This chapter includes scenes from GoldsJRZGirl’s Gold Standard and our co-authored stories A Second Little Mishap from the Mishap Series and This Doesn’t Have To Be Love from the Unexpected Series where you will see some things you haven't before so pay close attention!

I don't know where I'm going
In search for answers
I don't know who I'm fighting
I stand with empty eyes
You're like a ghost within me

Who's draining my life
It's like my soul is see through
Right through my empty eyes

Within Temptation – Empty Eyes

When the suns Nero and Necros are bound behind the moon Neru the battle to restore the balance must begin.

To the darkness West and North will be drawn
To the light South and East will be shown
The East guardian shall hold the staff that summons the winds of change and take the light throne
The South guardian will hold the chalice of the waters of rebirth and take the dark throne
With perfect balance between darkness and light will come a time of peace and prosperity to the OZ.

Shadowlands (Alemedia’s Palace)
The Ozian Hell Realm
Four days earlier

The moment she heard Lurline’s dying scream and the beginning of the destruction of the realm her despised parents had created, Alemedia knew the time had come to neutralize one of the threats to her existence, the Heart of the South. She’d coveted both his body and his soul for centuries, wanting for the moment when she could claim them.

She heard laughing in the seeing globe she was using to watch the destruction unfold and glared at the image of her father staring back at her.

“You always did have poor taste in men, daughter. Your sisters’ leftovers. First Lurline’s Aramon,
now you covet Ozmalita and Dorothea’s Tin Man. He’ll never be your consort no matter how much
darkness you infected his soul with through your machinations. He’ll choose the right path this
time and together he and Dorothea will destroy you and take your throne. Just as Aramon
predicted.”

“You underestimate me, father. You always did. Ephesus is mine as it always will be. Those
Guardians will never be strong enough to defeat me.”

Hades smirked. “They will be if ALL your Dark One daggers are neutralized.”

“They’ll never find them all.”

“Don’t count on it, dear. They already know your mother and I created six parallel words and
you’ve hidden your daggers in all of them. You’re losing all your Dark Ones.”

And Mother is going to resurrect one of them herself. Alemedia thought gleefully.

If all went according to plan, she would have three Dark Ones in Storybrooke Two. Resurrecting
Rumplestiltskin would not be easy in that realm but her mother’s cursed self was up to the task.

She waved her hand and Hades’ image vanished. Seconds later her mobat demons Zorin and Zelda
flew into the throne room carrying the unconscious body of Wyatt Cain.

“Take him to my chamber,” she instructed.

“Yes, Mistress.”

She followed them into her chamber and watched as they placed him on the bed. She heard him
groan and smiled softly when he opened his eyes.

“I’ve come home,” he said in a demonic voice.

She reached out and stroked his cheek tenderly. “At last.”

Ephesis
The Realm of the Forgotten
Three days earlier

"Although it fills my heart with sorrow
I must now go down a path you cannot follow
Those I love I will always defend
Even if this time it will mean my end…”

“Not this time Wyatt. Not this time,” DG shook her head violently, clutching her sword tightly. It
had been a clever, yet terribly risky plan to allow Alemedia to take control of her long enough to
threaten Henry and force him to trap her in Pandora’s Box but she knew it was the only way she
could enter Ephesus to try to free Wyatt.

It wasn’t Az the darkness wanted. It was me. It was always meant to be me, she thought as the
doors to the goddess’s dark castle opened. She heard snarling in the rafters above her and saw three
mobat demons flying toward her.

“The dragon’s spirit I call to thee
Form of a dragon let me be!” she chanted.

The demons shrieked in terror at the large, red scaled dragon that lashed out with its tail and sent
one of them crashing to the floor.

“You demons are immune to almost anything…except me!” she laughed. “Funny how your goddess omitted that small detail when she created you.”

“Because she didn’t know it,” she heard a voice say from behind her. Her eyes blinked several times.

“Aren’t you that lawyer from Ally McBeal?”

“Why does everyone always ask me that?” The Richard Fish avatar rolled his eyes. “No, but it is one of my favorite avatars. I can shift into another if you’d like.”

“You’re fine. But who are you? Oh, excuse me a moment.” She snarled and blew a blast of fire at a mobat demon hovering above her head. “I’m sorry. I think I was asking who you were.” “Your forefeather, Dorothia.”

“Aramon?”

“Try again.”

“H…Hades?” she gasped. “Oh, will you guys go sleep in a hole somewhere,” she snapped at the demons. “You can’t kill me so you might as well save yourselves the trouble.” Her eyes now glowed red. “Or you can join me.”

“That’s it Dorothia,” Hades coached. “Unlock the powers within. Seize your destiny.”

The demons froze. Several flew to the ground and tucked in their wings.

“What is your will, Mistress?” one inquired.

She shifted back into her human form. “Did…did that actually work or am I imagining it?”

“You know the emerald was Lurline’s weakness. The sword you hold in your hand is one of my daughter’s. The more you neutralize, the weaker she becomes, and you will take her place on the dark throne.”

“It’s your throne, not mine.”

“I am no better than my daughter without Persephone to anchor me. No, the Dark Throne must be held by one who is neither dark nor light yet capable of wielding both. You will restore the balance Dorothia but first you must conquer your past.”

“Easier said than done when doing so requires me to consummate my bond with a man I’ve screwed over in both our lives. Alemedia wants him so she’s going to use that to turn him against me.”

“So, fight for him. You’ve got it in you.” Hades vanished.

“Thanks for the advice…I think,” she muttered and started walking down the hall. As she was about to enter the throne room a portal opened in the floor.

“No, no NO!” she screamed when she felt herself being pulled in.

“Go home little girl,” she heard Alemedia taunting when she appeared before her. “You’ve lost him again…FOR GOOD THIS TIME!”
“I’ll be back and I’m gonna send you where you belong, you bitch!” DG howled, shaking her fist at the goddess before she reappeared in the middle of Storybrooke’s Main Street, Emma slamming on the brakes of her Bug and coming to a stop mere inches from DG’s face.

“DG! Oh crap I almost ran you over!” she cried and jumped out of the car.

“Too bad you didn’t! She’s a Dark One!” Leroy barked from the other side of the street.

“Watch it!” Archie snapped, glaring at him. “She happens to be my sister-in-law.” He hurried over to DG’s side and helped her to her feet. “DG, are you alright? Where’s Wyatt?”

“Az….Rumple…I need to see them,” she croaked. Archie gestured and the pair vanished in a puff of smoke.

“Still getting used to him being able to do that,” Emma muttered.

“You said it, sister!” Leroy exclaimed.

Rumple’s Mansion
Four Days after the Final Eclipse

“What you face isn't just her darkness...but your own as well,” Rumple said as Wyatt stood in his living room, having escaped through a second portal while Alemedia had been occupied with DG. "The doubts you have about each other and the mistakes you've made in your past are what is giving the curse its power and it will force you to destroy each other and everything around you unless you can overcome them. This is the moment you've been preparing for...are you ready to face it now?"

"I am," Wyatt answered firmly.

Rumple waved his hand and the katana sword appeared in it. "There is one last thing you will need to do. Remove your heart."

"I...I've never done it before."

"But you know how."

Wyatt reached into his chest and pulled out his heart. Most of it was glowing red while there was a portion of it that was black. Rumple pointed to the black portion. "This is what is left of the darkness in you and it has to be destroyed as does the darkness inside her. Now divide it." he instructed. "You should remember how to do this as well."

Wyatt closed his eyes and waved his hand over his heart to cast the division spell. It divided into three pieces, two of them hovering in the air and glowing red while the dark portion stayed in his palm.

"Now open your eyes and look."

"What...?"

"One of the original pieces has been returned to you....as it should have, however it has merged with the dark portion and is now being used as a weapon against you. That piece belonged to your late wife. The other two must be protected since they are bound to others." The two heart pieces merged to form the other half of the former Tin Man's heart. Rumple waved his hand and a box similar to the one he sent to Henry earlier appeared in it. "Send it to someone you know will keep it
Wyatt waved his hand over the box and it vanished.

“The blades must be neutralized before the clock strikes midnight or Alemedia will be free to walk the mortal realm.”

“Even if she still has other blades out there?”

“Yes. But first we need to see how many.”

“Eye of Aramon, I invoke thee
Show me what I need to see!” Rumple chanted and closed his eyes.

Storybrooke Four
Unexpected Verse
Four days after the Final Eclipse

He found himself standing before an alternate version of the wishing well, bearing witness as his fourth counterpart confronted Alemedia using one of her many vessels as her avatar. Only a few of them were given a glimpse of her in her true form.

You'll never be free of me.

I shall, demon! One day I shall send you away for good! You want to be free of me too, admit it!

You are a weak, cowardly fool. You are not strong enough to survive without me.

Once that was true . . . once but no more. Now I have my strength, my light . . .I have my FAMILY back, Dark One . . .and I am no longer alone.

They will leave you. Everyone you love leaves you. But I am always here. I am that one who MADE you what you are. Without me you are NOTHING!

If I am NOTHING, Dark One . . . why do you want me so badly?

As a trial lawyer you learned how to play with words . . .to seek the weakness in another's premise. . . and he did this now, seeking out the loopholes in the demon's words.

You want me because you have no choice! I am the bearer of the curse . . . and as such you cannot do anything but deal with me!

Ahh but that is where you are wrong fool....I CHOSE you!

Did you? Or did Zoso choose . . .because he was as desperate to escape you as I was to find a way to save my son . . .and he never told me the price . . . I made a deal I didn't understand . . .

Your light is the strongest I have ever encountered and now it is mine to corrupt... to destroy...

But you shall not destroy it, demon! You have not managed it through all these centuries . . . and now I am stronger than ever . . .

Are you?
YES!

Do you want to be bound to me now? DO YOU?

He felt Alemedia respond with a memory curse, severing many of this Rumple’s ties. A weaker man would falter but this fourth version of him held fast.

Submit and you will know no more pain...refuse and I will leave you with no memory at all!

Ah, but true love is the strongest magic in all the realms, dearie. He will not falter. Belle will anchor him as she’s anchored me. You’ve lost him. You WILL lose him.

You don’t want a vegetable for a host...you need a person...and more you want someone you can be a partner to...who revels in the darkness...like I never have unless forced to...so why not make one last deal with me, Dark One...a deal that will be mutually beneficial to both of us?

“Oh dearie, you are a bold one!” Rumple chuckled while still deep in his trance. “But you’ve certainly got her by the balls now.”

You...wish to deal with ME? And what could YOU offer me that I cannot simply take?

This. Your freedom. All these centuries you have been bound to inferior pathetic Rumplestiltskin...but once I break the curse over me...I WILL do it...you'll be free again...free to seek another with whom to bond...or not. Is that not worth something to you?

Indeed it is, fool. But you will fail and as much as I long to be rid of you I fear I am as they say in this miserable excuse for a realm...stuck with you!

Then, Dark One, it is in YOUR best interest to see that I do NOT fail, Rumple countered. So...we work together to free us both...do we have a deal?

We do. You surprise me fool. No other has dared to challenge me before.

No one else had a reason to. I do.

There is a price to pay for your freedom fool? Will you pay it?

What price?

Your heart...A spot of darkness will remain and your leg will return to the state it was before we merged. You will no longer be immortal.

No longer immortal as YOU define it, no. As for the rest...I shall gladly pay it in order for me to be free of this cursed existence.

To live forever is that not the ultimate desire of your kind?

Who wants to live forever, Dark One? When forever means living in misery and all that you love has died?

One who lives only for himself and not others.

Yes. But I am not that one. And I never was...not even when I was the desperate spinner. And we both know that well.

Indeed.
I shall return from whence we came and seek out the soul I need. This realm has no need of me...you mortals create enough darkness yourselves.

You shall . . . once I marry my True Love and through that break the binding the dagger created. Until then . . . go back to sleep, Dark One. This realm's magic is different from ours . . . but I can work with it. It just takes time.

The memories of those who are not as close to you I have taken...they will return in time. Call it a parting gift. Be aware however that the other curse you have been given is still active. Only when its final victim is bound by heart and soul to the one he has chosen will it be broken.

And until then?

Your memories and those of your son...you may still lose them at times...and of those closest to you.

I'll forget about them . . . about Belle and Bae?

It is possible however more difficult with a magician.

They'll forget me then? And there's no way to . . . prevent this?

Only your son is at risk

Why?

Because of his blood bond to you. He is the one you love most.

Then I'll have to make sure all the victims . . . get back together, right?

Yes. Only two remain unbound but by removing part of your memory... I have complicated things a bit.

Blasted imp! I suppose it's because . . . like a certain playwright said . . . the course of true love never did run smooth . . . or you're just twisting the knife aren't you, dearie?

Had I KNOWN it would extend my imprisonment, I would not have! I may have overreacted at bit.

Well, maybe next time you'll think before you act!

Says the man who took a burden he didn't understand.

Oh hush! Now that the magic is able to be accessed once more . . . I'll need to set up wards around the town . . . so no unexpected guests come calling . . . and then we shall see what this curse has made of us.

Do not take too long spinner! This world bores me... not enough belief in magic.

Then go to sleep! What is time to an immortal?

Do your duty quickly spinner or in will not sleep often!"

Yes, yes, I shall, now go to bed, you're cranky!

Spinner you have not seen cranky yet, but you will if you tarry!
I won’t . . . but things take time . . . despite all my magic. So be patient . . . and before you know it, you shall be free.

I’d better be spinner or you will not sleep for eternity!

Okay, now go to sleep! Or must I sing you a lullaby first?

Sttrybrooke One
Four days after the Final Eclipse

“He got the better of you, didn’t he Alemedia?” Rumple taunted, feeling the balance shifting as the fourth Rumple’s curse was broken. “Ah, you needn’t worry. He can’t hear us.”

“He’s useless to me anyway. You may have won this battle, but I am going to win the war.”

“Don’t count on it!”

“There must be ONE among you weak enough to remain my vessel!”

“I feel the balance shifting again dearie. Let’s go see where, shall we?”

“The balance, it’s shifting more toward the light….I can feel it!” Az whispered, her hand pressed against her chest. “Archie, can you?”

“Yes.”

They watched with a mix of delight and horror as DG’s body began to glow with a red light.

“Another blade his been neutralized…and more of her power is passing to me,” she murmured.

“DG…”

“Just a few more…..and then we’ll be ready for her!” she growled.

Enchanted Forest Six
Mishap Verse

“They call it the Vault of the Dark One but that’s not what it is dearie,” Rumple murmured as he stood beside his sixth counterpart once again an adult when his youth spell had been reversed. “Welcome to Hell….and you’re not going to enjoy your stay.”

So...our wayward child has come home…

Join us again…and crush those who oppose you!

I'm no child of yours, demon! Go and plague me no more!

“In your realm Cynric was the first Dark One. A pitiful one at that. My aunt could’ve crushed him with a blink.”

As before, Rumple could only observe, not interfere.

“To save yourself you must confront your past dearie.”

The sixth Rumplestiltskin was now confronted with avatars from his past and present. The first was
Milah. Rumple snorted at her shade.
“Once a whore, always a whore.”

You KILLED me!

Yes, I killed you . . . for being a faithless whore who cared more for yourself than the son you left behind. Perhaps I shouldn't have done so . . . but what's done is done and I can't say I regret it. Who did you really love, dearie? I know who. YOURSELF! And that makes you a far more selfish person than I am.

You could've let me go...let me have my son...

I never held you back . . . you could have left any time you wished . . . and you didn't want Bae . . . so don't lie and say you did . . . all you wanted was your handsome buccaneer and your life of adventure! Be careful what you wish for, dearie! You just might get it!

“Oh, and you did get exactly what you deserved, Milah.” He conjured a seeing globe and gazed into it, seeing several versions of his faithless wife, including the one he'd married imprisoned in one of Ephesis’ worst prisons, The Realm of Retribution.
“What you’ve done has been done to you tenfold bitch!” he hissed at them. Then he heard another voice that brought him to tears. “Oh please, tell me we didn’t ALL make that mistake!”

He saw another version of his son standing before his counterpart.

"You left me ALONE! I NEEDED you and all you cared about was your POWER!"

He could feel this Rumple’s spirit breaking, confronted with the worst mistake of his life.

"I took this curse to save you . . . and without it how could I protect you? How?” he heard himself saying along with his counterpart.

Hold fast Rumplestiltskin! You must not surrender. Shift the Balance!

We're here darling...all of us...can you feel it?

“Belle,” Rumple murmured and smiled. “You are the Heart of the West here as you are there. And Regina...at the North you stand, Emma the South and Henry the East. Help him become the blade forged from the fires of his past conquered!”

“Noooo!” Alemedia screamed as her avatar was being consumed by the ball of light conjured by the sixth Rumplestiltskin, light made from the love of his fellow guardians and friends.

“Oh yes dearie. You've lost another one!” he singsonged.

“The Balance has shifted again but I fear this may be a hollow victory.” Merlin cautioned after the sixth Rumple went through the portal to return to his family. He then clenched his hand into a fist and pressed it against his shoulder.

“Don’t you dare kneel Merlin!” he ordered the man who stood at the West Gate in the Sixth realm, his life force fading quickly as his powers passed to his successor.

“You are my superior, my lord.”

“Not to me, you’re not. Now what do you mean this may be a hollow victory?”

“She’s already chosen her vessel in this realm.”
“Whom?”

“You possess the Eye of Aramon. Look for yourself.”

His hands clenched into fists while he looked. “Of course it would have to be that blue gnat,” he growled. “Who else? She seems to like having a go at me in every realm...except we’ve made peace in mine.”

“And now it is Rumple and Maleficent’s task to bring the child back to the light.”

“That won’t be easy.”

“Ozmalita will be coming to claim my soul soon.”

“But you’ve chosen a worthy successor,” Rumple praised. “This realm will be safe with him at its West Gate.”

“Indeed, I have. The Balance is shifting again. You must go.”

“Until we meet again, Merlin.”

The elder wizard smiled before he vanished. It would be a very long time before Rumple would return to Paradise but he now knew his time had come for before him stood Ozmalita Diosa, the Keeper of Souls.

“You have done well Merlin. The circle is now complete, and the Balance restored in this realm.”

“Is it time?”

“Not yet old friend. Rumple still has much to learn but when the time comes, she will be waiting for you in the Mists of Avalon.”

He prayed that day would come soon.

Storybrooke Five
Gold Standard Verse

For the beating of five heartbeats, I must hold death in my hands. I must flirt with darkness, and challenge the beast within my own soul. And then I must strike.

Rumple now found himself standing beside his fifth counterpart, the other man’s horror his own as he saw the dagger buried in his sister’s chest. He reached out to take his counterpart’s hand, forgetting that it would pass through him.

“Rhea Laufeyson Gold-Sparrow, a brave soul you are;” Rumple praised. “And though you were trained by my family’s mortal enemy, she did train you well. Now use Irina’s power and free your brother!”

For Rhea was unaware that Baba Yaga had managed to escape her imprisonment and returned to Mother Russia where she once again fed on human souls to replenish the power that had been stolen from her by her former apprentice until she was defeated by one of Aramon’s descendants, Zelena Strogoff Sabitini.

"Papa, stop! You can't break the circle!"

"Let me go, damn you! It's killing her don't you see that? Rhea! Baelfire, let me go!"
"You keep him there even if you have to break his arms to do it Baelfire. I know MY son would!"

"Bae! Let go! It's killing her, damn it! I'm killing her!"

"Draw its power in as Irina showed you Rhea then cast it out!"

"She’s not strong enough," Alemedia laughed.

"Don’t underestimate her. She was trained by one of the darkest mages in all the realms. Irina Fedorova was no novice. Why do you think Aramon needed to create his talisman? It was meant for her because he knew he couldn’t defeat her without it."

He could feel the darkness taunting Rhea, tempting her to become its new vessel, her life force being drawn from her body as the darkness pierced through the light in her soul.

One, two, three…four….

"Dark One, I See you true! Dark One, I reject you! Dark One, I banish you! By earth, air, water, fire, and all the elements, I break the power of your binding!"

"By the power of true love, I shatter this curse!"

She slumped to the floor, her life force depleted.

"Bound by name are we
I surrender my power to thee!" Rumple chanted.

"What ARE you doing?" the goddess demanded. "Her soul is MNE!"

"Breaking the rules, dearie and her soul doesn’t belong to you now, it belongs to Ozmalita but she won’t be claiming it yet!"

"Rhea! Don't leave me! Come back! Rhea! Come back!" he heard his counterpart pleading desperately.

"Part of yourself you must give
Now by your will, let her live," Rumple recited.

"Rhea! I . . . won't . . . lose you again!"

Rumple Five pressed his lips to his sister's forehead and kissed her softly as part of his life force flowed from his body into hers.

"You bastard!" Alemedia raged. "What have you done?"

"Oh, didn't you know? I'm not the only Rumple who's a demigod, dearie."

"WHAT?"

"He's the great grandson of Loki himself, bitch so unless you want the Trickster on your ass, I suggest you tuck tail and go back to Shadowlands."

"You unlocked his demigod powers!"

"Only the most important ones...for now. He'll unlock the others as he goes along."
"This isn't over. I still have blades out there. You won't find them all."

"Oh I think we will...with a little help. One day the realms will be united and when we turn our combined powers on you, you're gonna wish you were never born."

"Bring it on. Bring it on," she challenged.

"Challenge accepted."

He knew he couldn't remain in the astral plane for long but this cursebreaking had been more difficult than the others and came at a much higher price but Rhea Laufeyson Gold-Sparrow had been up to the task.

"Your great grandfather would be proud dearies."

Suddenly he felt hands shaking him and he was back in his own shop.

"The ball's in our court now," he murmured.

"Where the hell were you?"

"Didn't you feel the shift in the Balance, Wyatt?"

“I did. And now I’m ready.”

He gestured and vanished in a puff of silver smoke.

"Rumple....what's h...happening..." Belle's teeth were chattering so much that she could barely get the words out. She grabbed the afghan that was draped over the sofa and wrapped it around her body but it provided little comfort and to his horror Rumple could see her breath in the air. He glanced over at the thermostat on the wall. It was below zero in the house and it was summertime!

At first he assumed it was a malfunction with the central air unit until he felt the presence of dark Ozian magic and it wasn't coming from him since he no longer used dark magic. He closed his eyes and concentrated until he found the source of the darkness. He could see DG crouched on the floor of her bedroom in Archie's house crying, her tears turning to ice as they fell to the floor, causing everything around her to turn to ice as well.

"You've taken my love and torn it apart
Now let this town be as cold as my heart
Forever encased in ice shall be its fate
Until I am at last one with my true mate!" she chanted bitterly.

"Dammit!" Rumple cursed and closed his eyes again, attempting to connect with Henry through their bond. Henry....the cold...can you feel it?

Grandpa, what's happening? We're freezing over here. It's freezing everywhere...everything in town that isn't alive is turning into solid ice outside!

It's DG....and Bastinda's curse...corrupting her magic, luring her into darkness like it did me...and Az!

We have to stop her!

We can't. There's only one person who can stop her and he's the reason why she's like this now! He's done something to set her off! The only thing we can do is protect everyone in town from
freezing to death. We need to get all the other mages together right away!

"R...Rumple....M'...s...so...cold," Belle shivered. He opened his eyes and conjured a fireball, throwing it at the fireplace to heat the logs inside it then waved his hand over his wife and himself dressing them in several layers of warm winter clothing. He summoned every blanket he could find in the house and sat down on the sofa holding Belle to him while they huddled under them.

"W...W...What's happening?"

"Wyatt's done something to upset DG or the curse has made her see something that is making her believe he doesn't want her and now she's cast a cold spell on the town."

"Can you break her spell?" she asked hopefully.

"No."

"Why not? You're the most powerful mage in all the realms!"

"I may be but this curse isn't on me anymore...it's on her...them. They're the only ones who can break it and she has absorbed more of Alemedia’s dark power."

"Rumple....could this have happened to us...?"

"No."

Rumple closed his eyes again, sending out a mental distress call to anyone else with magic to appear in his home right away. The first to teleport in were Az and Archie. They were bundled in winter clothing and Az was in tears.

"Dellia, you go on and huddle under those blankets with Belle and get warm, okay? Rumple, is there anything you can do about this?"

"No. This is between DG and Wyatt and unless they deal with the issues they've had in their past, they'll never be able to break their curse and neutralize their blades. We'll have to evacuate the town."

Regina appeared in the room with Robin, Henry and Roland. "What the hell, Gold! Did you do this?"

"No, it was DG...and Wyatt..."

"Dammit! Can you break it?"

"No, Mom. They have to. It's their curse," Henry explained.

Seconds later Emma appeared.

“Whoever pissed off the White Witch needs to apologize right now!”

“This isn’t Jadis, dearie, it’s DG.”

“Wait….the White Witch is real? Never mind. I already know fairy tale characters are real since I’m the kid of one. But you’re telling me DG did this? Why?”

“She’s seen something that’s disturbed her, something to do with Wyatt. I’m trying to find out what, but something is blocking my sight. Namely someone.”
“Alemedia,” Henry muttered. “She knows she’s weaker now that she’s lost three more Dark Ones and her power is passing to DG. She’s turning DG against Wyatt so she’ll kill him and he’ll kill her.”

“And the Balance will never be restored if they do so in hate,” Rumple finished.

“Well that’s just great but right now we gotta make sure everyone in the town doesn’t freeze to death first!” Emma snapped.

“It’s too dangerous to drive out. We’ll have to attempt a mass teleportation.”

The mages joined hands, praying that the two Dark Ones in their midst wouldn’t try to stop them. Moments later everyone except DG and Wyatt appeared outside the town line and began bombarding them with questions.

“Silence!” Rumple roared and began to explain the situation to the terrified residents.

“So, what you’re saying is DG and Wyatt have to fight each other?” David asked.

“It’s the only way they can break both curses,” Archie answered gravely. “And if they fail this time…”

“Evil will rule the realms,” Rumple finished.

Moments later a box appeared in Az’s hands. She opened it slowly and found a heart inside, her sister’s heart.

“You’ve waited half a century for this Deege. You can’t fail this time,” she murmured.

Through their bond DG could feel Wyatt’s darkness at its full strength, powered by his doubts and memories of every fault and mistake they'd ever made in their lives and as was hers powered by her own doubts and fears.

Confront your past and slam the door on it, DG, she could hear Archie saying.

She is a goddess, she can give him everything he could possibly want, change herself into everything he wants her to be.

So can you. Remember DG, love is strength, but it can also be a weakness. Use your love for him to strengthen his light and weaken her, Az advised.

Her lips curved into a sly smile as she picked up her sword. She’d waited five hundred years for this day, and nothing was going to stop her from achieving her victory.

They stood face to face on the frozen street, she wearing robes of red satin with the symbol of a chalice on the back, he in robes of black satin with the image of an axe on the back. Each carried a sword, his forged from the remains of his previous life, hers from the remains of the prison she'd freed him from in this life. He sneered at her.

"So, you wish to face the dragon's wrath to earn the right to call yourself a master," he said bitterly.

"I demand the right to claim him as my mate!" she declared.

"Then earn it!" he snarled as he raised his sword, their blades clashing in the air. Keeping the memories of watching his duels with Glitch in her mind, she studied every move he made looking for a weakness, but he closed every opening he made, forcing her to retreat each time.
"Still think you have what it takes, kid?" he asked sarcastically.

"I am not a kid!" she yelled.

"You can't avoid acting like one when it counts," he retorted. "Or have you forgotten that?" He kicked out at her and knocked her to the ground, her sword flying out of her hands. As he approached to deliver the death blow, she tripped him. They both jumped to their feet and their swords clashed again. "Looks like you need a few reminders. I bared my goddam heart and soul to you that night at your palace and what did you do...throw them right back in my face because you were too afraid to believe you could actually break my curse and make me human again!"

"And I have never forgiven myself for it!" DG cried.

"Maybe not but you still shared Nicolai’s bed."

"And while I did, I wanted it to be you there with me not him!"

"Who ran crying to her mother when she got scared by an old woman? Who disobeyed her parents and went into the woods? Whose little adventures always got her sister in trouble? Yours. Always your mistakes hurt someone else more than they hurt you!"

DG backed away from him, tears streaming down her cheeks. "I was just a kid..." she croaked, repeating the very same words he said to her months ago when she first realized the truth behind Azkadellia's betrayal of the family and the OZ.

"One who should have known better since you were warned often enough!"

"You broke our bond when you were warned not to and you ditched me every chance you got! You're a coward, Wyatt Cain!"

"I lost my wife, my friends and missed seeing my son grow into a man and for what? To protect the very person who caused this whole mess in the first place."

"You go to hell!"

"You first!"

Their blades clashed again. Suddenly she found herself being shoved against the side of Geppetto’s shop, the blade of Wyatt's sword pressed against her throat, nothing but hatred in his blue eyes. "I've waited five hundred years for this, bitch," he hissed. "Had you been a woman the first time I never would have needed to come back and live a life far worse than the one I had then."

"It wasn't all bad Wyatt," she said softly. "You had Jeb, you had Adora...and you have me..."

"I had a son who was spawned on me by a dog taking orders from her master and a sniveling little girl who doesn't know how to listen to people who are older and wiser than her."

"If I could go back and change everything, I would but it's too late. What we can do is learn from our mistakes. We won't fail this time. We can't."

"You're the one who made the OZ the hellhole it was with your stupidity and you expect me to forgive you...or even want you?"

"You do want me. You love me. You've always loved me just as I've always loved you. Dammit, I am not going to lose you again!"
"You mean nothing to me!" he yelled back. "Go back to your grave where you belong!"

Oh, you're wrong about that," DG said as she pushed out at Wyatt and forced him to drop his sword. "I mean everything to you," she added firmly as she pressed her hand over his heart.

In our hearts heart lies the truth we seek
Heed not the cruel words we hear each other speak

"What the hell are you doing?" he hissed. She focused harder and her hand began to glow as she drew out the light he'd taken from her and merged it with her own dark magic. She took his other hand and pressed it against her own heart, sending some of her light back into him. "Let go of me, you bitch!"

"I'm never letting you go again!" DG vowed.

"Kill her and take your place as my consort!" Almedea demanded. Wyatt’s hands were trembling as he raised his sword.

"I’ll kill you and he’ll take his place as mine as he should have the first time had I not been so foolish!" DG sneered, holding out her own sword.

"There’s only one woman I’ll ever love and it sure as hell isn’t either of you!" He shoved DG and summoned a sarcophagus, trapping her inside it. “Little hard to breathe in there, Princess?”

"NOT AGAIN!" she cried and blasted the marble tomb apart. “Wyatt, dammit, FIGHT HER!"

He threw back his head and screamed in rage, hearing the goddess’s voice in his mind, taunting him, tempting him.

She’ll just desert you again as she always has. She’s always going to be a child in a woman’s body.

Not this time.

“Dottie, you know what you have to do.” He moved forward, the blade of her sword mere inches from his chest. There wasn’t much time. He could feel the darkness taking control again.

“No,” she sobbed, backing away.

“She’ll never let me go, we both know it. You have to save yourself, save the others. Form the circle without me.” He moved closer.

“I can’t let you go again…I can’t!”

“Our bond was never consummated. You’ll be free to bond with someone else. Just…don’t give him a rough time, okay?” He smiled faintly.

“There’ll never be anyone else for me but you Wyatt Cain.” She leaned in.

Kill her and become my consort.

“I've already chosen my consort...and it sure as hell isn't you Alemedia!” Wyatt yelled, impaling himself on DG’s sword.

“I love you, Tin Man. In this life…and the next,” DG whispered, impaling herself on his sword.

“Deege!” Az buried her face in Archie’s shoulder, sobbing brokenly.
“Father!” Jeb moaned into Xenia’s shoulder.

“The…darkest of curses we’ve taken…and with our sacrifice in the name…of our love…let…let this curse at last be broken…” the couple recited as they kissed for the last time and fell to the ground in each other’s arms, their swords crumbling to dust.
“Well daughter, you seem to have lost two more Dark Ones,” Hades chuckled and set his seeing globe aside. Once Dorothia and her Tin Man were resurrected and their bond consummated, the circle would be complete and Alemedia would be locked in her prison once again.

Unfortunately, it also meant that a certain contract he held would never be honored.

"Yes, good lackeys are so hard to find these days," drawled a familiar voice. "But then dark curses always are a bitch to keep hosts alive with." There was a flash of brilliant green light and a tall slender man with wavy dark hair and bright green eyes appeared in the room, a scowl riding his normally handsome face. "Hello, cousin. Long time no see."

"Well, well, well if it isn't my Neanderthal cousin. What are you doing here, Loki? Woman hunting?"

"No, I am quite happily married. Even if I wasn't, I'd hardly start here," the Asgardian snorted, crossing his arms over his chest. His eyes narrowed. "Someone has been playing with the Balance, Hades. And taking lives that weren't theirs to take." There was black ice and steel in Loki's tone, and he twirled the triskelle pendant about his neck in his fingers.

"Not in your realm so it's none of your business, now is it?"

"Anytime the Balance is upset it is my business, cousin. Because you cannot upset it without the ripples impacting every other pantheon. Including mine!"

"Nonestica and the five realms created with it are MY domain so I cannot see how anything that occurs in them could impact your little hole in the wall. You've been drinking too much ale with Thor again. Or smoking some of that crack they call it on Earth."

"You wish! Your daughter's meddling has cost me my son Narfi! And my baby granddaughter!" Loki snarled, and the temperature in the room plummeted to sub zero as his temper unraveled.

"What? How?"

Hades attempted to cast a heat spell, cursing when it failed, his powers still weakened by his brother's and Alemedia's machinations. No matter. All he needed was true love's kiss to restart his heart and restore his magic. Zelena's kiss, but she'd sent him away ages ago.

"Alemedia cannot interfere in your realm. She knows that."

"Watch!" the Mischief God summoned a Seeing Globe with a snap of his fingers and spoke a few words in Norse. The globe glowed and then showed the two gods the fate of Loki's son Narfi, Narfi's wife Kyra, and their baby daughter Daria.

"All I see is a lovesick fae behind that plot, not my daughter."

"Who do you think put Titania up to it?" Loki snarled. "Alemedia was the puppetmaster behind the
scenes. Look!" The scene changed, to an earlier time, and showed the Queen of the Fae sharing a goblet of summer wine with Hades' daughter, who wore the guise of Queen Mab of the Unseelie Court, but Loki's magic stripped away the illusion, showing her for her true form.

"I must congratulate you Alemedia."

"And yourself. Masterful work with the Norse. I for one cannot wait to see Loki weep when he learns the fate of his descendants."

"You fancied him a bit, didn't you?"

"What woman didn't? Ah I could've made him my consort but alas I had to content myself with my sister's leavings."

Hades paled.

Loki's fists clenched. "I'd not have had you if you had danced naked on a pole before me, you traitoress bitch!"

"Let me handle this."

"And how will you handle it?" Loki spat. "You have lost control over her, Hades! She makes a mockery of you as both god and father."

"Your father, Hades Demonio summons thee
Ozmalita Diosa, appear now before me!"

Adora gasped when she teleported into her father's chambers, clenched her hand into a fist, pressed it against her shoulder and knelt before the Norse god. "Papa, why is Loki here?"

"Alemedia has been meddling in his pantheon, daughter. We must contain her before she harms anyone else."

"The only one can defeat her is her successor. You know that Papa."

Adora turned to Loki. "I am sorry cousin. You will have your justice, but I fear it will not be until the time the realms unite."

Hades sighed. "The only person who could contain her was her mother and she had my Seph killed by a wraith."

"Do you promise, little Hopeful One?" Loki asked softly, raising her to her feet. "For I would hate to call a blood feud upon your House. There has been enough bloodshed."

"We must find and neutralize Alemedia's remaining Dark One daggers. As each one is neutralized, more of her power passes onto her successor, Dorothea Ozopov. Dorothea can destroy her once she is at full strength." She smiled. "The Strogoff heir has already inherited Lurline's power and will balance the light."

"Right now, her soul lingers between life and death...her fellow Guardians must restore her heart and surrender part of their life force my light," Hades reminded her.

"So I have felt the Balance begin slowly to shift," Loki nodded. "Perhaps this may yet be set aright. Well, as aright as it can be. My family will grieve our loss for centuries. As it is I had to cast a strong calming spell on Vali and Thor lest they come here seeking vengeance."
"Let our Guardians do their duty cousin. I will guide them but there are certain events I cannot interfere in," Adora pleaded.

"I understand. Keep the Balance, child. I shall deal with Titania later," Loki said grimly, his smile terrible to behold.

"May I speak with you privately?"

"What are you plotting Ozmalita?"

"Nothing, Papa. I just want to talk. It's been some time since I've seen him."

"Of course. Do you need me to create a room?" Loki teased, something of his old demeanor surfacing.

"If you wish," she giggled.

Hades groaned and rolled his eyes. "Manwhore. And he says he has a wife!"

"Oh do be quiet, you old sourpuss!" Loki shot back. "Adora is like one of my daughters, so quit your grumbling. I swear, you could give a stone lessons on sobriety!"

"Dick. Oh I so love this modern Earth insults. They put our oldies but baddies to shame."

He gestured and the Victrola began to play.

Adora cast a silencing spell on the room and took Loki's hand in hers. "Our dear Lilliana is the key to many things, cousin.....righting old wrongs and healing old wounds."

"She is her mother's daughter," Loki murmured softly.

"But missing the pieces of her heart," Adora said sadly.

"And is there one who holds them? For I think there must be, somewhere."

"We've met one before. The former cricket in the fifth Storybrooke. The other is her son."

"Consort and child. That will work nicely," Loki said approvingly.

"One of Daria's children lives in that realm. He is a counterpart of Lilliana's son."

"My great-grandson," Loki declared with pride.

"One of twins. The other I saw in the OZ eleven years ago. The third was once held captive by Aramon's mortal enemy, Irina Fedorovna but I believe she used the name Baba Yaga."


Adora conjured a seeing globe and handed it to him. "Rumplestiltskin, Robert and Rhea. They do you proud, cousin."

"Identical twins, like my Narfi and Vali. And my great-granddaughter is as lovely as her mother," Loki murmured, his eyes sheening with tears.

"Well versed in both light and dark magic but she would not have been able to save her brother had Lilliana's son not unlocked his demigod powers so that he could give her part of his life force to
restore her. All magic comes with a price, dear cousin."

And love was the strongest magic in all the realms.

"Which is as it should be. They are strong in the rune magic, and the frost magic of my Jotun
father," Loki noted, pleased.

Adora laughed. "Then I suppose there'll be some snow battles in that house!"

"I doubt it not," Loki giggled. "We frost bloods love to play in the snow. Which should have been
a clue to Irina that her apprentice was more than a Seer, for only those of Jotun blood can survive
in the Frozen North."

"Irina wasn't known for her intelligence."

"No, which is probably a good thing," Loki snorted.

He cocked his head to one side, as if listening to a conversation, which he was.

"Papa! Modi is chasing me scissors and threatened to cut my hair off like a shorn lamb's!" his
daughter Miri sent to him via her communication pendant.

"Uncle Loki, the brat turned my hair blue!" Modi added. "Payback's a bitch, Miriamele!"

"Enough!" the exasperated god snapped. "Stop bickering or by the Nine when I get home you will
both be scrubbing the dungeon with toothbrushes! Now behave!"

"Yes, sir!" the two teenagers replied sulkily.

"Kids!" Loki sighed. "Gonna drive me to drink!"

Adora giggled. "Yours or fosterlings?"

"Miri and Modi are at it again," Loki replied. One was his adopted daughter, the other his nephew,
who he had practically raised alongside his own because Thor and Sif were away so much.

"You should tell Thor he owes you back child support!"

Loki started laughing. "He would be in debt to me for a few centuries! But he does tell me that his
sons are better raised with me than they would have been with him, so that's worth its weight in
gold."

"Yes it is."

"He's also lucky I love kids." Loki admitted.

"But you will miss them when they're grown. My Jeb is a man now and soon he'll make me a
grandmother."

"I am sure you will enjoy that. Because you can spoil them and send them home!" Loki winked. "A
pleasure I missed with my Daria. But I do have Fenris' Ragnar and Lokiya to spoil."

"And the grandchildren Daria's family gives you."

"Yes. Once I reveal myself to them."
"And Norns forbid I forget my Astra, who is going to turn my hair white before I am three thousand the way she is going." the god said ruefully, referring to his toddler daughter.

"But that's what children are made to do!"

"My parents will tell me it's their revenge for what I put them through," Loki said.

"But they forget Thor was the one who blew a huge hole in the palace roof trying to use Mjolnir the first time! Even after Mother told him not to! Then he blamed ME for it."

"Lurline and Alemedia are and were the troublemakers in our family as you know."

"Yes, and they were worse than either me or my brother or any of my children. You were an angel compared to them, darling."

"I try to be but I've made my share of mistakes. I've interfered in a Guardian bonding twice and now...now I must make it right."

"But you learn from your mistakes, which is the most important thing."

At that moment she could feel DG and Wyatt's souls calling to her, begging her to take them to Paradise for their final rest.

"I must go now. We will see each other again cousin."

But she suspected he wasn't finished with her father yet.

"Until we meet again, darling." He kissed her forehead and gave her a hug. "The Norns bless you, little cousin."

Adora smiled at him as she vanished.

Hades was still listening to his Victrola when the silencing spell was lifted.

"There is very little I can do about my daughter without all my powers, Loki. Ozmalita will do all she can to keep her contained but unless all those daggers she tethered her life force to can be found and neutralized, her reign of chaos will continue. You can thank my dear mother-in-law for that."

"You can't blame ALL of Alemedia's misdeeds on Demeter's curse Hades so don't even bother trying."

"Then what do you suggest I do blame it on then?"

"I may spend most of my time in Asgard but that doesn't mean I haven't been monitoring the other realms. Alemedia inherited her cruel streak from you."

"I..."

"You groomed her to be your instrument of revenge against your pantheon, but you never expected that one day she would strike against you, did you?"

Hades glared at him.

"That's the trouble when you treat a child like a pawn. Eventually they turn on you. Odin learned that the hard way too."

'Yes, my father treated me like dirt once upon a time. And yes, I took my own brand of revenge, BUT I never disrupted the Balance and killed innocents. I confined my rage to him and our
enemies. I exiled him and Thor for a time, I didn't murder them. And then I learned to let my pride and anger go. So don't begin to compare me with your twisted daughter, cousin!"

"I never thought she'd go as far as murdering her own mother..."

Loki shook his head. "You unleashed a monster, Hades. She has all the power and pride and ambition of your family and none of the compassion."

"All I can do now is hope the Guardians will do their duty and find those blades."

'You had best pray they are successful. Or else I may need to settle this myself and that's the last thing you should want."

He knew well that Loki's idea of justice was swift and severe, far worse than any his daughter could ever dream up.

"I think this concludes our conversation. Just remember though, you owe me wereguid for my son, and I will be watching. Because no one breaks deals with me." Loki growled. "Oh, I'll remember. Farewell cousin."

'Until we meet again.' Then Loki vanished in a swirl of green and gold sparkles.

"Show off," Hades muttered.

He gestured and a scroll appeared in his hands.

"Are you ready to make a deal with me now, Papa?"

"Give me my powers back then we’ll talk, daughter. Until then, take a hike as they say in up there."

"How do you expect me to do that when my Dark Ones are breaking their curses?"

He looked up, seeing streaks of gray in her dark hair. “You’ve been weakened but you bounce back. You always do. Just like I taught you.”

“I still have a Dark One whose soul hasn’t been claimed yet. And he just so happens to be the one whose name is on that contract you’re holding. He can’t have a second son if he’s dead, now can he?” Alemedia grinned. “And we both know your reasons for wanting to ‘own’ Rumplestiltskin. You think it will bring your witch running back into your arms.”

Hades’ eyes glowed fire red. “I’d chose my next words very carefully, daughter.”

“We can both have what we want. I get one of my vessels back, you get your witch, a pet and the son you’ve always wanted. I’d say you’re getting the better end of the deal.”

“And how do you plan to resurrect him?"

“The oldest way. A blood sacrifice.”

“Ah….so you’re going to use his firstborn as the sacrifice. Risky but clever, daughter.”

Alemedia froze suddenly. “No! NO!”

Seconds later she vanished.
He reached over the side of his chair and pressed a button, several pages of a book falling out of it. He shuffled through them until he found the page he was looking for.

“Soon Zelena,” he murmured. “Soon you’ll be with me again and I can give you everything you’ve ever wanted.”

Paradise
The Ozian Heaven Realm

DG awoke to find herself standing on the gazebo at Finaqua, tears in her eyes when she saw her mother sitting on their old swing, singing her favorite lullaby.

“Two little princesses dancing in a room
Spinning fast and free on their little toes
Where the light will take them
There’s only one way to know
Two little princesses dancing in a room…”

“Mother,” she moaned.

“DG. My angel. My light,” Lavinia said softly and held out her arms.

“I’ve failed Mother…he’s not with me….he’s gone to her….the Balance is still shifting,” she wept.

“Years ago I surrendered part of my life force to you because I knew one day you restore the Balance and save the OZ.”

“But I didn’t….it’s gone! It’s all gone!”

“One day it will return my angel but not as you remember it. I cannot return. My place is here now with your father.” Lavinia cupped her daughter’s face in her hands. “And yours is back in the mortal realm with Wyatt. Go back my angel and live the life you’ve always been meant to. Marry him. Have children…and remember us.”

“I will Mother. I will. I love you both so much. Where is Daddy? Why can’t I see him?”

“You didn’t look hard enough,” Tyler joked from behind his easel. DG ran to her father and embraced him. “Still a pistol, like your mother. Wyatt’s gonna have his hands full with you.”

“I want to go back…but I don’t know how.”

Tyler pressed her hand against her chest. “That’s how you find your way back honey. What did Hank always tell you? Home is where your heart is. I had him modeled after your grandfather, my father. That’s what he always told me. Find your heart and you’ll find home and all life’s answers can be…”

“…Found along the old road,” DG finished and kissed his cheek, the brick road appearing behind her. She smiled, recalling her first trip down that road centuries earlier. She started walking down the road, singing the song that made her think of Wyatt every time she heard it.

“Lovers forever face to face
My city your mountains
Stay with me stay
I need you to love me
I need you today
Give to me your leather
Take from me my lace…”

Paradise
The Ozian Heaven Realm

Find my prison and release me Dottie, Wyatt thought from inside the iron suit that had been his prison for many years in his second life. It was not where he thought he would be in the afterlife but Fate or something else had decided to play a cruel prank on him once again.

Our love wasn’t strong enough. I wasn’t strong enough and I’m in this damn dark hellhole forever.

“I have my own life and I am stronger
Than you know
But I carry this feeling
When you walked into my house
That you won't be walking out the door…” he heard a voice singing. It was a song he’d heard before and he smiled at the memory.

The Dream Realm
Two years before the Double Eclipse

“…But that time I saw you
I knew with you to light my nights
Somehow I’d get by…”

“I think I’m starting to like this modern music of yours, Dottie,” he said to DG one evening while they were dancing in the yard to the music playing on what DG called her ‘CD player’. “What is this song called?”

“Leather and Lace.”

“Are the people singing it married?”

“No but they sang it for a couple that was getting married. It didn’t work out but it’s still a great song.” She laid her head on his chest. “And you’re learning these dances pretty fast Tin Man.”

He chuckled. “I’m not stepping on your toes as often now though I wish you’d listen to me and wear shoes out here more.”

“I like being in my bare feet.”

“You like doing a lot of things you shouldn’t,” he joked.

She raised her head and caressed his cheek. “I wanna dance like this every night when we finally get to meet Tin Man.”

“You’re gonna have to teach me it all again.”

“I’m gonna look forward to it…” she murmured and laid her head on his chest again, wishing time would stop and she could be in his arms that way for the rest of her life.
Storybrooke, Maine
10AM Four days after the Final Eclipse

“DG!” Az sobbed, cradling her sister’s body into her arms. “You can’t leave me now, you just can’t! Come back to me! Come back to us.”

A few feet away a heartbroken Jeb held his father. “There has to be a way to bring him back. There has to!”

“There is,” Henry said. “The box you have Jeb. Open it now!”

“Their hearts,” Archie whispered. “Dellia, DG’s box! We have to put her heart back in and restore it before her soul crosses over!”

“It will take more than that to bring them back dearies,” Rumple spoke up. “Is it a price you are willing to pay?”

“Tell me what to do!” Jeb demanded.

Az’s eyes met Archie’s. He nodded.

“Rumple don’t you even think about it!” Regina cried. “You’ve already given enough!”

“And I would give my last breath if that was what it took!” he snapped. “What she has given to me I must give back to her! I gave her mother my word that I would watch over her and I will.”

“Then you’re not doing it alone. What you give, I give,” Belle said, taking his hand in hers.

Az removed DG’s heart from its box and pushed it back into her chest. She took Archie’s hand and they placed them over her heart.

“Part of ourselves do we give
Now by our will let her live,” they chanted.

“Part of ourselves do we give
Now by our will let him live,” Jeb and Xenia chanted as they held their hands over Wyatt’s chest.

“Let me in there! Let me in there dammit.” Ambrose begged. “Take whatever you want from me if it will bring them both back!”

“Raw give too,” Raw murmured.

“Oh hell, take some of mine too!” added Elmer. “But I am gonna enjoy teasing that kid over this!”

Rumple conjured an orb and held it up as white mists emitted from all their mouths.

“Part of ourselves do we give
Now by our will let them live!” he and Belle chanted as the life force flowed into the orb. It floated over to where Wyatt and DG lay.

“It’s not working! It’s not working,” Az sobbed. “DG, please don’t cross over! Come back!”

“Come on DG,” Archie begged.
“Nothing can hurt us if we’re together Deege. Hear me!”

“Father! Come on Father. Don’t give up now. You can’t!”

“They’re about to cross over,” Henry said gravely as their life forces returned to their bodies.

“NOOOO!” Az screamed.

“Father!” Jeb wailed.

Paradise
The Ozian Heaven Realm

“Lovers forever face to face
My city your mountains
Stay with me stay
I need you to love me
I need you today
Give to me your leather
Take from me my lace…”

“Wyatt!” DG cried, running to the tin suit that had been his prison in his second life, fearful that she would find it empty. She pressed her hand against the lock. It began to glow and the suit opened, Wyatt falling into her open arms.

“Dottie….Princess….” he whispered and kissed her.

“Wyatt,” she sobbed and kissed him back.

“You came back for me…”

“I love you Tin Man and nothing, nothing is ever gonna take you away from me again!” she cried passionately and kissed him back. He broke their kiss and gazed deeply into her eyes, asking the question she’d waited centuries to answer. She nodded through her tears.

He swung her up in his arms and started to carry her back to the cottage, kicking the door open with his foot and kicked it shut again. She giggled as he carried into her into the bedroom and deposited her on the bed.

“This isn't exactly what I had in mind for our first night together,” he confessed.

“Am I complaining?”

"No."

"I have one request though…lose the hat."

Wyatt burst out laughing. "Did you really think I'd wear my hat to bed?"

"Wouldn't surprise me."

He sat down beside her and leaned forward, capturing her lips. He could feel her body trembling.

"Dottie? We don't have to do this now if you're not ready..."

She pressed her fingertips against his mouth to silence him and began to speak, her voice thick with the desire that was raging within her, the desire of the dragon for her mate, the desire of a woman for her man. "I've been ready for centuries. And this time nothing is going to stop us."
Wyatt longed to touch her yet he still hesitated remembering how nervous he and Adora were on their wedding night more than twenty years ago. He'd planned on marrying DG first but it seemed that the OZ had other ideas and he wasn't going to argue with it. He was as tired of waiting as she was.

"It's going to hurt a bit at first sweetheart and you know I don't like hurting you..."

She smiled softly as she reached up and caressed his cheek. "Now do you understand why I love you so much? Not very men would even give a thought to that. What did I do to deserve a lover as wonderful as you?"

"I keep asking myself what I did to deserve you every day of my life, sweetheart," he murmured.

They kissed again, this time slower, deeper. As Wyatt's icy blue eyes met her sapphire ones and their mouths fused as one she felt as if she were sinking into a warm ocean, never wanting to come up for air. She didn't need to. Every breath she took was his and every breath he took was hers and in the world the darkness could not breach they at last became one heart, one body, one soul....

Storybrooke, Maine
10:20 AM Four Days after the Final Eclipse

The orb in Rumple's hands shattered and a powerful shockwave scattered everyone on the street, their life forces reabsorbed into their bodies and the ice covering everything in the town began to melt as they slowly got to their feet.

"DG! DG!" Az cried, frantically searching for her sister's body.

"Father?" Jeb asked.

"Where are they?" Archie asked.

"Looking for us?" they heard DG ask. She and Wyatt stood in front of Granny's Bed and Breakfast, their joined hands glowing.

"DG!" Az sobbed and ran to her sister, throwing her arms around her.

"Father!" Jeb hugged his father.

"Umm, does someone want to tell me what the hell just happened?" Emma demanded.

"The circle is complete," Rumple murmured.

"And now its time we sent that bitch back where she belongs." DG growled.
Let The Circle Be Unbroken

I won't take no prisoners, won't spare no lives

Nobody's puttin' up a fight

I got my bell, I'm gonna take you to hell

AC/DC – Hells Bells

“Do you know what to do, Rumple?” DG inquired of him. He nodded.

“My mother’s memories passed to me before she died, memories she inherited from her father. You should remember him, cousin. You’ve encountered him in both your lives.”

“The Mystic Man,” she murmured.

“He was Alexander Strogoff?”

“You only saw him a few times in your first life, Wyatt.”

“And his powers passed to me,” Henry spoke up. “He was the East Guardian. Mister Cain, you were meant to be the West but Nicolai Ozopov stood in your place and couldn’t cast the spell properly because he hadn’t mastered the element of fire yet.”

“Well that seal’s gonna hold this time. I’m still not that good at my magic but your grandpa is.”

“You will be sharing powers with DG since your bond is now complete. Henry, you will share yours with Regina and Emma. Belle, you will be sharing mine. Az and Archie, you two already know what to do. DG, you are the only one of us who has fought this battle before.”
“But this time we’re taking the fight to Alemedia.”

“In Ephesis!?” Az exclaimed.

“Whoa, wait a minute, are you telling me we are going to Hell, literally?” Emma demanded.

“I’m afraid so dearie. The first seal was forged in the mortal realm with an incomplete circle that made it too weak to hold her. If we forge this one in her domain with her powers weakened it can trap her. She will not be able to walk the mortal realm without a vessel. Right now she is able to because of that weak seal,” Rumple explained.

“We don’t know how many more Dark Ones she has but if we can trap her essence in them, each one that breaks their curse brings us closer to destroying her, putting DG in her place and restoring the Balance,” Az added.

“Yeah, we’re going to Hell and apparently I’m driving the bus,” DG muttered.

“And we’re running out of time. We don’t know what she’s up to so the sooner we do this, the better."

The Evil Queen’s Palace

Enchanted Forest Two

(Canon Verse)

Rumplestiltskin was dead and her plans to travel back in time and force him to choose HER to cast his curse had gone up in flames. Zelena screamed in rage and hurled a candelabra at Regina’s mirror with her magic.

“Pouting won’t solve anything dear,” Alemedia scolded, waving her hand and repairing the broken mirror. “You can still travel back in time.”

“How? He is the North symbol of wisdom. There’s no one else in this wretched realm intelligent
enough to replace him!”

“Well then you’ll just have to bring him back, now won’t you?”

“And how am I supposed to do that? I know the Laws of Magic! You can’t bring back the dead!”

“Yes, you can. And you can change the past…with the proper magic of course. The Laws are in place to prevent novices from dabbling in magic they can’t understand. But you are no novice, Zelena.”

“Why are you helping me?”

I’m not, Mother. I’m helping me. You are the only one that can destroy me and take my throne, but as long as you’re under MY curse, you are under MY control.

And Persephone’s cursed self believed she was allergic to the one thing that would break her curse…ambrosia, the food and drink of choice for her pantheon.

“Let’s just say I admire your wickedness.”

“What do I need to do?”

Alemedia gestured and her grandfather’s scrolls appeared before her. “This book is written in a language the few people are given the privilege to translate. You’ll find the spells you need within it.”

The Scrolls of Forbidden Knowledge had been one of Zeus’ most prized possessions. Stolen from his own father Cronus, they contained spells on everything, including raising the dead and moving through time. The latter two spells were the ones needed for the goddess’s plans to come to fruition. Persephone had stolen them centuries ago at her husband’s request and translated them into their own language that the Greek gods would never be able to translate. Hades spoke often of using the spells within them to extract his own revenge against his brother and Demeter only he would never have the pleasure. Alemedia wanted the glory of destroying the Greek pantheon for herself.
Zelena carefully unrolled the scrolls and began to read, smiling evilly. The ingredient for her resurrection spell had just returned to the Enchanted Forest. The others would have to be created but she was up to the task.

She teleported to the Dark Castle, disgusted by the deplorable condition it had been left in by that group of savages that called themselves “The Merry Men” Oh they were merry alright, merrily making pigs of themselves. With a few waves of her hand the castle was once again restored to its former glory. She gestured again and a man appeared in the library bound and gagged.

“Now it's time for you to pay your debt to me, Lumiere,” she hissed at her prisoner. “Make certain the visitors to this castle find this book. Fail and I’ll melt you down.”

He nodded sadly.

She placed a book on the shelf, a book similar to the one Rumple had in his collection about the history of the Dark Ones. This book and its Storybrooke duplicate would have altered text of course but Rumple’s latest conquest would be none the wiser. She watched under a cloaking spell as Rumple’s former maid and son searched the library, finding the book as they were meant to with Lumiere’s help and now they had discovered the Vault of the Dark One but the enchanted candle couldn’t keep his lies straight and now all her plans would go up in flames….again.

“Rumple didn't sacrifice his life for good, so he could return to be a slave to evil!” Belle insisted. “And this Wicked Witch is evil. We must let him rest or find another way.”

“My father is the king of loopholes. I'm sure he'll figure out a way to deal with her.”

“What if he can't? Think what she could do, if the Dark One was under her control. We'll find another way to bring him back.”

“What, if there is no other way? I can't waste any more time. I need to get back. To hell with the costs!”

“It's what your father told himself when he forged the curse that condemned countless people to misery. Don't make the same mistake he made! Neal, wait!”

Bae pressed the key he’d found in the book into the Vault’s lock and screamed in pain when it branded his skin. The bloodline sacrifice taken, the Vault opened, and Rumple rose up from the puddle of black oil seeping out of it, his dagger in his hand.
“Rumple?” Belle asked fearfully.

Bae groaned and collapsed in the snow. Belle hurried over to him and knelt beside him. “Oh Neal, what did you do? Hold on, hold on!”

“Belle….BAE, NO!” Rumple howled and took his son in his arms. Zelena stepped out from her hiding place, smirking.

“Poor Baelfire. Just couldn't learn from his father's mistakes. He wanted so badly to get back to his son. couldn't see the forest for the trees.”

“You did this! You tricked him!” Rumple accused, pointing the dagger at her.

“All I did was pass on some vital information. With the help of a friend. And then, your son did the rest.”

“You didn't tell him the price!”

“Oops. It's a sin of omission, love. Although, I thought it was rather obvious. A life for a life.”

“It's gonna be alright, son.”

“I do doubt that.”

“Go!” he ordered Belle and drew Bae closer. “I’m not gonna let him go.” He held tightly to Bae and the dagger, attempting to teleport but he had not fully regained his powers yet.

“Sorry Rumple. You can’t hold on to both.”

Once again he would have to choose. His son…or his power…and he would not make the wrong choice this time. The dagger slipped out of his hand.
“Wow, I didn’t think you had it in you,” Zelena chuckled when she picked up the dagger. Rumple held his son closer and closer until they merged into one body. “You got your son, but you’ve lost yourself.”

“No Rumple. No room! No room! No Rumple,” he babbled insanely.

Having his son occupy his body was only a minor setback that would soon be rectified.

“It’s done,” she informed Alemedia upon their return to the Dark Castle.

“Once they’re separated you will have full control over him. Do me proud dear.”

“Oh, I will.”

She had just done one of two things considered impossible: brought back the dead. Now she faced her greatest challenge; travelling back in time. It would take time, but it would be done!

“Oh, I can just hear Zeus now,” Silas said weakly when Alemedia teleported herself outside where he waited.

“Your life force is fading Silas. It’s time.”

“I’m ready,” he murmured.

She reached into his chest and pulled out his heart, the organ as dark as his soul, any traces of humanity eliminated decades ago. His physical body was now a pile of ash that she vanished with her magic. She teleported to Snow White’s castle under a cloaking spell, wandering the halls until she found the person, or more appropriately the cricket she was looking for. She waved her hand over it, transforming him from a cricket back to the human he’d been born.

“The darkest of evils shall be reborn from the purest of hearts,” she murmured and reached into Archie Hopper’s chest, removing his heart. There was only a small dark spot on it from the one
great mistake of his life. She held up Silas Finster’s rotting heart, merging the two with her magic before she pushed it back into his chest. She vanished as his eyes fluttered open and he sat up, clutching his chest.

“Wh….What’s happened to me!” Geppetto!” he cried out.

“Jiminy….Archie?! What’s happened? You're human again!”

“I…I don’t know….chest hurts…..” he panted. “F….Find Blue!”

His terrified friend ran down the hall as fast as his legs could carry him until he reached the Blue Fairy’s chambers.

“Something’s happened! Jiminy…Archie is human again and he’s in terrible pain!” he announced.

“That’s not possible! He is unable to take human form when he’s back here!” Blue exclaimed and followed him to Archie’s room. He was still in bed, barely able to move. Blue waved her wand, attempting to recast her transformation spell but was blasted back.

“I don’t understand it….something is preventing me from changing him back!”

“Archie, are you still in pain?”

“It’s…it’s stopping…..” He lay back down and closed his eyes.

“It’s that Wicked Witch. It has to be,” Geppetto growled.

“But why would she attack me? I’ve never met her.”

“I don’t know but we have to do something about her before she hurts anyone else.”
“If what Belle told us is true, there’s very little we can do as long as Rumplestiltskin is under her control,” Blue spoke up. “Archie, I am going to ward this room in case they try again.”

“Don’t worry about me. The others are in more danger than I am.”

_Oh, you’re wrong about that Archie_, he heard a menacing voice taunt. _And one day you’re going to find out just how much danger you are in._

Geppetto and Blue stayed with him until he fell back to sleep. He was safe again…for now.

**Ephesis**

**The Ozian Hell Realm**

**11:45 AM Four days after the Final Eclipse**

_“The Guardian of the North Gate summons thee_  
_Alemedia Demonia, appear now before me!”_

_“The Heart of the North Gate summons thee_  
_Alemedia Demonia, appear now before me!”_

_“The Guardian of the South Gate summons thee_  
_Alemedia Demonia, appear now before me!”_

_“The Heart of the South Gate summons thee_  
_Alemedia Demonia, appear now before me!”_

_“The Guardian of the East Gate summons thee_  
_Alemedia Demonia, appear now before me!”_

_“The Hearts of the East Gate summon thee_
Alemedia Demonia, appear now before me!

“The Guardian of the West Gate summons thee
Alemedia Demonia, appear now before me!”

“The Heart of the West Gate summons thee
Alemedia Demonia, appear now before me!”

“I’ve never been one to shy away from a challenge,” Alemedia laughed as she appeared. “Alright then, ‘let’s get ready to rumble’ as they say in that pitiful world you’re stuck in.”

Do NOT break the circle no matter what happens! Rumple instructed the others.

Just hold my hand Deege. Remember….

Nothing can hurt us if we’re together.

So we just stand here? Emma asked.

No. She’s going to attack us and we need to be ready, Archie sent.

Alemedia stomped on the floor and a set of vines with thorns shot out of it, wrapping itself around DG and Wyatt. DG pressed her hand down on the vines and water droplets formed on them. Henry sent a blast of air at the wet vines and they turned into ice. Wyatt used his sword to cut them loose while Az and Archie opened a crack in the earth and forced the icy vines into it.

"That the best you can do?" Emma taunted. “You’re a goddess.”

"I haven't even started yet, little girl."

Almedea transformed into a giant hawk and flew toward Henry. He slammed his staff into the
ground and a funnel cloud began to spin toward her that she opened her mouth and swallowed. Emma and Regina shifted into giant eagles and began tearing at the hawk’s wings with their claws.

“You hurt our son we shred your ass to pieces, bitch!” Regina snarled.

"Your little bird getting its wings clipped, dearie?” Rumple giggled as a battered Alemedia crashed to the floor. She shifted back to her human form and blasted him away from Belle.

“Rumple!”

“Ah, the Beauty of the Beast, so fond of chipped cups….so why don’t you be one!”

A chipped cup now lay where Belle stood. She attempted to shift back but her novice magic was no match for a goddess, even in a weakened state.

Strands of gold thread wrapped themselves around Rumple’s arms and limbs and began to pull him in all directions.

“B….Bound….heart….body….and….soul….are….we….I….surrender….my….power….to….thee!” Rumple panted.

Rejuvenated, Belle shifted back into human form.

“Let him GO you BITCH!” Belle screamed.

“Rip them apart!” Alemedia shouted.

A flock of mobat demons flew into the throne room.

“Pongo, demon form…NOW!” Archie commanded.
“Perdy, demon form!” Az ordered.

A portal opened in the wall and the Dalmatians ran into the throne room, shifting into their demon forms and taking flight while DG and Wyatt shifted into their dragon forms.

“Here monkey monkey monkeys,” DG taunted, pursing several demons.

“Belle! Fire, fire kills them!” Rumple cried, moaning in pain.

She conjured a fireball and threw it at a demon swooping down on her.

“Oh monekys…let’s play,” Regina laughed evilly, fireballs in her hands. Emma conjured several of her own while Henry created a twister.

“Moms, send them here, quick!”

Az and Archie shifted into crickets and flew over to where Rumple was suspended, attempting to gnaw through the binds.

“Dammit! They’re sold gold!” Archie cursed.

“Leave…me…here….help Belle!” he cried.

“How the hell are you still stuck in this?”

“Binds….created….by Hephaestus….only he or another god …can break them…”

WHACK! His left arm was released from its bond.

“Oh a weapon made by the God of Fire. There’s always a loophole, darling!” Belle cried triumphantly, holding up a sword once belonging to the god that had been in Rumple’s collection
of items stolen from the gods and kept in the Dark Castle and his shop.

She sliced through his remaining bonds and handed him the sword.

“I always hated cleaning that room because it was always infested with dust bunnies! I think you did it on purpose.”

“Well it’s a damned good thing you remembered it, sweetheart! That’s it! If we use their weapons, we can subdue her!”

“Please tell me you have a lot of them,” Archie begged.

He smirked. “I may have acquired a few and not just from our pantheon. I hope the other gods are feeling charitable today.”

“Who cares! We need them!” DG yelled while Alemedia shifted into a giant eel and lashed at Wyatt, forcing him to shift back into human form.

Wyatt!” DG cried as she felt a searing pain seize her body and she fell to the floor beside him.

"The trouble with shapeshifters is that they're not immune to electrical attacks..." the eel cackled with the goddess's voice. "And when he is weakened, so are you now that your bond has been consummated," she added triumphantly.

“You’ve made your point, now I’m gonna make mine!” Regina growled and shot an arrow from the bow she now held in her hand. It struck the eel between the eyes. It screamed and attempted to slither toward a pool in the center of the room. Henry created a windstorm that started pulling it back toward them.

“To the South the North’s strength we send
Against the darkness let it defend!” Az and Archie chanted.

From his place on the floor Wyatt could feel a stronger light seeping into his body. He slowly rose
to his feet with his sword in one hand while the other pulled DG to her feet.

"Oh, you bitch," DG snarled as she felt Archie and Az's light surrounding her. "If I had the ability to control electricity, I would fry your fucking ass! I hate snakes!"

“How well did you pay attention in biology class?” Archie asked, a sword in his hand. “What happens when you chop the head off a snake?”

“I didn’t do so well in school, but I’ve killed enough snakes in my time!” Wyatt swung his sword and beheaded it with a single stroke. The head vanished and in its place was a now human Alemedia.

_She’s making us give each other our strength so we drain. We have to open the prison now! Az sent to Rumple._

_We have to contain her first but she’s breaking through every damned one of our traps!_

_Pandora’s Box?_

_It won’t work Belle. It’s meant to trap others, not her._

“In this prison the darkness we confine

_‘Lock it away forever for no soul to find!’” Az, DG, Archie and Wyatt chanted and formed a circle. Henry, Regina, Belle and Emma ran into it._

Rumple gestured and a set of cuffs came up out of the floor, locking themselves around Alemedia’s wrists and ankles, forcing the goddess to her knees. Burn marks appeared on her skin.

“Tsk tsk tsk. Those Norse bracelets are bad for the Greek complexion, aren’t they…dearie!” he spat.

The goddess groaned and struggled against her bonds, screaming in pain when more burn marks began to appear.
“She fell into a burning ring of fire
She went down, down, down
And the flames went higher
And it burns, burns, burns
The ring of fire
The ring of fire…” he sang.

Loki, you worthless son of a Jotun WHORE! she cursed.

For she knew this weapon had been created by the Trickster god to contain dark mages of his own pantheon but when used on mages in another pantheon the effects were more severe.

It was why she'd stolen them in the first place.

But she’d never expected one of her vessels to use them against her.

"Remind me to send Loki a thank you card, along with an apology for 'borrowing' his cuffs,” Rumple chuckled.

He raised his head.

“Earth, air, fire, water, spirit, let our powers combine
To restore the Balance and preserve our bloodline!” he chanted. “Chant with me, all of you. NOW”

Earth, air, fire, water, spirit, let our powers combine
To restore the Balance and preserve our bloodline!”

Alemedia smiled. They’d weakened each other enough fighting her that the attempt to try to bind her would kill them all. Just as she’d planned. A few hours was all she needed.
Asgard

4:00 PM Four days after the Final Eclipse

"Do I look like I mind?" Loki asked while he was viewing the events in Ephesis through a Seeing Globe.

The Guardians were holding their own against the goddess but even in a weakened state they still wouldn't be able to create a prison powerful enough to hold her for they were only demigods. The power of a full god was needed to create an unbreakable prison.

And he owed one of them a debt.

"You helped save my family, Rumplestiltskin Strogoff. Now it is my turn to help you save yours."

He opened his hand and small globe appeared in it.

"It was her meddling that took you from me, my Narvi, Daria, Kyra and sweet Glinda. Now I avenge you!"

A small portal appeared on the wall. He hurled the sphere into it.

As the Sphere of Containment vanished, Loki dusted off his hands and then headed over to the dining hall for dinner. As he entered the long hall with its tapestries and war shields and golden glittering tiles, Odin looked up from his seat at the head of the table. "Loki, you've been busy."

"I have, Father. I needed to settle an old score." he replied, coming to sit down to the left of the king, next to his wife Sigyn.

"We know, darling," Frigga said approvingly. "It is right that you give the Guardians aid in their time of need and bind the evil witch who killed my grandson."

"Fate is inexorable and payback is a bitch, Mother," her son replied. He raised his wine goblet in a toast. "To victory!"
"To victory!"

**Ephesis**

**The Ozian Hell Realm**

**6:00 PM**

"*Earth, air, fire, water, spirit, let our powers combine*

*To restore the Balance and preserve our bloodline!*” they all chanted.

“It’s not working…” Regina said weakly.

Emma could barely keep her eyes open from her place in the circle.

“Rumple, we…can’t…hold on…much longer…” Az mumbled.

“Henry, no Henry wake up, come on!” Archie pleaded, barely awake himself.

“Too tired, wanna sleep.”

Belle sagged against Archie. From his place in the center of the circle Rumple could feel his legs starting to give out and a tightness in his chest.

Suddenly a portal opened and a glowing sphere floated out and into his hands.

He gazed down at it, a small smile on his lips.

"*In this prison the darkness we confine*

*Lock her away forever for no soul to find!*” he called out and raised the sphere above his head. "I know you're tired but chant with me, dearies!"
“In this prison the darkness we confine

Lock her away forever for no soul to find!” they chanted.

A red mist floated out of Alemedia’s chest and into the sphere. Seconds later she vanished and reappeared inside the glass, howling in rage.

”Loki Laufeyson, I curse you, you worthless son of a Jotun whore!”

”I guess my apology was accepted,” Rumple giggled when the sphere returned to his hand.

”Did we do it? That bitch locked up?” Emma inquired sleepily.

”We did. With a little help,” he murmured and conjured a pedestal, placing the sphere on it. Inside it the goddess continued to scream out her rage, cursing everyone and everything, her words falling on deaf ears. “She will never be free to walk the mortal realm again.”

”Great. So how the hell do we get out of Hell?” Emma asked.

”I will take you back,” Adora appeared in the throne room.

”Adora….Nimmie…” Wyatt whispered. DG winced.

Adora approached the couple cautiously. She knew her brief indiscretion with her former husband wounded DG deeply, but she’d also been left no other choice in order to save her son.

”We had our moment in time Wyatt but now it’s time for us to let go of the past. You’ve been given another chance. Don’t squander it this time. Make the life with Dorothisa you were always meant to.” She reached out and placed her hand on DG’s abdomen. “Marry, preferably before your son is born.”

Wyatt gaped at her. “But….but….it was only one time!”
DG giggled. “Didn’t you know one time is all it takes, Tin Man? Is it true? Am I having Wyatt’s baby?”

“You are, dear and it is a boy.”

“Jeb is gonna be in for a shock…I’m gonna be a father again before I’m a grandfather!” Wyatt cried. “But I don’t give a damn.” He picked DG up, spun her around and kissed her. “We’re gonna have a baby, Princess!”

“That means you’re gonna have to make an honest woman of me now Tin Man,” DG teased.

“And I think it’s time we made our marriage official,” Archie whispered to Az. She nodded and kissed him softly.

“Rumplestiltskin Strogoff-Gold I do hope YOU plan on marrying ME before our child is born!”

“What kind of man d’ye take me for, dearie! I told ye I planned on marryin ye as soon as this mess was sorted!” Rumple ranted to Belle.

“You need to use that Scottish Highlander accent more often,” she said dreamily.

“Oh God…get rooms you guys!” Henry groaned and covered his eyes.

Adora laughed and used Henry’s staff to create a portal. “This will take you back to your homes, but you won’t be getting married….at least not for a week or so. You’re going to need a long rest after the battle you’ve fought. The Balance has shifted to the light but there are still more battles to be fought. You will know when that time comes.”

“And we will be ready,” Rumple declared as they all stepped through the portal that took them back to Storybrooke. They collapsed on their beds the moment they arrived at their homes and fell into an exhausted sleep.

Ephe\n
Ephesis

The Ozian Hell Realm
“Well daughter, you’re in a rather tight spot, aren’t you?” Hades taunted when he teleported into her throne room.

“LET ME OUT!” she screamed.

“I can’t. I don’t have all my powers, remember? Is it done?”

She smiled. “He has been resurrected but we’ve hit a bit of a snag. He’s gone mad and merged his life force with his son’s.”

“Then they’ll have to be separated. He needs to be thinking clearly before Zelena can use him as an ingredient for her time travel spell. The Savior should be able to undo the spell. He’ll make her do it. He’s too noble to keep on living when he knows his father is the only one powerful enough to try to stop Zelena. The moment she separates them that boy’s soul is mine!”

“How do you expect to get your hands on it before Ozmalita does?” Alemedia inquired.

“You’re not the only one who can use a vessel to do your bidding.”

“You already have him under your control!” she whispered. “How? You’re powerless.”

“Not as powerless as you think, daughter.”

“How did you do it?”

“Why the same way you control yours, with an object!” Hades gestured and the Dark One vault key appeared in his hand.

“How did you do it?”

“Why the same way you control yours, with an object!” Hades gestured and the Dark One vault key appeared in his hand.
"The moment he touched that..."

"His soul belonged to me," Hades laughed evilly.

“We have to be careful, Father, Loki is watching us.”

“I think we can accomplish what we need to with him being none the wiser, now can we, daughter?”

“I do….now.”

“If all goes according to plan Zelena will time travel successfully and the changes she makes in the past will pave the way for you to resurrect Silas.”

“And he will destroy the Guardians,” she hissed.

In the meantime, the decaying, dark heart that was left of the most powerful Dark One in all the realms would feed on the life force of his brother until it became powerful enough to live again in his body.
After all the stops and starts

We keep comin' back to these two hearts

Two angels who've been rescued from the fall

After all that we've been through

It all comes down to me and you

I guess it's meant to be, forever you and me, after all

Cher and Peter Cetera – After All (Rumple and Belle’s love theme)

You ask me if there'll come a time

When I grow tired of you

Never my love

Never my love

You wonder if this heart of mine

Will lose its desire for you

Never my love

The Association – Never My Love (Archie and Az’s love theme)

Lovers forever face to face

My city your mountains

Stay with me stay

I need you to love me

I need you today

Give to me your leather
Belle was nervous as she walked into Game of Thorns. In the weeks she, Rumple and the others recovered from the severe magical drain they’d suffered she began to have second thoughts about cutting her father out of their lives. They were going to be having an Ozian wedding ceremony along with their Ozopov cousins and it was tradition that both the bride and groom be given in marriage by a family member from their houses. Bae would be giving his father away and though she’d had many offers Belle wished her father would be the one to speak for the House of Lavalliere.

Moe was working on a flower arrangement that he immediately set aside and stepped out from behind the counter, throwing his arms around his daughter, both in tears.

"He finally let you go! Oh, thank the gods." Moe exclaimed.

"Papa, we're still together..."

Moe released her. "Oh, Belle.....why?"

"Because I love him...and I am going to be his wife." she replied.

"His wife? Darling, please. You can't marry that...that monster!"

"He's not a monster," Belle cried. "He may have done terrible things in the past but that's who he is anymore. He's the man I love and I am going to marry him. I'd like you to be there...to give me away as the patriarch of the House of Lavalliere. We are having an Ozian wedding Papa."

"I will not give you away to that beast again!" Moe raged. "And you need to come to your senses."
"Or what?" Belle challenged. "You'll have me dragged before the clerics again? You'd get the results you wanted this time for I have given myself to him Papa...body, heart and soul. I've done it because I love him. How many times do I have to say it before you can accept it and be happy for me?"

"I'll never accept it!" he raged. "If you want to marry that monster and rut with him, go on and go but know this: you are dead to me."

"You don't mean that!" Belle sobbed. "I'm...I'm your daughter and soon I'll be having your grandchild."

"I have no daughter. Now leave my shop, whore and take that monstrous bastard you carry in your belly with you!"

Belle raised her head, her blue eyes meeting his. "I once told Rumple that if he rejected my love, he would regret it...forever and have nothing but an empty heart yet he found the courage to come back to me. Now I say the same to you. I am your daughter. I have loved you all my life, done everything to make you proud of me, even sacrificed my freedom to save you and our people and you turn me away, denounce me as a whore...and now it is you who will have an empty heart."

Keeping her head held high, she walked out of the shop and down the street, fighting back her tears. She maintained her composure as she walked into Rumple's shop. He was not behind the counter as he usually was during the day. She finally found him the backroom sitting at his worktable with the parts of an old sewing machine scattered across the top, his head lowered as he tried reassembling it.

"Rumple..." she croaked.

"In a minute...damned thing," he grumbled.

"Rumple," she tried again.

"Belle, just a minute!" he barked.
The dam burst and she buried her face in her hands, sobbing brokenly. Rumple jumped out of his chair and pulled her into his arms. "Sweetheart...sweetheart I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to snap at you like that!"

"It's not you," she moaned.

"Who upset you like this?" he demanded. "When I get my hands on them...."

"Rumple, please....please promise me you won't do anything to hurt him again..."

"Again? It's your father, isn't it? What did that bastard do to you now?" He led her over to the cot by the wall and sat her down, gently wiping the tears from her eyes with his handkerchief.

"I...I asked him to give me away at our wedding and he....refused....he still thinks you're a beast and....I...your whore...he called our baby a monster."

"That does it!" he growled.

"Rumple!"

"I am not letting this stand Belle," he said firmly. He took out his cell phone and dialed a number. "Hello, Granny? Is your daughter busy? Oh...right...I've forgotten it's lunch time. No matter....no I'll uhhhh....try someone else." He disconnected the call and dialed a second number. "Hello, Ariel? Yes. Would you come over to my shop please? All right, we'll be waiting."

"What are you doing?"

"It's going to be all right, sweetheart," he murmured as he embraced her.

"Rum, what's wrong? You sounded stressed on the phone," Ariel said when she arrived half an hour later.

"I need you to stay here with Belle while I take care of something."
"Rumple, no!" Belle cried, clinging to him. "Darling, please...it's not worth it!"

"It is to me."

"What's going on?"

"That son of a bitch who calls himself a father had the audacity to call Belle a whore, our child a monster and threw her out of his shop. I'm going to go have a little chat with him."

Ariel cringed remembering Belle telling her their last chat involved Maurice being beaten within an inch of his life with Rumple's cane. "Don't you even think about it Rumplestiltskin!" she warned. "If he wants to be that way, it's his loss. Don't you understand, this is exactly what he wants you to do! He wants you to be the monster and Belle does not need that. She needs you to be the man she loves."

"What kind of man would I be if I didn't defend her honor?" he demanded. "A coward, that's what and I will never be a coward again!"

"Please, darling...promise me that if you go there, it will be just to talk to him," Belle pleaded.

"Belle, sweetheart, he's hurt you so much..."

"I know but I won't have you going to jail because of me," she said through her tears. "Promise me!"

"All right, sweetheart. I'll just go talk to him but do not expect me to be nice about it."

She stood up. "I'm going with you."

"Belle, I'm not sure that's a good idea," Ariel protested.
"Neither do I," Rumple agreed. “You and the baby do not need the stress.”

"I'm going. If we're going to do this, we're doing it together."

"I thought I told you to get out of my shop and you dare bring that monster in here with you!" Moe shouted when she and Rumple entered the shop holding hands, a united front. Their joined hands were glowing as a protection spell was active in them.

Are you quite finished?" Rumple asked calmly.

"I've just gotten started."

"So have I! It's taking every ounce of self-control I have not to do a repeat performance of our little chat session when you decided to steal Belle's cup from me, you son of a bitch! How dare you call her a whore, our child a monster when you know she's nothing of the kind?"

"As long as she's with you, she is. You've cast a spell on her, seduced her."

"You fool! She's with me by her own choice. It always has been her choice, or have you forgotten that, dearie?" Rumple sneered.

"I told you before, Papa. Nobody decides my fate but me and I chose to be with Rumple...forever. At first it was to save our land and our people but now it is because I love him. Now I believe it was my destiny to be with him." Belle spoke up.

"You're delusional and belong back in that damned asylum."

"Or locked in a tower being tortured by clerics, I suppose," Rumple retorted. "You stood there and watched while they violated her for loving me and you call me a monster? I was willing to try to make peace with you for her sake but if you continue to treat her like this, you'll always have an enemy in me. I love your daughter and I am going to marry her. You can either stay here and swill in your hatred or you can put the past behind us and be part of this family. The choice is yours."

"Get out," Moe hissed.
"I let my son go once and I regretted it my whole life. If you let Belle go, you'll regret it too."

"Don't act all self-righteous with me, monster. Now get the hell out of my shop."

"We'll go," Belle said. "I love you Papa. I just wish you could be happy for me."

"Never!" Moe spit.

Rumple shook his head and they turned and left the shop.

When they got back to the shop Ariel was pacing the floors while Eric was attempting to calm her down.

"It's about time you got back!" she cried. "What...what's going on with your hands?" she exclaimed.

"Ozian defensive magic. It only becomes active when someone is being attacked but we haven't been...not physically," Rumple explained, the glow fading once he released Belle's hand. "Were we under a magical or physical attack it would throw a shield over us."

“He won’t budge?”

“I’m afraid not Eric and it pains me that her own father refuses to stand with her on the day she needs him the most. He has no love left in his heart. Only hate for us and our child.”

"You'd be proud of Rumple, Ariel. He kept his calm the entire time," Belle said, not disguising the pride in her own voice.

"It wasn't easy," he muttered. "That still leaves us without someone to give Belle away," he added sadly.

"No it doesn't," Eric declared. "We'll be happy to do the honors. After all...the two of you brought
Ariel and me together and its only right that we should give her away."

"Oh, thank you! Thank you so much!" Belle sobbed as she threw her arms around the other couple. Rumple shook Eric's hand.

"I owe you a debt," he said softly.

"No, you don't. We are the ones who should be grateful to you and Belle...even Regina. I never thought I'd see my Ariel again and yet..here she is. You deserve your happy ending too and we're more than happy to help make sure you get it. Now what do we need to do?"

“An Ozian wedding, specifically an Ozian Guardian wedding is different from any other ceremony.”

He gestured and the Book of the Ancients appeared on the table.

“This will tell you everything you need to know. I’ve translated it for you.”

The couple sat down and began reading, excited by their new role in the friends’ special day.

Storybrooke, Maine

May 11, 2011

7:00 AM

Five weeks after the Final Eclipse

Rumple was standing in front of his bathroom mirror on his wedding day, scowling at his appearance.

*I look like I haven't slept in a week.*

And he hadn't, not that much anyway. His nightmares had returned with a vengeance after he and
Belle agreed to spend the week before their wedding in separate homes according to the old tradition. Several times they terrified him so much he went down to the wishing well to see if the curse was coming out of it or to his shop to check and see if the dagger had his name on it again. That morning his son found him huddled on the floor of his shop still in his pajamas, shaking with terror and babbling.

"Papa....are you all right?"

"H...He's not dead....he's going to find a way to come back....and kill all of you....make me watch...before he puts me out of my misery," he sobbed.

"No, no Papa...it's okay..he's gone," Bae assured him as he wrapped his arms around him and held him tightly. "You got rid of him, papa. You saved us. He's not going to hurt you anymore, he's not going to hurt us anymore." As he stroked his father's back comfortingly his hand started to glow. "Nothing can hurt us now that we're together again," he chanted, believing it.

As Rumple heard those words, he felt his anxiety fading away, replaced with the joy and love he felt for his precious son. "Bae...." he whispered. "You're here? You're alive?" he croaked.

"I'm here Papa, and we're never gonna get separated again," he vowed. "Come on, let's get you home and cleaned up for your big day."

Rumple smiled. It was a big day for him. At the end of it he would at last have his happy ending but not if he looked like he'd been living like a hermit.

Bae opened the wardrobe and pulled out his father’s grey dragonscale leather suit. He would have burned it after they returned from Neverhell as they now called it if Belle hadn’t taken such a liking to it.

“You might wanna shave the forest off your face, Papa or Belle’s gonna get beard burn.”

“Oh hush up and get yourself dressed!” Rumple picked up the can of shaving cream and sprayed his son with it. “You need to shave yourself too, boy!”

“Nope. Keeping mine.”
“Fine but make sure you throw those dirty clothes in the hamper. You’ve worn that shirt for two days and I swear it’s about to grow legs and walk!”

“I like this shirt.”

“Son, if you have any chance with Emma or Tinkerbell, you’re going to need to make some changes to your lifestyle. Do you dress like that when you decorate peoples’ houses?”

“Zee, Angelo and I always wear stuff like this so yeah. We’re up to our ears in everything when we’re decorating so Aramani and Gucci won’t cut it.” He sighed. “Papa, I’m starting to think nothing’s gonna change with Emma and me. We only talk because of Henry.”

Rumple sat on the edge of the bed. “And Tinkerbell?”

“We made an agreement we’d hang out as friends, but I like being with her.”

“If you and Emma don’t work out perhaps you and Tinkerbell should make a go of it. Some of the best relationships start out as friendship.”

“I wanna try again with Emma, Papa. I really do.”

“I know, son. But you also have to spend more time with Henry too.”

“I’m doing that but he keeps asking when I’m getting back with Emma and I don’t have any answer for him!”

“He knows it will take time.” Rumple glanced at the clock. “Lurline’s underdrawers! I’m going to be late!” He jumped off the bed and limped into the bathroom.

"You look great, Grandpa," Henry complimented when Rumple came downstairs dressed in his dragonscale and leather suit. "Are you nervous?"
"A little...no....a lot," he confessed.

The boy smiled at him and patted his hand. "You'll do fine. C'mon Grandpa. Let's go get you your happy ending!"

Rumple ruffled his hair affectionately. "I've been waiting for this my whole life," he murmured.

McDonald’s Farm

7:00 AM

David Molk, Jeb Cain, Elmer Gulch, Ambrose, Raw and the other deputies from the Storybrooke Sheriff’s Department descended on the farm like they were executing a police raid. David, Edgar, Hildy, Terry and Elmer crept up to the VW bus and surrounded it. David peered inside and saw his brother sleeping on a makeshift bed in the rear of the bus. He raised his hand and began pounding on the side window.

“Police! Come out of the vehicle with your hands up!” he bellowed while the others laughed.

“Whaa…?” Archie groaned and sat up. “David, you idiot! You scared the hell outta me!”

“Well get your ass up! It’s your wedding day!”

“I’m getting up now would you guys get outta here and let me get dressed.” Archie yanked the curtains on the windows closed.

“Yeah, well I’m comin in,” David said and pushed the side door open. “What do I smell in here? Were you smoking pot?”

Archie scowled. “How many times do I have to tell you that just because I want to live like a hippie that does not mean I smoke pot or shove coke up my nose? It’s incense. Look!” He handed him a bowl with used sticks.
“Uh-huh. Where’s the stash?” David demanded skeptically. “I know people use those sticks to hide the smell.”

“I don’t believe this! You know what today is and you wanna search me for drugs?”

“You’re damn right. You’re not getting married higher than a kite. Okay guys, get in here. We gotta toss the place.”

“You are lucky you’re my brother because you’d be an inch tall right now!” Archie grumbled and crawled out of the mattress holding the blanket over him. “Come on, wrap this up! I’m gonna be late for my wedding, dammit!”

“Nothin here, Molky. Just some sticks and a lot of flowers and man, they really do smell like weed!”

“Phlox,” Archie clarified. “But you can’t smoke it. Now the rest of you get outta here and let me get dressed!”

They were laughing as they climbed out of the bus. Moments later the brothers emerged from the van. Archie was wearing Jimi Hendrix inspired outfit with a tie dyed shirt with jeans, a brown suede vest, boots, a bandana around his head and his indigo sunglasses, while David wore a Jim Morrison inspired outfit with a white smock shirt, black leather jacket, pants and boots.

“Okay, let’s go see if Cain’s ready,” Archie chuckled.

“Wakey wakey sunshine!” Ambrose chuckled, booting Wyatt’s foot as he’d seen Cain do to Antoine DeMilo.

“Go ‘way Glitch,” he muttered and threw the pillow over his head.

Ambrose seized him by the arms and yanked him out of bed. “Cripes, you weigh a ton, Tin Man!”

“You’re funny, Zipperhead. Now giddout and lemme sleep!” He detached himself from Ambrose and lay back down.
“I know how to get him up,” Jeb chuckled and into the kitchen, pouring some water from the sink into a large mixing bowl and tossing a handful of ice cubes in. He brought it back into the bedroom and dumped it on his sleeping father. Wyatt howled and jumped out of bed.

“Dammit Jeb!” he growled.

“Well you better hurry up and get dressed or your gonna be late for your own wedding!”

“The wedding! Lurline’s underdrawers! Dottie’s gonna kill me if I’m late!” He grabbed his duster, blue striped shirt, tan pans and boots out of the closet and ran into the bathroom. Moments later he emerged looking as he did the day they were reunited in the OZ.

**Storybrooke Library**

**8:30 AM**

Belle sat in front of the window of her library apartment, gazing out at the town, wishing she could see Rumple's house, but it was too far away. She'd reluctantly agreed to the tradition that the bride and groom couldn't see each other before the wedding thinking it would only be a day or two, not a week. The separation was painful as it had been so many times before. They still talked to each other on the phone, but it wasn't the same as having him there beside her. The nights were the worst. She hoped he would break their agreement and appear in her bedroom one night but he didn't. He vowed he would never break a deal with anyone in his family again and he was sticking to it much to her dismay because this was one deal she wouldn't have been angry at him for breaking. Thankfully it would end in a few hours when he placed his ring on her finger and made her his wife. Then they would spend the rest of the night and the days after making up for their week of separation.

"Belle, hun, are you awake?” she heard Ruby calling from the other side of the door.

"I am...come on in," she replied.

Ruby entered the room with her bridesmaid's dress draped over her arm. "Are you all right? You seem kind of down."
"Tell me how you'll feel after you've been apart from the man you love for a week," Belle murmured.

"I...ummm...don't really have one....not yet anyway."

"What about you and Victor?"

"We've gone out a few times."

"That's all? There's nothing more to it?"

"You're a hopeless romantic and of all people I would never have expected Gold to make you feel that way."

"Some loves are worth fighting for," Belle said softly, rising from the bed and taking her wedding dress off the hanger and went into the bathroom to change. When she emerged Ariel, Tinkerbell, Wendy and Snow had arrived to help her with her hair and makeup.

"You look so beautiful," Ariel said softly.

"Rumple is going to be speechless when he sees you," Snow said.

Belle decided to go against tradition and decided that her wedding gown would be an exact duplicate of the gold one she wore the day she and Rumple met all those years ago and requested that he wear the black and grey dragonscale and leather outfit he'd worn in Neverland. She'd been the speechless one that day when she saw him thinking how handsome he looked in it.

After the women finished Belle's hair and makeup they changed into their own dresses. They were simpler gold dresses with spaghetti thin straps.

There was a knock on the door. Tink opened it and found Regina standing on the other side with a box in her hands. "Have you all done the something old, new, borrowed or blue yet?" she inquired
"No. You're just in time," Snow said.

"I'd like to give you something new, if that is all right with you, Belle."

Belle smiled. "I'd like that."

Regina stepped in front of the bride and opened the box to reveal a beautiful heart shaped locket with a diamond in the center. Belle opened and she smiled when she saw Rumple's picture inside of it.

"Rumple isn't the photogenic type but when Henry told him he wanted a picture of him for a gift for you he managed not to ruin it," she joked.

"It's beautiful," she whispered and embraced her. "Thank you Regina....and I'll be sure to thank my grandson when I see him," she added, fastening the locket around her neck.

"Belle, I am so sorry for what I did to you all those years ago. I know I can't take it back, but I can assure you, nothing like that will ever happen again."

"We're family now and we’ve come far since then."

Regina smiled.

"Do you have something blue, Belle?" Snow asked.

The bride grinned and pulled the skirt of her gown up to reveal a blue garter around her upper thigh. The other women giggled.

"Oh, I cannot wait to see the look on his face when he finds out he has to go get it." Regina chuckled.
"Actually, I think he'll enjoy it," Ruby said. "You have it up there high enough, Belle? You know...you could make him go after it with his teeth," she suggested with a smirk.

"Now that sounds tempting," Belle murmured.

"Oh my God! I would die laughing," Regina exclaimed.

"So would I," Snow agreed. "Are you going to do it Belle?"

"I may. I do owe him for making us stay apart all week."

"Well...does anyone have something borrowed?" Ruby asked the group. Wendy nodded and approached Belle with a smaller box in her hands. She opened it to reveal a gold and diamond bracelet.

"My Mum and Dad bought this for me," she said and fastened it around Belle's wrist.

"It's lovely. Thank you, Wendy. I promise to take care of it."

"I'd like to give you something old," Snow said and handed the bride a box with a pair of earrings in the shapes of hearts with diamonds in the center. "These were the first piece of jewelry I bought in this land. I don't wear them now so they're yours....and they match Regina's locket perfectly."

"Thank you, Snow."

"Well now that we've gotten you ready, the rest of us need to get ready! Hop to it!" Ariel commanded, clapping her hands.

“And we have to go over to Archie’s place to help Beth and Aurora get Az and DG ready,” Snow reminded them.

“Who will be giving them away?” Ruby asked.
“Ambrose,” Belle replied. “He is DG’s biological father, but I think having him represent the House of Ozopov is what Ahamo and Lavinia would’ve wanted.”

“Archie’s brother is giving him away and Jeb is giving Wyatt away.” Regina chuckled. “David wanted Archie to stay at his house, but he’s been sleeping in that old hippie bus out at MacDonald’s farm. Wyatt’s taken over the place since he got here.”

“It doesn’t surprise me,” they heard Adora say when she appeared. “The farmhouse looks like the one Ahamo’s parents own in Kansas. That’s where he’s taking DG on their honeymoon. Kansas.”

Belle laughed. “Rumple is going to throw a fit when he finds out where Archie is taking Az.”

“Where?” the others demanded.

“Exactly where he’s been sleeping all week.”

“What?! Is he crazy! Az is further along in her pregnancy than you are!” Snow exclaimed. “She can’t be sleeping in a bus. Oooh I am going to bop him on the head with that umbrella.”

“Actually, it’s a road trip. I’m sure they’re going to stop along the way.”

“I hope so!” Regina huffed.

Snow looked at the clock. “It’s getting late ladies! We’d better hurry over to Archie’s place!”

**Archie’s House**

**9:00 AM**

“I wish Mother and Daddy could see us now,” DG said softly while she and Az stood in before the mirror in their wedding attire. She wore a copy of the maroon dress she’d been given to gain access to the Mystic Man’s club while Az wore a replica of singer Mama Cass’s legendary ‘sunburst’
“They can. They’re watching over us now Deege.”

“You’ve waited a long time to marry Archie.”

“And you’ve waited even longer to marry Wyatt.”

“I can still remember us sitting by the lake at Finaqua burying our stone. You were thinking about Archie and you started telling me how wonderful and how scary falling in love was.”

“And I remember you telling me that if love was so scary, you didn’t want to be in it. Now you know its worth the fear.”

“It’s worth everything. And speaking of our stone…” DG held out her hand and the heart shaped stone appeared in it. “Do you know about the wedding day traditions over here?”

Az chuckled. “Of course I do, Deege. I was studying this realm’s culture before you were born. You’re talking about giving the bride something new, old borrowed and blue.”

“Here is something old and new for both of us,” She waved her hand over the stone and two heart shaped lockets appeared in it. Az opened hers to find a portrait of their family on one half and herself and Archie on the other half. Az picked up the other locket, waved her hand over it and opened it to a copy of the family portrait on one half and DG and Wyatt together on the other half. They fastened their lockets around their necks and hugged.

“Looks like you’ve already started,” Beth said when she walked into the bedroom followed by her mother, Regina, Ariel, Snow and Ruby.

“We’ve only done something new and old.”

Ruby held up two blue lace garters. “Your something blue, ladies. Make them work for it.”
Snow opened the small jewel box she held in her hand. “Something borrowed. My mother had these bracelets made for us.” She fastened them around each bride’s wrist. “I can’t think of two people who should wear them more than sister brides.”

“Come on, Az. Let’s go get married…finally!” DG exclaimed and laughed.

All of Storybrooke was gathered in the forest, a large gazebo built over the wishing well to accommodate the three couples that would exchanging vows under it. Blue stood at the altar, the Book of the Ancients in her hands while the three grooms waited at the altar with the men representing their perspective Houses.

“Ready, Belle?” Eric asked her.

“I’ve been ready,” she murmured, linking her arm through his.

She linked her arm through his and they began to march toward the altar to Peter Cetera and Cher singing ‘After All’, the song they’d chosen as their theme after hearing it play on the radio one afternoon in the shop.

“Always just beyond my touch
You know I needed you so much
After all, what else is livin' for?

After all the stops and starts
We keep comin' back to these two hearts
Two angels who've been rescued from the fall
After all that we've been through
It all comes down to me and you
I guess it's meant to be, forever you and me, after all…”

“Who gives this woman to this man?” Blue asked once they reached the altar and the couple faced each other.
“I Eric, representative of the House of Lavalliere, do give my friend Belle Lavalliere to this man in matrimony.” Eric declared, placing Belle’s left hand into Rumple’s.

“Who gives this man to this woman?”

“I, Baelfire of the House of Strogoff-Gold do give my father Rumplestiltskin Strogoff-Gold to this woman in matrimony,” Bae announced, placing Belle’s right hand into Rumple’s.

“You may now speak your vows.”

“My darling Belle, for so long I believed myself to be a beast unworthy of love, to be lost forever in darkness but then I made a deal, a deal with a beautiful, intelligent woman who brought me out of my darkness and into the light again. You made me stronger. You believed in me when I no longer believed in myself and I will spend this life and every life we share together proving to you that I am worthy of your love and your belief in me.

Through the years we will stand together

For today we complete a bond that nothing will sever

And from our love many children there will be

For one heart forever now are we.”

“My Rumple….for the longest time I thought the truest love there was only existed in my books but one day a man came to my castle and I made a deal to go with him…forever. I didn’t know what Fate had in store for me when I made that deal but now I realize I had to make it to understand what true love really is. It’s loving someone so much that no price is too high to pay to be with them. No matter what Fate brings our way in the years we have together, I will always stand at your side and I will defend you and love you in this life and every life after.

Through the years we will stand together

For today we complete a bond that nothing will sever

And from our love many children there will be

For one heart forever now are we.”

“Rumplestiltskin Strogoff-Gold, is it your intention to bind yourself heart, body and soul to your bride?”
“It is my intention.”

“Belle Lavalliere, is it your intention to bind yourself heart, body and soul to your groom?”

“It is my intention.”

Blue waved her wand over Eric and Bae’s hands. “Eric, representative of the House of Lavalliere, please remove the bride’s heart.”

Eric reached into Belle’s chest and gently pulled out her heart.

“Baelfire of the House of Strogoff-Gold, please remove the groom’s heart.”

Once the hearts were removed Blue waved her wand over them and they split into two pieces, one in their hands, the other hovering above them. Rumple and Belle summoned the floating pieces over to them and held them in their hands.

“See as I see
Feel as I feel
Let our two hearts become one
Not even in death shall this bond be undone! Belle Lavalliere,” Rumplestiltskin Strogoff-Gold!” Belle cried through her tears and released her heart piece.

“See as I see
Feel as I feel
Let our two hearts become one
Not even in death shall this bond be undone! Rumplestiltskin Strogoff-Gold!” Belle cried through her tears and released her heart piece. They merged them with the pieces in Eric and Bae’s hands and the men carefully placed them back inside their chests. Rumple and Belle faced each other and joined hands, kneeling.

“Now I call upon the Guardians of the North, South and East to bestow your blessings.”
“To our West this blessing we to give
A long and happy life will you live
Four beautiful children for you will there be
Two Daughters and two Sons of Light to carry on your legacy
Never again for you will the darkness come
For no magic is stronger than the love of two hearts joined as one!” they chanted.

“By the will of the gods and the state of Maine, I now pronounce you husband and wife. You may now kiss your bride Rumple!”

There were tears in their eyes as their lips met in their first kiss as husband and wife. Out of the corner of her eye Belle could see her father hiding behind one of the trees, a scowl riding his face.

“Don’t let him spoil our moment, sweetheart,” Rumple begged.

“I won’t,” she murmured and kissed him again. All too soon they broke their kiss for now it was Archie and Az’s turn to take their vows.

“Ready, Az?” Ambrose asked her. She nodded.

“A hippie wedding,” Rumple chuckled from his place at the altar. Belle nudged his foot with her slipper.

“Oh, stop!” she giggled as The Association’s ‘Never My Love’ began to play.

“What makes you think love will end
When you know that my whole life depends
On you
Never my love
Never my love
You say you fear I'll change my mind
And I won't require you
Never my love…”

“Who gives this woman to this man?”

“I, Ambrose Benu, Talon of Dragon of the House of Ozopov do give my kinswoman Azkadellia Ozopov to this man in matrimony.”

“Who gives this man to this woman?”

“I, David Molk of the House of Ozopov-Hopper, do give my brother Archie Jiminy to this woman in matrimony.”

“Archie, Azkadellia, you may now speak your vows.”

“Dellia, I came into your life on the winds of a travel storm, resisting a fate that had been chosen for me before I was even born. I was charged with first protecting you, then loving you and in the years we’ve been together we’ve loved so much and lost so much. But I stand here now as I did every year for the past eleven years loving you not because it was what the OZ willed me to do. I loved you then and I love you now because I choose to.

Through the years we will stand together
For today we complete a bond that nothing will sever
And from our love many children there will be
For one heart forever now are we.”

“Archie….” Az began, barely able to see through her tear filled eyes. “You’ve been with me almost from the day I was born. You’ve protected me, but most importantly you’ve loved me. You’ve loved me.”

Archie’s eyes filled with tears as she recited the very words he’d spoken to her the night of the first eclipse back to him.

“Even when I was lost in darkness, your light was always there to remind me whom I was and
whom I could be. I always knew that the will of the OZ was that I would have a bondmate but I had already chosen you. I will always choose you.

*Through the years we will stand together*

*For today we complete a bond that nothing will sever*

*And from our love many children there will be*

*For one heart forever now are we."

“Archie Ozopov-Hopper, is it your intention to bind yourself heart, body and soul to this woman?”

“It is my intention.”

“Azkadellia Ozopov, is it your intention to bind yourself heart, body and soul to this man.”

“It is my intention.”

After David and Ambrose removed their hearts, Archie and Az summoned the floating pieces to their hands to complete the spell.

“See as I see

Feel as I feel

*Let our two hearts become one*

*Not even in death shall this bond be undone! Azkadellia Ozopov!”

“See as I see

Feel as I feel

*Let our two hearts become one*

*Not even in death shall this bond be undone! Archie Ozopov-Hopper!”

“Now I call upon the Guardians of the South, East and West to bestow your blessings.”
“To our North this blessing we to give
A long and happy life will you live
Three beautiful children for you will there be
A Daughter and two Sons of Light to carry on your legacy
Never again for you will the darkness come
For no magic is stronger than the love of two hearts joined as one!” they chanted.

“By the will of the gods and the state of Maine, I now pronounce you husband and wife. Archie, you may now kiss your bride.”

Archie laughed joyfully and swung his bride up in his arms, kissing her breathless before they moved to their places for DG and Wyatt’s ceremony.

“Your turn now Doll,” Ambrose whispered to DG.

“I’m ready!” she cried.

“You in the moonlight
With your sleepy eyes
Could you ever love a man like me
And you were right
When I walked into your house
I knew I'd never want to leave…” Don Henley sang as DG walked up the aisle to where a nervous Wyatt stood.

“Who gives this woman to this man?”

“I, Ambrose Benu, Talon of the Dragon of the House of Ozopov give my daughter Dorothia Ozopov to this man in matrimony.”
“Who gives this man to this woman?”

“I, Jebediah Cain of the House of Cain give my father Wyatt to this woman in matrimony.”

“Wyatt, Dorthia, you may now speak your vows.”

“I've never been real good at this. I'm going to try anyway no matter how much like an idiot I'll sound. I'm not the easiest person to live with. No one knows that now better than you. I'm stubborn as hell, sometimes bitter as piss and vinegar, have a temper worse than the dragon I have in me and have at least twenty years on you but when you look at me, I forget all the things that make me think I don't deserve you and remember why you think I do.

We can't keep everything bad out of our lives Dottie, nor will we win every battle but we'll always be stronger together than we'll ever be apart. You always tell me that love is the strongest magic of all and I had a hard time believing that until you showed me what it has done for me and for us. Your love freed me from a prison I thought I'd spend the rest of my life in. Your love always brings light to the darkness I sometimes create in me by having my doubts about everyone and everything. I once told Ambrose I had to keep his wide-eyed optimism in check. You keep my bitter cynicism in check even when sometimes we have the same doubts. I love you Dottie and I always will.

*Through the years we will stand together*

*For today we complete a bond that nothing will sever*

*And from our love many children there will be*

*For one heart forever now are we.”*

“Not good at this my ass, Tin Man.” DG said as the tears of joy rolled down her cheeks. All these years there was always someone or something trying to keep us apart but somehow we always found our way back to each other. I know you're still afraid sometimes that you're not good enough for me but the years I spent without you made me realize that the only place I ever feel safe, loved and at home is in your arms and I never want to leave them. Just before I first came back to the OZ Popsicle told me that no matter where I found myself home was where my heart was. I was afraid I'd spend the rest of my life searching for it, but I found it the day I broke the lock on that damned suit and you fell back into my life like you'd never left. When our kids are born I know you're going to love and protect them as much as you love and protect me and Jeb. I am, however, a little worried that once our daughters start bringing suitors home I'm going to have to play referee to a pistol packing, sword wielding ex-Tin Man with a dragon in him who'll want to use them for target practice or...maybe a snack.”

Wyatt, unable to control himself, laughed as did the rest of the guests. After everyone settled down she continued. "I need you to know that you're never going to have another cold, dark and lonely
night again because no matter where you are now, part of me is always going to be with you to chase it all away. I love you, Wyatt. I can't say it enough.

*Through the years we will stand together*

*For today we complete a bond that nothing will sever*

*And from our love many children there will be*

*For one heart forever now are we."

“Wyatt, is it your intention to bind yourself heart, body and soul to this woman?”

“It is my intention.”

“Dorothia, is it your intention to bind yourself heart, body and soul to this man.”

“Hell yes but we already did all that!”


“I’m gonna have my hands full wi’ that one.”

*See as I see*

*Feel as I feel*

*Let our two hearts become one*

*Not even in death shall this bond be undone! Wyatt Nicholas Cain!” DG cried, using the names from both his lives.

*See as I see*

*Feel as I feel*

*Let our two hearts become one*

*Not even in death shall this bond be undone! Dorothia Gale Ozopov!”*
“I now call upon the Guardians of the North, East and West to bestow your blessings.”

“To our South this blessing we to give
A long and happy life will you live
Three beautiful children for you will there be
A Daughter and two Sons of Light to carry on your legacy
Never again for you will the darkness come
For no magic is stronger than the love of two hearts joined as one!” they chanted.

“By the will of the gods and the state of Maine, I now pronounce you husband and wife. Wyatt, you may now kiss your bride.”

"About damn time," Wyatt muttered as he pulled DG into his arms and kissed her passionately while Jeb and Archie laughed and Az shook her head.

"Oooohhh," DG whispered to her husband as she returned his kiss. "Anxious, were we?"

"No, my knees were getting sore from all that kneeling. We should've just eloped. Less tiring."

"So does this mean you'll be too tired to enjoy our wedding night?" DG asked with a teasing grin.

"Hell, no! I hope you're not tired woman because I intend to spend the whole night making love to you."

"Then plan on leaving the reception early Tin Man because I don't think I'll be able wait too long..." she murmured, her body already aflame with anticipation.

"Ahem!" Archie whispered impatiently. "You two aren't doing anything until this ceremony is over!"

Wyatt groaned. "What more is there?"
"Oh, will you just be quiet and face the congregation!"

"He's enough to drive you up a wall," Wyatt muttered as he and DG faced the crowd.

The officers of the Storybrooke Sheriff’s Department, Robin Hood’s Merry Men and soldiers from the lost realms began to form two lines on either side of the red carpet leading from the altar to the couples’ vehicles.

Ambrose stood at the end of the line of a new generation of Talon masters and apprentices. "Talons of the Dragon, form shield!" he commanded. The men and woman raised their Katanas high above them and crossed the blades in the air, forming a sword bridge.

Emma stood at the end of the line of police officers. "Deputies, form shield!" she shouted. Instead of using swords, they raised their shotguns in the air, crossing the barrels.

Sarah Jane, granddaughter of the famous "Boiling Belle" was sitting in a large tree stand, Belle's legendary pot full of ingredients that would make her grandmother proud. As the couples walked out onto the red carpet, Sarah Jane rang her grandmother's dinnerbell.

"It's dinnertime boys!" she cried as her assistants tipped the pot over, showering the couples with thousands of red rose petals. "I call this one 'Belle's Blessing!'" she cried as the couples kissed again.

"Launch the second course!" she shouted and the couples were once again showered with rose petals as they stood on the red carpet, oblivious to it all as they kissed, their bodies pressed so close together that they could have merged into one being.
You Can Take The Fairy Character Out of the Realm...

Chapter by cjmoliere

You're wishin' you weren't here
You don't try to make a go
It's all on video and he's smellin' the fear
He's your worse dream comin' true
You got trouble times two
A trooper with an attitude

38 Special – Trooper With An Attitude

The newly wedded couples were eager to start their honeymoons but knew they would at least have to make an appearance at the grand wedding reception Regina planned at the newly expanded Town Hall. Rumple and Belle planned to spend theirs at Rumple’s cabin in the woods. It had been completely remodeled while they were recovering from their magical drain and Bae and Zelena had just finished turning one of Rumple’s storage rooms into a nursery for the baby.

The Darlings, deciding to stay on in Storybrooke, were now working for Rumple at the pawn shop. In the week prior to the wedding Rumple, Belle and the Darlings discussed expanding the shop to start selling antiquities purchased at auctions and estate sales as well as making half of it into a bookshop. Belle was thrilled with the idea of having her own bookshop that she could hold story time in when she wasn’t working at the library.

Although he knew Rumple would probably rake him over the coals for it, Archie was still determined to take Az on the road in his bus for their honeymoon. He also wanted to open his own shop when they returned where they could start selling Az’s sculptures, DG’s artwork and his DIY lawn creations. It was a hobby he’d picked up the OZ and carried over with his cursed persona.

Three days before the wedding a large meeting was called at the town hall and many were surprised when Emma announced that she was stepping down as Sheriff.

“Why?” Ruby asked.

“Because since the curse was broken there are at least half a dozen people who’ve come here that are more qualified for the job. The only experience I had was as a bail bonds person. We need a real cop to head the department and after conducting interviews with all the experienced officers I have found the best candidate for the job. People of Storybrooke, I’d like you to meet our new Sheriff….Wyatt Cain!”

A nervous Wyatt rose from his chair and walked up to the podium. “Ummm….thank you,” he said when the applause died down. “All I’m gonna say is that I’m gonna do my best to keep law and order in this town and I’ll be countin’ on my fellow deputies to give me a hand with that. And I wanna thank Emma for doing a good job while she’s been in office.”

“I have decided that we are now going to make the Sheriff’s position a lifetime appointment. If, at any time Wyatt decides he wants to step down, HE will be the one to choose his successor,” Regina announced.

It was agreed that Emma would remain Sheriff until Wyatt and DG returned from their
honeymoon. She would stay on with the department as a Deputy and in Wyatt’s absence she would start interviewing refugees from the realms to try to expand the department.

“They need to get a room,” Bae remarked to Jeb, Xenia and Ambrose and Raw, the newly married couples still kissing amidst a shower of rose petals. They laughed.

"I think they are," Xenia said as they watched Wyatt lift his bride into his arms and carry her into the woods. They were still kissing. Archie picked up Az and started following them, laughing.

"Now? Can't they wait till after the reception? We have all those guests waiting!" Ambrose protested. "Tell them they need to wait till after the reception!"

"I'm not going to tell them. You go ahead and do it and watch how fast my dad follows through with his threat to make that zipper show up on your mouth," Jeb warned.

Ambrose threw up his hands. "I give up. You're all impossible."

"Not impossible just don't want to make Tin Man and DG mad," Raw pointed out. “Commander even worse when he gets mad.”

“Oh boy….DO NOT call him that to his face, Raw,” David pleaded. “He hates it. But what the heck are they doing?"

Rumple and Belle vanished in a puff of smoke.

“Now there THEY go!” Ambrose shook his head.

“Ummm….you think we should delay the reception a few hours?” Emma inquired of Regina. “Food seems to be the last thing the newlyweds have in mind.”

It would be the last thing I have in mind too, she thought.

“Where did everybody go…off to make tacos?”

“H…Henry…what….?” Emma choked. Snow and Charming snickered. “Oh, shut up! YOU started him on that because you didn’t WARN me what you were up to before I came home that day!”

“Well I woulda said they were off to make babies Mom but they already did that.”

“Oh my God, my kid is corrupted for life!” Emma moaned and buried her face in her hands.

“Maybe Az is gonna sculpt Archie like one of those French girls again.”

“WHAT? WHAT? Henry Mills Strogoff, you’d better explain that one right now!” Regina ordered.

“Whoa, calm down Mom. Ummm…remember when Cora was gonna come to Storybrooke. Grampa sent me to find Archie and I did…but ahh….I kinda dropped in at a bad time.”

“And just WHAT did you drop in on Henry Mills Strogoff?”

“Ummm….Az was sculpting Archie and ummm….he was naked…”

“Oooh when I get my hands on him I’m gonna…..”

“Hey, Mom it was my fault. He didn’t know I was gonna drop in. Besides, I walked in on you before!”
“Well I guess we don’t have to have The Talk with him. He already knows enough,” Bae quipped. “Yeeouch! If looks could kill…” He backed away from Emma and Regina.

“You’d be dead,” Emma growled. “So do yourself a favor and shut it, Gold!”

He nodded and wisely held his tongue.

“Well we might as well start the reception without them then. No sense letting all that good food go to waste. Come on.”

The party was already in full swing when they arrived at the Town Hall even if the guests of honor were missing.

“I’m going to beat them all with my rolling pin! Skipping out on all this good food!” Granny ranted.

“I say we hunt ‘em down and make ‘em come here!” Leroy bellowed. “’Mon boys!”

“Oh crap…I think there’s gonna be an increase in the snail population,” Bae muttered when a group of residents raced out of the diner. “Zee! Where do you think you’re going!?”

“I’m joining the mob!” she cackled. “Come, caro mio!”

Angelo threw up his hands. “I never argue with her. It’s pointless.” He hopped on the back of Zelena’s broom and the flew off into the woods.

“…Rumple…it’s beautiful!” Belle cried as they stood outside of his new newly remodeled cabin. “When did you have this done?”

“Oh, while we were sleeping.” He scooped her up in his arms.

“Rumple, your leg…”

“Oh, I may hae been given my limp back but that doesna mean I cannae enchant it not to pain me for a bit to carry my wife over the threshold. After all, tis how it’s done in this land.”

“Have I told you how much I love your native accent?”

“Ye can tell me indoors,” he murmured. The door swung open when he stepped onto the porch and slammed shut once they were inside. He carried her down the hall to the master bedroom and laid her down on the bed. As he crawled into bed with her they heard a commotion outside.

“HEY GOLD! GET YOUR ASS OUT HERE. YOU HAVE A WEDDING RECEPTION TO ATTEND!” Whale yelled through a bullhorn.

“I am going to turn him into a whale if he doesna get out of here in two minutes!” he growled.

“RRRumplestiltskin, Belle…come out come out wherever you are,” they heard Zelena giggle after she and Angelo emerged from the fireplace covered in soot after climbing down the chimney.

“Zee, why couldn’t we just come in the front door,” he groaned.

“He would have it warded.” She rapped on the bedroom door. “Are you decent?”

“Ye won’t be if ye dinna get yer arse outta here, cousin!”
“Well you shouldn’t have deserted your guests. It’s rude.”

“Git out or by the goddess I’ll turn ye green!”

“Bring it on, cousin. Bring it on!”

“All right, Ye asked for it!”

Angelo howled with laughter. “Oh my God…Zee….look in the mirror!”

She walked over to the mirror above the mantel and smiled at her new appearance. “Not bad, not bad.” She waved her hand over her face. “I might actually use this look for our next Halloween party.”

Henry slammed the tip of his dragon’s head staff into the ground when he saw a window being opened in the rear of the cabin.

“Sorry Grampa,” he chuckled.

“Henry Mills Strogoff, ye release those wards right now!”

“Let’s make a deal Grampa. You come to the wedding reception for two hours and I’ll release the wards. You can teleport anywhere you want after that. Do we have a deal?”

“Dammit, ye sound like me!”

“Well, do we have a deal?” Henry floated over to the master bedroom window and hovered there using his staff. Belle was sitting on the bed laughing hysterically.

“He’s a spoke off the old spinning wheel, isn’t he darling?”

“Aye, he certainly is. Well lad, ye hae a deal ‘cause ye won’t be leaving us in peace otherwise!” He reached out and shook his grandson’s hand. Minutes later he emerged from the cabin with Belle.

“One couple down, two to go! Come on boys!” Leroy hooted.

“Commander and Tin Man not going to be easy for them,” Raw remarked. Jeb nodded in agreement. They searched the forest for over an hour but no trace of the other two couples could be found.

“We should’ve just run off like they did,” Rumple grouched. “Ah well. Come on sweetheart. We’ll amuse them for a bit.”

Though there were still two couples missing from the reception, the guests were more than happy to make do with one. Bae stood up and held up his champagne flute.

“Papa, Belle, you’ve crossed realms, crossed time and fought so many battles to be where you are today, and I just wanted to say that I love you both and I couldn’t ask for better people to be my parents. Belle, you may not have given birth to me, but you have loved me and treated me like I was your son from the day we met. I wish you both a long life with much joy…and lots of brothers and sisters for me to spoil and send home! To Papa and Belle!”

“To Rumple and Belle!”

“Well dearie, ye could be returning the favor to me and giving me more grandchildren to spoil and send home to ye!” Rumple retorted, smirking over the rim of his glass.
Granny and had staff had prepared a wonderful feast for their guests of honor and though she was disappointed four of them would not be attending, the one couple that did stay behind was pleased that she’d added their beloved hamburgers to the menu and Zelena and Angelo had prepared several of their favorite dishes from Italy and Russia.

“And now we invite our bride and groom to come to the floor to share their first dance as husband and wife,” Regina announced and ‘After All’ began to play.

“I can’t help it,” Belle murmured. “I still feel like this is all a dream and I’ll wake up in Regina’s castle a prisoner…”

“It’s real sweetheart. Feel it,” he encouraged, lifting her hand and pressing it against his chest. “Do you feel our hearts beating Belle. We’re one now…in every way. No one is ever going to take you away from me again.”

Suddenly she was yanked out of his arms.

“But I’ll die trying…BEAST!” Maurice roared.

“Papa! Rumple, he’s laced his hands with squid ink!” she cried.

“Oh, has he?” His eyes narrowed to slits. “Ye dinna wanna go a round with me, mon. Father-in-law or no. Now release my wife!”

Henry, Bae and Emma moved forward, all armed with anything they could find.

“Stand down! He’s mine!”

“My daughter doesn’t love you. You seduced her with that dark magic from your bastard bloodline. And now I’m taking her back.”

A group of cloaked figures marched into the hall.

“Impossible! I thought they were all dead!” Xenia gasped.

“What the hell are they?”

“The Sons and Daughters of Shadows,” Rumple spat. “Her disciples. Well versed in dark magic. Where were ye when we were sending yer mistress back to her cage, dearies?”

The leader drew a sword. “Biding our time Strogoff scum. Now we will break the circle and our mistress shall reign in this land. Take them all!”

“You wanna fight? Bring it on,” Regina challenged.

One of the figures tossed a travel storm token at the wall and a glowing vortex appeared. The ones holding a still immobile Belle began to drag her through it.

“I think not!” Rumple snarled and blasted them. “I’m at full strength now so dinna think ye can escape me THAT easily.”

“Blue, clear the hall! Now!” Regina bellowed. The fairy waved her wand and the rest of the guests vanished in a puff of smoke, leaving Emma and Regina still in the hall with Maurice, Rumple and the disciples.

Emma summoned her sword and began dueling with two of the monks while Regina slammed
three others against the wall and summoned vines to bind them.

“Where are the others?” the leader demanded.

“Somewhere you can’t find them.” Rumple taunted. One of the men holding Belle attempted to tear out her heart and was blasted back. She laughed as she began to recover her strength.

“A heart that’s divided can’t be taken,” she reminded them with a smirk. She spotted her father trying to sneak away and slammed the doors shut. “You’re not going anywhere, Papa!”

“Belle, please…see reason!”

“Did you think I wouldn’t recognize them, Papa? Their faces have haunted my nightmares for years! WHAT DID THEY PROMISE YOU?”

Rumple howled with rage and teleported himself over to where they were standing while Emma and Regina finished off the others.

“YOU ARE ONE OF THEM!” he roared.


“You made a deal daughter…and so did I.”

The Enchanted Forest
Twenty-eight years ago

The deal had been stuck. His lands and his people had been saved but his daughter was lost to him forever, or so he thought.

“You can get your daughter back.”

His hands gripped the arms of his chair. “Who are you?”

The woman lowered her hood. “My name is Ekaterina Zero and I am the High Priestess of Shadowlands, Surely you have heard of us.”

“You…you serve her….the dark goddess,” he whispered fearfully. “No, no. We have done enough deals with those of your ilk.”

“Your own goddess seems to have abandoned you, Lord Lavalliere. We have our own interest in your daughter. She must be removed from Rumplestiltskin’s side and we can make that happen for you…if you become one of us.”

“I cannot…”

“What choice do you have? Leave your daughter with the Dark One? He will lie with her and breed his monstrous heirs upon her innocent body. My mistress’s vessel he may be, but he does not serve her. He serves himself. He must be destroyed!”

“You can destroy him and free my daughter?”

“If he has already taken her, her body must be cleansed,” Katia informed him. “We must be certain
their copulations do not bear fruit.”

The thought of his precious daughter rutting with the beast horrified him.

“Do you consent?” Katia pressed.

“I consent,” he murmured.

Katia waved her hand and a group of cloaked figures appeared in a circle around her.

“Come forward and kneel,” she commanded.

Maurice’s knees knocked when he rose from his chair and walked slowly toward the circle, the figures chanting in the Ozian language, a language his daughter had been studying prior to her being taken. Had her summoning him been part of the Dark One’s plan all along? He knew no other woman in the realm would have the beast. Once Maurice was inside the circle Katia placed her hands upon his shoulders.

“Into the Shadows I come
Your will be done
Recite!” she ordered, her nails cutting into his flesh.

“Into the Shadows I come
Your will be done!” he recited.

“Rise and take your place in the circle.” A black hooded cloak appeared in her hands. Maurice took and put it on, moving to his place in the circle.

Storybrooke, Maine
Years later

“…Bastard! They were USING you! They knew what your daughter was, what I was! They were using you to defy the will of the OZ. But you’ve failed…” he sneered, grabbing Maurice by the throat and shoving him against the doors. “Your goddess is imprisoned, the circle complete. All magic comes with a price dearie and now you pay!”

“Mistress, do not forsake us! Destroy them!” one of the women pleaded.

“It’s over bitch,” Emma pointed the tip of her sword at her throat. “Your mistress is locked up tight and you’re gonna be joining her.”

Henry appeared in a puff of smoke.

“The East Guardian summons thee
Ozmalita Diosa, appear now before me!”

A puff of silver smoke appeared in the hall revealing a tall, ginger haired woman wearing a white lab coat.

“You’re not Ozmalita,” he growled, the eyes on his staff glowing.

“This is my new form Henry,” Adora said softly and knelt. “What is your will?”

“Take them to Ephesis,” he commanded. “They are the surviving disciples of the Temple of Shadows.”
“They are not the only ones. There are others in the five remaining realms.”
“We will find them,” Rumple said through gritted teeth. “This one…” He held Maurice out. “I ask
that he be sent to the Realm of Retribution for his crimes against his flesh and blood!”

“What…what do you mean…what?” Maurice babbled.

“You’re going to Hell, dearie and I’ve heard the accommodations can be quiet…painful.”

A small pendant appeared in Adora’s hand. She began chanting in Greek and Ozian, the disciples
screaming while white mists emitted from their mouths and into the emerald in the pendant’s
center, their bodies disintegrating.

Maurice looked at his daughter with pleading eyes. “Belle…”

“Your bondmate has called for a judgement against your father, Belle. I cannot take his soul unless
it is your will as well.”

Tears rolled down her cheeks. “Take him,” she croaked.

“The words, dear Belle. You must speak the words.”

“I loved you Papa. I loved you so much. I sacrificed my freedom to save you, to save our people all
those years ago. I never expected to love Rumple or for him to love me, but we DO love each other
and NOTHING will come between us again. Not even you,” she sobbed. “I ask that he be sent to
the Realm of Retribution for his crimes against his own flesh and blood. “

“NO!” he yelled. “You cannot do this! Belle!”

“It’s been decided,” she said flatly. “Take him.”

“I curse the day your dear mother bore you!” he yelled when he began to disappear. “YOU ARE
NOT MY DAUGHTER!”

Belle spun around and buried her face in Rumple’s shoulder, weeping brokenly.

“Your loss dearie,” he murmured, stroking her hair. “It’s all right sweetheart. It’s over. It’s finally
over…”

The guests returned to the hall now wondering if there was anything left to celebrate. They took
their seats in silence, shocked when Belle flicked her wrist and the music started playing again.

“NO!” she cried through her tears. “I will not give them the satisfaction. Get up, dance! This is my
wedding day and I will have nothing else spoiling it!” She grabbed Rumple’s arm and dragged him
out onto the dance floor. He made a face.

“Ye dinna expect me to dance to disco, do ye sweetheart?”

She turned to him, hands on her hips. “Are you honestly going to stand there and tell me you don’t
like disco?”

“It’s bloody awful! Play something else.”

“You get out here mister or you’ll be spending your wedding night on the couch!” she threatened.

“Are ye gonna make me?”
“I’m going to count to three. One…”

David and Beth Molk were already on the floor dancing to You Should Be Dancing, David imitating John Travolta’s moves from Saturday Night Fever perfectly.

“Go Molky!” the former SFPD inspectors hooted, saluting them with their glasses.

“You gonna stand there and let us be upstaged or get out here and dance, you oaf? TWO!”

“I bloody HATE disco!”

“THREE!”

“Agh, fine!” he growled and joined Belle on the floor. “I’m gonna look like a bloody fool. How d’ye dance this crap, dearie?” he demanded of David.

“Watch and learn,” David grinned and began teaching the groom the dance moves. “Didn’t you ever watch the movie?”

“If I hate disco, what makes ye think I’d bloody watch anything with it in it?”

“Come on Belle,” Beth laughed.

Rumple waved his hand and he and David were wearing the trademark white polyester suit from the movie.

“I might as well look the part,” he said and laughed.

“Boogie down, Papa!” Bae chuckled. Seconds later he was on the floor beside him.

“Now ye can look as foolish as me, lad!”

“Come on, Papa. Let’s us show ‘em what the Gold men can do. You know any Van Halen?”


Bae leaned forward and whispered in his father’s ear. Rumple grinned and gestured again. This time he was dressed in a leather jacket, jeans and white t-shirt.

He sauntered over to where Belle was standing strumming his cane like a guitar to Van Halen’s ‘You Really Got Me.’

“Girl, you really got me now
You got me so I don't know what I'm doin'
Girl, you really got me now
You got me so I can't sleep at night
Girl, you really got me now
You got me so I don't know where I'm goin', yeah
Oh girl, you really got me now
You got me so I can't sleep at night
You really got me…” he sang.

“Who knew Gold was a Van Halen fan,” Emma mumbled.

“I didn’t but I think it’s cool. Alright Grampa!” Henry shouted.
“Reminds me of our wedding,” Beth giggled.

Belle went into her husband’s arms, smiling. “I didn’t know you could sing.”

“There’s a lot ye still dinna know about me, sweetheart but ye’ve got a long time to find out,” he murmured, picking her up and spinning her around.

“Can we leave the party early,” she whispered.

“Aye.”

“And can you do me a favor?”

“Anything.”

“Talk to me like that tonight. I love that accent.”

“As ye wish,” he whispered and kissed her hotly.

An hour later the music was turned off and the couple walked over to the dessert table to cut the cake. It was a three tiered marble cake with white and grey icing to represent the snow capped mountains and the topper a replica of the Dark Castle. They held hands and cut two slices together. Belle picked up her piece and mashed it in her husband’s hair.

“Ohhh ye asked for this dearie!” he giggled and mashed his on her backside.

“Ha ha, Miss Belle gots cake on her butt!” Roland Hood giggled.

“And now I would like all the single ladies to gather around. I’m tossing my bouquet!” she announced. “Oh no you don’t Emma Swan!” She cast a come-hither spell when she caught Emma trying to make a break for it.

“Damn!”

It’s going right in her hands. Do you get my meaning Rumplestiltskin Strogoff-Gold.

I’ll do my bit, dearie. She closed her eyes, the bouquet glowing slightly before she tossed it over her shoulder. Emma stood at the back of the line, trying as best as she could to avoid one of the most dreaded of wedding traditions.

Don’t let me catch it again please, she prayed. It seemed that no matter whose wedding she went to she always ended up catching the bouquet but she was never the next person to get married.

She could see Regina moving her way through the line.

Good, Let her get it.

“What? No!” she groaned when the bouquet fell into her hands.

Belle winked at her husband. Snow brought a chair out for her and she sat down. Rumple, using his cane to balance himself knelt at her feet and reached under her skirt for the elusive garter.

Use your teeth.

Dearie! There are children here!
Oh damn! I forgot.

Later, darling, later.

Is that a deal?

It’s a deal.

He stood up, the scrap of blue lace dangling from his finger. “All right ye men get yer arses in here,” he ordered, pleased to see his son at the front of the line. He turned his back, counted to three and tossed the garter over his shoulder. There was a brief scuffle and a triumphant Bae stood up. Tinkerbell lowered her head. Regina patted her shoulder comfortingly.

“There’s still a chance. Emma won’t give him the time of day.”

“And how are things progressing with you and Robin.”

“Slowly. He loved Marian so much…”

The fairy nodded, looking away as Emma took Belle’s place in the chair.

The moment Bae’s hand touched her thigh he was taken back to those many nights they’d spent in cheap motels in the backseat of her Bug and across the room she could see the living reminder of those nights.

I can’t think about it. I can’t, she told herself. He’ll just abandon me again. Bae’s eyes met hers when he rose to his feet with the garter in his hand.

“I’m not giving up on us Em,” he said before he returned to his seat.

“Regina, Belle and I will be leaving after we have the bridal dance,” Rumple informed her. She nodded.

Ruby stood by holding a white silk purse for the guests to toss their dollar fee in to dance with the bride and groom. Rumple and Belle would be using the money to support the Nonestican refugees.

“Have a good time on your honeymoon.” Bae kissed Belle’s cheek. “And make sure Papa behaves.”

She laughed. “I’m going to have to keep myself out of trouble first.”

“Where are you going?”

“Back to our cabin and we’re not to be disturbed this time unless it’s a dire emergency!” He waved his hand and teleported them back to their cabin.

Belle took his hand and started pulling him toward the bedroom. “Now what did you say you wanted to do with your teeth?” she asked.

“Well sweetheart allow me to show ye…” He scooped her up in his arms and carried her over to the bed, nibbling on a sensitive spot on her neck. “And that’s just the start…”

Topeka, Kansas

"So this is where you grew up?” Wyatt asked DG once they stood in front of her old farmhouse in Kansas. The travel storm that took her to the OZ did some damage to the house, but it was only minor. DG waved her hand and used her magic to repair her broken bedroom window and missing
pieces of the roof.

"Reminds me of my old cottage."

"I figured it would. Are you ready to go in?"

"Yeah."

There was still more damage inside from the Longcoat invasion. Even as she repaired the damage DG couldn't help thinking about Hank and Emily. Ambrose was still trying to erase the coercion virus Alemedia's Longcoats had given them but he wasn't having much success because their circuits were rejecting all his counterattacks. He promised her he would keep trying or try to repair them with new circuits. He warned her there was a possibility they would no longer remember her, but she was willing to live with that as long as they survived since they were all she had left of Ahamo.

Wyatt studied the living room, fascinated by all the modern gadgets that seemed to make life much easier for other siders. DG took him to each one and explained what it was. The telephone wasn't strange to him; he'd used one when he lived in Central City but an older model.

"We should have had stuff like this in the OZ," he murmured.

"Az was planning on that when she was a child. Have a seat, Tin Man. We're gonna watch some TV."

He'd been terrified of the TV at first because it reminded him of the time loop and the viewing tank back at the tower but as DG explained that the TV was not able to show anything about him he started to relax.

"Now make yourself comfortable and I'll cook us some dinner," she said softly.

"You can cook now? I had to do all the cooking when we were living together in Elba."

"That was before I started working at the Hilltop and your kitchen was fifty years behind the times. I was learning how to be a cook before I went back to the OZ. That, beauty school and self defense classes took up most of my time here."

"Dottie you've been away from here so long there's probably nothing edible in the house."

She smiled. "That's when being a demigoddess comes in handy."

Wyatt took off his duster, vest and Fedora and put them on the coffee table and put his boots under the table then stretched out on the sofa that barely accommodated his tall frame. He used the remote control and started changing the channels, finally settling on a program where the people lived like he did in Elba.

In the kitchen DG had used her magic to fill the cupboards and refrigerator with enough food for several weeks. She stood in the doorway and watched Wyatt as he lay on the sofa watching a western movie, a loving smile on her lips. There were still some moments when she feared she was only dreaming again, and she would wake up and have to try to find him. Hearing the stove's timer buzz she hurried over to the oven and took the roast out.

"Something smells good in here," she heard Wyatt say from behind her and felt his arms around her waist. She leaned back against him and tilted her head back as he kissed the side of her neck. "What is it?"
"Roast, corn on the cob, mashed potatoes and gravy."

"Need any help?"

"No, I'm good. You just keep watching TV. Are you liking it so far?"

"Yeah I am but I hate just sitting around while you do all the work."

"You're probably one of the few men I've known who would say that."

"From what you've told me the men on this side don't seem to know how to treat a woman."

"Some don't, no," she admitted. "Everything should be done in ten minutes."

"Okay," he said as he reluctantly retreated to the living room. The movie ended and he pressed a button on the remote. Silence. "Damn...what the hell did I do? Ummmm...Dottie, can you come in here for a minute?" he called out.

"What's wrong?"

"I think I broke the TV. I can't hear anything," he grumbled.

"What button did you push?" she asked him. She already knew what the problem was but she wanted him to learn how to fix it himself if he did it again. He pointed to the button. "Okay...here's how you fix it," she said as she showed him how to return the sound back on.

"I feel like an idiot," he complained.

"Don't worry, baby. Everything here will just take some time to get used to, that's all," she said softly as she kissed him.

"I hope we can stay long enough for me to learn a good bit. Fall and winter in Storybrooke is probably gonna be a lot easier for us that it would've been in the OZ. Remember the hell it was for us to get through the Northern Island?"

"You're not exactly the best driver," DG said with a smirk. "That's one thing you're going to learn to do better on this side. Popster's truck should still be here and so should my bike unless that prick Gulch impounded it."

"He's an officer of the law Dottie and deserves respect. You broke the law by speeding and he was well within his rights to give you a ticket," her husband reminded her.

"I should've known I wouldn't get any sympathy from you Tin Man," DG muttered.

"Nor will you if you get caught again, me being the law and order in the town or not." While they were eating dinner they both felt as if they were living like a normal couple again.

"I wish it could've been like this two years ago," DG said wistfully as she reached across the table and covered Wyatt's large hand with her small one. "I wanted to touch you so much but when I tried all I felt was air."

"It wasn't easy for me either," he confessed. "You were still young and I thought you deserved more than I could give you. Sometimes I still feel that way."

"I'm the one who should feel that way. You've been through hell in both of your lives, worse in this one because I can't stop being an idiot. Before you get mad at me, just hear me out. How often do
you have to keep me on the straight and narrow? More times than I can count and if you aren't doing it, Az is. I'm done being immature and foolish because I don't want our kids to be like that. I want you to promise me we'll bring them here and as much of this world we can. They need to know how to survive in all the realms."

"We will Dottie," he said softly. "Are you ready to go upstairs?"

She held out her arms. "Come and get me, Tin Man!"

He laughed and threw her over his shoulder like a sack.

"Oooh I didn’t mean that way but I like the view!" She swatted his backside while he carried her upstairs.

Portland, Maine

Az rolled down the passenger side window to allow the cool breeze to caress her face while Archie drove down the highway, a compilation of their favorite 60s and 70s songs playing on the stereo. A small smile played across her lips as she recalled their first venture into this realm they’d known as the other side when she was still a young girl. Now they were on another adventure, this time as husband and wife and soon they would have their lost daughter back in their arms. It was more than she could’ve hoped for.

Archie reached across the seat and took her hand in his. "What are you thinking about?"

"How happy I am. I have you, I have my sister, cousins, new friends….and soon we’ll have our baby back."

"No one’s gonna take her away from us this time. Do you regret not staying for the wedding reception? We still have time to turn around."

"I just want to be with you, I don’t care where we are but don’t drive too long or you’ll get tired."

Not wanting Az to be sitting in the bus too long in her condition, they pulled off at a rest stop to stretch their legs and eat the lunches they’d packed.

"Everyone is staring at us," she said worriedly.

"I don’t care. Let them but if one person says one word outta line…"

"Archie, please. No brawling on our wedding day."

"You know I don’t like when anyone insults you." He sighed. "All those years I missed…"

"Don’t, please. You knew our being apart was the will of the OZ."

He tossed a stick into the grass. "That didn’t mean I had to like it!"

"It’s over now. Let’s not think about it anymore." She cupped his face in her hands and kissed him. "Think about the future. We’re having our baby. We can build a new life here." She lay back on the blanket. He lay beside her, his head propped up on his elbow.

"Do you remember all the times we used to sneak over here by ourselves," he murmured. She nodded, eager to return to her father’s childhood home to unearth the secret she’d buried there years before. She’d never expected the confession she’d spoken into an enchanted stone as a young girl of nineteen to ever see the light of day nor that she would make the same confession a week
later.

“Promise me we’ll see more of this world, Archie.”

“We’ll go anywhere you want to go.” He stood up and helped her to her feet. “We should find somewhere to stay before it gets dark.”

An hour later he pulled into the parking lot of a motel he’d spotted. He unlocked the door and went inside, his hands on his hips.

“Honey?”

“Dellia, go out to the van.”

“But…”

“Go on,” he said firmly and stormed back to the front office slamming the key on the table. “I’d like my money back please.”

“Sir, there are no…”

“Did you hear what I said? I want my money back. NOW!”

“What’s the matter?”

“What’s the matter? What’s the matter? Have you smelled that room lately? And when was the last time the linens were washed? Do you really expect my pregnant wife to sleep in such, such…filth?” he ranted. “I should report this place to the Health Department. As matter of fact I will….AFTER you give me back my payment!”

“You paid….”

Archie took out his phone. The clerk yanked the money out of the drawer and thrust it at him. “Here, here now go!”

“Glad to,” he muttered.

“Honey, what was the matter?”

“Dellia, did you smell that place? It was like…I can’t even describe it. There’s no way in hell I was letting you sleep in that filth!” He started the engine and sped out of the parking lot, wanting to get away from that place as quickly as possible.

It was getting late and Archie had been driving for miles with no other motels in sight. He found himself nodding off several times and rolled down the window to keep himself awake while Az dozed in the seat beside him. Finally he pulled the bus over into a field and cut the engine. “Dellia?” he whispered in her ear.

“Did you find a motel?” she asked sleepily

He shook his head as he helped her to the back of the bus. “I know…I know it’s not how you planned on spending our wedding night but….” He waved his hand and a shield formed over the bus and crawled onto the makeshift bed he made for them. “I had this wonderfully hippie honeymoon planned out and it’s not going very well, is it?”

“It’s just getting started,” she murmured and began unbuttoning his shirt.
"You’re not too tired?"

"Archie Jiminy Ozopov Hopper, it’s our wedding night and I don’t intend to spend the rest of it sleeping...not yet anyway,” she whispered and pulled him down to her.

Topeka

DG was eager to show Wyatt the town but he immediately objected when he realized what their mode of transportation would be.

"Out of the question! We are not going to town on that...thing!” he said as he glared at her motorcycle. "And you are not riding it while you're with child either."

"Don't start bossing me around Tin Man!" DG snapped.

"Honey, I'm only being..."

She sighed. "I know you are. We'll take Popster's truck. I hope it still works."
They found the truck in the garage but when DG turned the key on nothing happened. "Dammit. Here, you get in the driver's seat,” she ordered her husband.

"What are you doing?" he asked her as she climbed out of the cab and lifted the hood. "Dottie, get out of there!" he cried.

"What?" she asked as she poked her head out from behind the hood. "Oh, wipe that look off your face. This ain't the first time I've had to fix this piece of shit."

"You can fix trucks?" he asked incredulously, realizing for the first time that he didn't really know everything about his wife.

"And turbines...not to mention any other mechanical thing. Been doing it for years," she mumbled as she worked. "Try to start it up!" she called out.

"How the hell do I do that? This thing has more knobs on it than that crazy truck Demillo had!" Wyatt groused.

"Just turn the key but keep your foot off the gas," she instructed. "I said keep your foot off the gas!" she yelled when she heard the engine revving and the strong smell of gasoline. "You're gonna flood it!"

"Well, back home you had to push on the gas to get it to run!"

"Not here. You'll flood it if you step on the gas while you're starting it if it’s fuel injected."

"Does she really expect me to know what the hell 'fuel injected means'?” he grumbled.

"I heard that,” DG said as she stood in front of the ajar driver's side door with her hands on her hips. There were streaks of grease on the side of her face and on her shirt.

Wyatt burst into laughter. "That's a new look for you."

"This coming from a guy who doesn't know how to start a truck?"

"I know how to start a truck!" he protested.

"Oh yeah, one from the Stone Age," she taunted.
"Smartass."

"Well it's not my fault our world is a bit behind the times. I need a shower...care to join me?"

"In the shower? Why would I do that?"

"Oh Tin Man are you in for a surprise," DG said as she grabbed his arm and pulled back toward the house.

Two hours later DG was driving them into town. She glanced over at the passenger seat and giggled. Wyatt took off his Stetson hat several times, scowled at it then put it back on his head.

"I don't know why I have to wear this damned thing. Nothing wrong with mine," he grumbled.

"A fedora was in fashion years ago around here. These hats are more up to date."

"Looks like I'm wearing a plate on my head."

"Oh stop it. You still look sexy to me," she said softly.

"You've been nothing but surprises today...making me change my hat and.....about the shower...." She could see his face turning crimson under his hat. "I feel like I'm twenty again."

"You didn't sleep with anyone until then?"

"Adora and I messed around a bit but never did the deed til our wedding night," he admitted. "Her folks didn't believe that though because I was Sam Cain's son and my pa ran around a lot so her pa showed up at our house with a shotgun and told me I wasn't going to sire a bastard on his daughter like pa did on my mother."

"Your mother got pregnant with you before she married your dad?"

"Yeah...and took off on him. She actually went to Lurline's temple to try to give me to Alana to raise but Pa showed up and they got married there right after she had me. She never let me or pa forget how much she hated both of us for ruining her life."

"As if she didn't play a part in it!" DG cried. "The bitch. No wonder she looked the other way when your stepfather beat you. She used him as her instrument of revenge." She reached across the seat and patted his hand. "And now I know why it was so hard for you when you lost Adora. She was one of the only bright spots you had in your life."

"I owe her a lot, Dori. Had she not straightened me out I'd be worse than Alemedia."

"As long as we're here we should go up to Maryland."

"I'm not flying in one of those damned planes. I'm telling you that right now. It reminds me too much of the suit. I'll open a portal and we'll get there that way."

"I have something I want to ask you....and please don't get mad at me...but would you be willing to see a doctor here about some of the problems you have? Archie, maybe."

"I'm not a headcase!" he shouted, slamming his first down on the dashboard. DG slammed on the brakes and brought the truck to stop.

"No, just a stubborn asshole!" she croaked as she got out and slammed the door.
"What the hell are you doing?" he cried as he rolled down the window.

"Walking home!" she yelled.

"Are you out of your mind? We're miles away from the house. Get back here!" he ordered as he hurried after her.

"You go to hell! I'm not of your deputies so you can't order me around."

"No but I am your husband..."

"And I'm your wife!" she cried as she turned around and faced him. "A wife who loves you and wants to help you but you won't let me!"

"Dottie, there's nothing wrong with me," he insisted.

"Isn't there? Then why do you still wake up sometimes scared to death you're locked in that suit or toss and turn in your sleep calling out my name, Jeb's, Az's or Adora's thinking something has happened to one of us. And if worrying about us isn't what your nightmares are about, then I hear you begging your stepfather not to hit you anymore. You've been too busy helping me forget my past that you've forgotten yours still haunts you and it tears at my heart to watch you go through that," she sobbed and wrapped her arms around him and rested her head on his chest.

"I know you're worried about me and I love you for it but I'm gonna be fine."

"Stubborn man," she mumbled.

"You still mad at me?"

"A little bit but I'll get over it," she said as they climbed back into the truck. DG started the engine and tuned on the radio, tuning in to her favorite rock station. As Guns N Roses 'Welcome To The Jungle' came on Wyatt nearly jumped out of his seat.

"Damn, does he have to scream like that!" he cried.

DG giggled. "Yeah. Actually a lot of the songs I listen to fit you pretty well."

"I don't see how," he mumbled.

"You will," she said with a smirk.

"Isn't there any music you play that doesn't require screaming?" he asked.

DG opened the storage compartment in the middle of the seat and took out her favorite CD. It was a collection of Sarah McLachlan's hits. She put it in the player and skipped to the song 'Possession'. She replayed it in her mind so many times when she began having feelings for Wyatt again and it seemed to describe her emotions perfectly. She began to sing along.

Wyatt was amazed that she was able to concentrate on driving when she was singing that strange song with such passion.

"This is where I used to work," she said as they pulled into the parking lot of the cafe. "Better brace yourself baby....they're gonna be asking me a lot of questions about where I was."

"How are you gonna explain me?"
"Easy. You're my husband," she said with smile. "C'mon."

Phoebe was the first person to see her and dropped the tray she was carrying. "Oh my God DG! We....we all thought you were dead!" she cried.

"Phoebe, what's going on out there?" Carter barked from the kitchen. He pushed the metal door open and stopped dead in his tracks when he saw DG standing there. "D...DG?!"

"I know my being here is a bit of a shock," DG began.

"You ain't kidding!" Carter mumbled. "We all saw the damage the twister did to your house. It was enough to kill an army. Where are your folks? D...Did they survive?"

"Carter, why don't we wait till closing time before I go into details," DG suggested. "Right now my husband and I need a good breakfast."

"Husband?" Carter and Phoebe asked in unison and looked at Wyatt.

"Yep. This is my husband, Wyatt Cain."

"Hi," Wyatt said nervously. He didn't have to read their minds to be able to tell what they were thinking. He was old enough to be DG's father and they probably knew a number of men closer to her age that would probably suit her better.

Stop it, he heard her voice in his mind scolding.

I should've stayed home, I stick out like a mobat in a deserted forest.

Only because that hat, shirt and jeans make you look like a cowboy the women want to take a ride on.

Ozma's ghost, Dottie! The mouth you have on you...

Ummm hmmm. When we get home I've got more interesting things I can do with it.

He cleared his throat and led her over to an empty booth.

Behave yourself!

I will...for now.

"You're determined to drive me crazy, aren't you?" he asked her aloud.

"It's been in my job description for ages," she replied.

He picked up a menu and started reading through it. Phoebe approached them with her pen poised over her order pad. "You gonna have your usual, Deege?"

"You bet."

"And you uh...Mr. Cain? What will you have?"

Get the special. It's more like what you usually eat for breakfast.

Wyatt smiled at DG. "The special looks good. Can I get some coffee with it?"

"Sure. Regular or decaf?"
Regular. If you tried the decaf you'd hate it.

"Regular, please."

I just hope it hasn't been sitting out for hours or it's gonna taste like shit anyway.

Probably didn't sit out any longer than mine usually does.

"You having coffee too, Deege?"

"Yeah, thanks Phoebe."

When she returned with their plates Wyatt was relieved to see the special was just eggs, toast and pancakes, exactly what he did like to eat for breakfast.

"Now that I'm on my break," Phoebe began as she slid into the booth beside DG. "You can tell me how you went from 'men are pigs' to the wife of this cute cowboy."

This woman is sick.

DG tried not to laugh as she heard Wyatt's voice in her head again.

How dirty are her thoughts, Tin Man?

Very. My advice is to not read them because you'd probably end up doing something to her you'd hate yourself in the morning for.

"Well...ummm..." DG stammered as she fought back the stab of jealousy she felt watching her co-worker eying up her husband like he was a piece of meat.

"I'm an old friend of the family," Wyatt answered.

"How come we've never seen you before then?" Phoebe inquired.

"He means my birth family. I've been in witness protection since I was five."

"Really? Were your parents gangsters or something?"

"No, but they're important political figures back home and someone was trying to kill all of us. They sent my sister and me away so we'd be safe from the people hunting my parents."

Phoebe laughed. "Oh, come on Deege! You've made up some wild stories in your day but this has to be the best one."

"She's not lying," Wyatt said in his firmest voice as he stabbed his egg with his fork. "I spent years trying to find her because that was my job."

"Oh, so you were supposed to be her bodyguard?"

"Something like that, yeah."

"So how did you...?"

"He finally found me four years ago," DG explained. "I remembered little of him from when I lived back home but he told me who he was and that he as here to watch over me but he couldn't stay away from his wife and son for long. He was who I was with after Mike tried to rape me out at
Porter's Glen. His wife passed away and well, we kinda grew on each other until the people who were after me found us again. He got caught and I ended up being found by Gulch."

"Who said you were babbling a lot of crazy stuff about witches and dragons," Phoebe reminded her. "And why didn't he tell your parents where you were?"

"We couldn't. They were being followed too."

"Everything's okay now, isn't it?"

"We got a long way to go but our country's getting back on its feet," Wyatt answered.

"Are you going to move back here or go back home?"

"We'll probably just come here to visit once in a while," DG said. "I need to spend time with my sister. My parents are dead."

“Oh honey I’m so sorry.”

“It’s alright. I have Wyatt now and soon we’re going to start our own family.”

As they were walking out of the diner an hour later they heard laughter behind them.

“Gee Deege, you must really be getting desperate if you’re robbing the graveyard to get a man.”

Her grip on Wyatt’s hand tightened.

Wyatt spun around to face their antagonist, his blue eyes now red as fire as his darkness took control. DG grabbed his hand, attempting to use her light to push back his anger but it was no use. His darkness was at its full strength when he was in a blind rage and no amount of her light could push it back.

"What did you just say you son of a bitch?" he demanded.

Storybrooke, Maine

The scents of French Toast, eggs, bacon and freshly brewed coffee roused Belle from a deep sleep early the next morning. She opened her eyes to find her husband standing beside the bed, a tray in his hands.

“Good morning Mrs. Strogoff-Gold.”

“Mmmm, Mrs. Strogoff-Gold….I love the sound of it,” she murmured and sat up. “I hope this isn’t all for me!”

He grinned. “I’ve already had my breakfast.”

“Oh you!” she laughed and threw a piece of toast at him.

“Now dinna be wasting good food love,” he scolded gently. “Now look what ye’ve done. Ye’ve gotten syrup on me and now ye’ll have to clean it up.”

“Oh, will I?”

“Mmmm hmm…”

“And how do you propose I do that?”
“Do you have to ask?” he inquired breathlessly.

Later that afternoon they went for a walk in the woods, Rumple having to stop and rest several times when his leg began to pain him.

“You can’t fix it?”

He shook his head. “Tis my price for surrendering to the darkness as is this,” He pointed to the scar on his chest. “But it was all worth it.”

Belle lifted his leg onto her lap and began to massage it. “I’m hoping we can have some peace now that all the curses have been broken. Rumple, I’ve been doing some thinking about the baby…and I… I’d like to name it Hope if it’s a girl.”

“That’s what I was thinking too sweetheart. Sometimes I think she might have been my mother’s spirit watching over me.”

“I wish I could’ve known her.”

“So do I sweetheart, so do I. She gave her life for me and with the years I have left I am going to prove myself worthy of the sacrifice she made. Now if we have a boy…”

“Nathaniel…for Nathaniel Hawthorne.”

He laughed. “How did I know ye would want to name our lad after one of your favorite authors?”

“Because we read his works together for hours in the Dark Castle. You knew about this world’s culture before anyone else did.”

“No. Az and Archie did too. They accessed his construct’s memories and Az’s father was from this side. Ah, that feels wonderful sweetheart.”

“I don’t know much about being a wife but I’m going to learn.”

“Never leave me. That’s all I ask of you.”

“I would never do that, Rumple!” she cried and kissed him. The tumbled onto the grass. “Rumple, are you alright?”

“I’m just fine sweetheart,” he murmured into her hair. “I just want to lie here and old you for a while.”

“You won’t hear me complaining.”

Portland, Maine

A loud tapping on the window woke Az out of a deep sleep. She lifted her head, her heart in her throat when she saw a man in a police officer’s uniform looking in on them.

“Archie, Archie!” she cried, shaking his shoulder and pulling the covers over them to shield them from the prying eyes.

“Mmmm what is it, Dellia?” he groaned into her hair.

“Archie, wake up! There’s a police officer standing in front of our van.”
“You’re just dreamin’ honey.”

“No, I’m not! Come on, wake up!” She shook him hard. He groaned again and fell back to sleep.

The officer pounded on the window. “Step out of the vehicle please!” he commanded.

“Commander Ozopov, YOU GET UP RIGHT NOW!” she yelled in his ear in her Sorceress voice.

That did the trick. He sat up and glanced over at the window. “Okay, okay give us a minute.”

“Step out of the vehicle NOW!”

“All right, you asked for it!” Archie grumbled, crawling over to the door and sliding it open.

“Archie you can’t go out like…”

She pulled her dress on and crawled out of the van while the trooper was talking to a still naked Archie trying his best to cover himself with his hands.

“Oh, for Heaven’s sake we’re not drunk, and we certainly were not doing drugs!” he protested.

“You wanna do a sobriety check on me, go right ahead but you’re not gonna find anything. Now, could I at least put some clothes on?”

Az glanced over at his squad car and to her horror she could see one of those dashboard cameras her brother-in-law talked about recording every second of their encounter that would probably end up on one of those social media sites.

A few minutes later another highway patrol car arrived.

“Lurline’s underdrawers!” Az cursed under her breath. The second officer guarded them while the other started searching the van. He brought out Archie’s wallet and her purse and started copying everything from Archie’s driver’s license and her state identification card.

“There’s a motel ten miles up the road. Why didn’t you pull off there?” the other trooper was asking Archie while the one that woke them seemed to be undressing Az with his eyes, Archie giving him his ‘Commander’ glare that meant he was going to find out how feeling small felt like...literally. She elbowed him in the ribs. They were giving them enough of a show without throwing magic into the mix!

“Because it looked like a place I wouldn’t even let my dog sleep in.”

The trooper ripped a piece of paper off the pad he was holding and held it out to Archie. He looked at it and shook his head.

“This could’ve been avoided if you’d just given me time to get dressed. Officer, I understand you need to be cautious, but this is a little umm...extreme.”

“I’m letting you off easy but if you wanna go to jail…”

“Forget it! I’ll pay the fine!” he cried and snatched the ticket out of the trooper’s hand. “Are we allowed to go now or are you planning on letting me give every car that drives by a free show?”

The troopers grinned at each other.

“Hilarious. And let me guess; you’ve got it all on your dashboard cam and it’s gonna wind up online. My brother is a cop and believe me, I’ve heard all the stories.”
“Gotta say this stop has been the funniest one we’ve had in months,” one laughed.

They couldn’t help laughing themselves.

“David is going to laugh himself when he hears about this,” Archie chuckled and crawled into the van to get dressed. The troopers were still there, apparently ready to take a break. Now the couple didn’t mind their company. Archie brought their lounge chairs out of the bus along with the cooler. The ice had melted overnight but the drinks were still cold.

“You said your brother was a cop? State or local?” the trooper named Kleinfelter asked. The other’s name was Turchetta.

“SFPD. Homicide and vice before he transferred to Maine. He was looking for me. We’re twins but we were raised apart. He’d been looking for me for a while and finally found out where I lived so he moved his family to the town I live in and got hired as Sheriff’s deputy.”

“What do you do? Besides drive around in a hippie bus and sleep naked?”

“I’m a psychiatrist and an environmentalist plus I dabble in a little gardening. My practice is small, so I spent most of my time gardening and making things, mostly out of stuff people throw away. Another person’s trash is my treasure you could say.”

“I’m a sculptor and we’re on our honeymoon,” Az added. “Archie thought it would be romantic for us to take a trip up the coast but we didn’t see a hotel for miles after that last one and he was getting tired…so we stopped off to sleep.”

Among other things.

Archie!

“You do know how dangerous that is these days, right?” Turchetta demanded. “We don’t wanna have to get called out here to find you dead somewhere.”

“Officers, we’re well aware of the dangers of the open road these days but we’re not completely helpless.” Archie opened his wallet and handed him his weapons permit. “My brother’s already given me enough of a lecture on it.”

“If you go twenty more miles there’s another motel that’s pretty clean. I would stop off there if you get too tired. Any idea where you’re headed?”

“Topeka. We’re gonna meet up with my-in-laws.”

“Well have a good trip…oh and make sure you pay your fine,” Klinefelter added and chuckled. “You know it’s gonna go on your record.”

“Yes, I know!” Archie groaned. “And I know I’m gonna hear about it from David before I get back.”

They were back on the road twenty minutes later. They had another few days of driving before they reached their destination.

“I can’t wait to see Daddy’s house again.”

“DG warned us it is probably going to be a wreck after that travel storm Lannot’s men dropped on it.”
"She’ll fix it. I wonder if it’s still there."

"If what’s still there honey."

She smiled softly. “That last trip we took… I… I made a confession stone. I’d started having feelings for you as soon as I turned thirteen. They frightened me… but excited me at the same time. I buried it in the field, promising myself that if nothing ever happened between us it would stay there.” He reached across the seat and raised her hand to his lips. "Now you have a reason to find it again."

Topeka

"Need a hearing aid old man? I said: DG must be desperate if she's robbing the graveyard to get a man."

"You have no idea who you're dealing with boy," Wyatt growled.

"What'cha gonna do, old man? Beat me with your cane?"

"Wyatt...don't..." DG pleaded.

"He's got this coming."

"It's not worth it!"

"It is to me!"

"Go ahead old man. Do your worst," Mike challenged.

"With pleasure," Wyatt sent a powerful windburst at the younger man that shoved him through a portal into Porter's Glen, manifesting a set of iron chains that bound his wrists and ankles to the ground beneath him. Mike screamed and struggled to free himself. "Yell all you want. No one's gonna hear you." Wyatt said as he and DG appeared in front of him.

"What th… get me out of here!"

A zipper appeared over his mouth.

"That's better," Wyatt said as he knelt beside the now terrified man and pointed his pistol at him. "You don’t know how much I’d love to tear you to pieces for what you did to my wife. Let’s see what else you’ve done.” He reached into the other man’s chest and ripped his heart out, the memories within it making his blood boil even hotter.

“Wyatt...he's not from our world. We can't do anything...” DG said.

"He deserves to be punished for what he's done... not just to you but to other women.” The younger man started screaming as intense pain spread through his groin.

"I'm sorry... I won't do it again I swear only make it stop!” he pleaded. "Jesus, what the hell are you?"

"I'll make it stop... if you swear to me that once you get back to town you tell the cops what you did. If you don’t, you’ll be seeing me again and there'll be more than pain next time. Do I have your word?"

"Yes... Christ yes only make it stop."
"I'll be watching you to be sure you make good on it."

"Wyatt, pull it back. He's been punished enough," DG said softly as she laid a hand on Wyatt's shoulder. His eyes turned back to their normal color again. He formed a portal in the ground and shoved the injured man into it. "Where did you send him?"

"To the county lockup," he answered.

"What did you do to him?"

"His family jewels won't useful for anything except going to the bathroom from now on. You're not the first woman he tried to rape Dottie and you weren't the last. When he didn't get you, he went after another girl a year later, but they couldn't make the charges stick. They won't have any trouble now."

"He won't talk."

"He will unless he wants to be in pain constantly."

She pressed her palm against his chest. "Can you put the dragon back to sleep and give me back my Tin Man?" she pleaded.

"That damn Alemedia. I can't stand having this dark magic in me and I hate myself for you having it too."

She kissed him. "Now stop brooding."

"We should get back to the house."

"Why?" she asked.

"Huh?"

She smiled as she wrapped her arms around him. "I don't want the only memories I have of this place to be Mike trying to attack me and being separated from you. The memory I do want to have is the two of us out here alone...sort of camping out. Like we did while we were trekking across the OZ."

"This place has as many dangers as the OZ, Dottie."

"Nothing can hurt us as long as we're together."

Using their magic they created all of the supplies they would need for an overnight stay although it tired them easily. "Now some people actually have a home on wheels...we call em RVs or campers but I always liked pitching a tent," DG explained as they were setting up their tent.

"Sitting in a tin box is not my idea of camping," Wyatt muttered. "If you're going to camp out, do it the right way or don't do it at all. These other siders seem like they're too pampered by their modern gadgets. When my pa and I went on long hunting trips we sometimes pitched a tent, other times we just slept outside. I wanted to take Jeb on a camping trip but never got the time...."

"Don't worry, you will one of these days. And I expect you to take our children out in the wild to get a feel of it. I don't want them growing up pampered brats," she added as they huddled by the fire he'd built for them. Wyatt took out his pistol and checked the chamber. When he realized it was fully loaded, he reattached it to its holster.
"Just making sure. We've got to keep the magic use to a minimum sweetheart or we'll drain ourselves to the point where we won't be able to protect each other if we get in a jam."

They heard a car approaching. Wyatt stood up, pulled his gun out and pushed DG behind him. The driver turned off the headlights and walked toward them.

"You better have a permit for that!" the officer shouted.

"Dammit Denny, what the hell are you doing out here!" DG yelled back, recognizing one of her former classmates who gave her as difficult a time as Gulch.

"You and that husband of yours have some explaining to do," he said as he approached them. "Wanna tell me why Mike is in a cell at the county jail ranting about how your husband's some kind of warlock who can shove him through glowing holes in walls and squeeze his balls without even touching him?"

"He's drunk, stoned or both. He ambushed us outside the Hilltop and started making fun of us, but we told him to leave us alone," DG lied. "Whatever else he thinks happened was just in his mind."

Denny suddenly smirked at Wyatt. "I'm not the kind who advocates prairie justice, mind you but in some cases I'm willing to make exceptions. Camping out huh? Not a bad idea."

"Aren't you supposed to be out on patrol?" DG inquired.

"As of now I'm officially off duty."

"Oh how nice," DG said sarcastically. "Well then why don't you go home?"

"Dottie, do we have to have our little talk about you respecting an officer of the law again?" her husband countered impatiently. Denny smirked when he noticed her sudden docility. He never thought he'd see the day when the little hellion would finally learn to take some orders. He was starting to like this husband of hers.

"No, we don't but he's still a pain in my ass," she grumbled. "Like Gulch."

"Believe me the feeling is more than mutual. Gulch said he moved to where you were just to keep an eye on ya."

"Do I have to put you two in separate corners?" Wyatt asked.

"Nah, I was just leaving but can you do me a favor and not cause any more chaos while you're here? That wife of yours causes enough."

"I'll try not to but I won't have anyone insulting my wife," Wyatt said firmly.

"Guess that'll have to do. See you in town," Denny said as he tipped his hat toward the older man and walked back to his car. The moment his car was well out of sight, DG pulled her husband into her arms and kissed him again.

"Bring the sleeping bag and pillows out," she whispered.

"Why?"

"Because Wyatt Cain, we're going to make love under the stars," she informed him. Before he could say anything, she jumped into his arms, wrapping hers around his neck and her legs around his waist.
"Dottie, gonna be kinda hard to bring the sleeping bag out when I've got my hands full with you..."

"Well then use your mojo and bring it out here," she murmured.

It was difficult to concentrate when his wife's body was pressed against his still he managed to focus long enough to make the sleeping bag and blankets materialize in front of them. She tackled him to the ground and began unbuttoning his shirt.

“You’re always gonna keep me on my toes, aren’t you Dottie?”

“I sure am,” she murmured and kissed him.

And he wouldn’t have her any other way.
I was born amidst the purple waterfalls
I was weak, yet not unblessed
Dead to the world
Alive for the journey
One night I dreamt a white rose withering
A newborn drowning a lifetime loneliness
I dreamt all my future, relived my past
I witnessed the beauty of the beast

Nightwish - Bless The Child

Author’s Notes: The characters Dr. Natalie Durant, Miles McCabe and Stephen Connor originally appeared in NBC’s short-lived series, Medical Investigation.

Storybrooke, Maine
One month after the Final Eclipse

Rumple and Belle were stunned to find a large crowd gathered outside the newly remodeled antique shop and bookstore. There was a long, red ceremonial ribbon tied across the front door and a wide red velvet carpet leading from the door to the passenger doors of the limousine and a large banner reading: GRAND OPENING TODAY!

"Bae....did you do all this?" Rumple inquired of his son. He merely smiled and got out of the car, turning to address the crowd.

"Thank you all for coming! Today is a very special day, not only for this town but for my parents because it is the beginning of a new chapter in their life as they open their first business together. I give you Rumplestiltskin and Belle Strogoff Gold, the proud owners of Rumplestiltskin Strogoff's Collectibles and Belle's Boutique!" Bae announced and opened the door, reaching for Belle's hand and helping her out of the car first, followed by his father. The crowd cheered loudly, their family members and closest friends the loudest.

"All right Grandpa and Belle!" Henry yelled.

Regina made her way through the crowd, a frame in her hands. She stood before them. "On behalf of the town of Storybrooke, I present this lifetime business license to Mr. and Mrs Strogoff Gold. Congratulations and may your shop be a great success!" she declared as she handed the frame to Rumple. He tucked it under his arm and shook her hand, Belle following suit.

"Thank you, Mayor Mills," he said with a grin. "Were you expecting me to say Your Majesty, dearie?" he teased.

"I'll admit, I'm a bit disappointed but I'll take what victories I can get." she said.

Belle laughed. "Thank you."

Bae led the couple over to the front door of the shop. Wendy opened a bottle of champagne and poured two glasses, handing one to Rumple and the other to Belle that she quickly changed to juice while Jonathan and Michael went through the crowd, handing the rest of the adult guests glasses.
"A toast...to my parents: Rumple and Belle, whom we love dearly and wish them every happiness. To Rumple and Belle!" he called out raising his glass in the air.

"To Rumple and Belle!" the crowd echoed.

"To us, my sweetheart," Rumple said softly, clinking his glass against hers.

"To us," Belle whispered, linking her arm through his so that they drank from each other's glasses while the crowd cheered.

Rumple put his arm around his wife. "Although this shop only bears Belle's and my names, none of this would've been possible without all the hard work by our son Bae and our stepchildren, Wendy, Jonathan and Michael. Let's give them all a round of applause, shall we?"

"Papa!" Bae cried as the crowd clapped enthusiastically while the Darlings smiled nervously.

"Oh come on, you all deserve it!" Belle teased.

Regina stepped up to her son and whispered in his ear. "It's time to show your grandfather your surprise, honey."

Henry stepped forward, waving his hand and producing a large pair of gold scissors.

"Good job, lad!" Rumple said proudly as he took the scissors from the boy's hand. Holding them together, he and Belle slid the blades between the red silk ribbon tied around the door and cut it in two. "Rumplestilskin Gold's Collectibles and Belle's Boutique is now open for business!" he announced and they walked into the shop. Belle kissed him softly.

"Have a good day, darling."

"You too, sweetheart." he said, taking his place behind his counter with Jonathan at his side while Wendy and Belle went over to their half of the shop and Michael retreated to his office to work on the accounts. It was not long before the store started filling up with customers and several reporters from The Mirror wanting to interview the owners. Out of the corner of his eye Rumple could see Sidney Glass admiring a display of objects from Turkey. He'd been released from the asylum not long after Pan's defeat and resumed his job at The Mirror but he no longer acted as a spy for Regina. There were still too many bitter feelings between them.

"I once had a carpet like this," he murmured as he studied a Turkish carpet then the price listed for it. "I'd like to purchase it."

"You're sure, Sidney?"

He nodded. Rumple motioned for Jonathan to join them. The young man unlocked the display case and carefully removed the carpet.

"We can have this delivered to your house this afternoon, Mr. Glass."

"Thank you."

Rumple escorted him over to the counter so that they could complete the sale while Jonathan made arrangements to have the carpet delivered to Sidney's house that afternoon as promised. No sooner did he have that transaction completed, another customer was approaching him to inquire about another set of items he had for sale. He smiled. He did have his busy days when it was still a pawnshop but a busy day to him back then was only a customer or two.
Over on their side of the shop, Wendy was ringing up the customers in the checkout line while Belle was helping the ones browsing find what they were looking for. Her suspense and romance shelves were emptying fast forcing Michael to keep coming out of the office to help restock the shelves with more copies of the books that were selling. An added bonus was that the business cards they kept on their counters with Bae's number on it were being taken by almost every customer. He called his father around lunchtime to tell him that he was being flooded with calls from people wanting him to decorate their homes and businesses. The people of Storybrooke were doing exactly as they'd promised, adjusting well to their life in the new world.

“You’re doing well Rumple,” Adora praised when she approached the register with a book in her hand. “So well that it’s time for me to move on.”

“Move on? I don’t understand dearie.”

“My work here is done. The circle is complete and this town is safe under your protection.”

“What about your son?”

She glanced over to where Jeb stood with Ambrose and Xenia. “He’ll be fine. He has Xenia now and soon they’ll be giving me a grandson. I’ll stop and visit them. The Balance is not restored yet. There are still other blades out there.”

“We’ll find them.”

“You will, the time the realms unite.”

“What does that mean?”

“You’ll find out…when it happens.”

“Before you go there’s something I’ve always wanted to ask you. In the Realm of the Forgotten….Hope….that was you, wasn’t it?”

She shook her head. “What did she tell you the last time she saw you.”

“That I’d see her again if I continued the path I’m on.”

“Then you will.” She smiled.

“I’m still getting used to your changed appearance. What name are you going by these days?”

“Doctor Natalie Durant,” she replied and handed him a business card. “I work at the National Institutes of Health. It’s a good fit for me…trying to save lives in this land. But I can’t always save them all…”

“You do you best dearie. It’s all you can do.”

Seconds later she heard her phone ringing. She pulled it out of her pocket and looked at the screen, frowning.

“Go dearie. Your patients need you.”

Your mother needs me, she thought.

Portland, Maine
“Natalie, where the hell have you been?” Doctor Stephen Connor demanded angrily when she reappeared at the hospital a short time later. He looked like Wyatt, talked like Wyatt and sometimes acted like Wyatt but Stephen was his own man with his own set of inner demons that didn’t come from being a fairy tale character trying to adjust in a new land. They came from being a dedicated doctor that gave his all to his patients but couldn’t save them all.

“I was in the lab,” she lied. “What’s wrong?”

“We need to find the source. Three more patients have been brought in with the same symptoms.”

“And Dr. Bergmann?”

“She’s still not showing any symptoms. Talk to her again and see if you can find out anything her daughter had in common with these other patients.”

“I’ll call you when I find out.”

They were both startled when his phone rang. “Connor? I’ll be right down. Six more patients are being admitted. This thing’s spreading. Go!”

She found Lilly in the waiting room her eyes filled with tears.

“Dr. Bergmann?”

“She lost the baby,” she croaked. “Please…I can’t…I can’t lose her too…”

“We’re doing everything we can. Dr. Bergmann, I know this isn’t a good time but there are some questions I need to ask you that might help us find out what’s wrong with Cassie.”

“What do you need to know?”

“Cassie is one of many patients who’ve been admitted in the last twenty-four hours with toxic levels of mercury in her system. We were hoping you could help us find out how she could’ve been exposed to it.”

“I’ve been here all night thinking about it and I can’t figure it out!” she cried.

“Try,” she pleaded.

Lilly thought for a moment. “Cassie’s always been a very healthy girl. In our real….” She stopped herself. “She’s rarely been sick so when she started getting sick I thought it was from the pregnancy but it got worse…you’re saying it was mercury?”

“Yes. Her blood tests indicate she was exposed in a short amount of time.”

“She did tell me she thought something she ate at Benito’s didn’t taste right to her.”

“Benito’s? When did she eat there? What did she eat?”

“Fish. I can’t stand it myself but she and my husband Otto loved it…”

“Excuse me Doctor.” Adora grabbed her phone and dialed a number. “Connor? Can you get Miles to find out if anyone else ate at Benito’s? Thanks?” She hung up and smiled at Lilly. “This might be the answer we’re looking for Doctor. I think your daughter ingested seafood with toxic levels of mercury but we’ll need to run more tests to be sure.”

“Run all the tests you need just save my daughter!” she cried.
A visitor was waiting for Adora when she returned to the lab.

“What are you doing here?” she hissed at Loki.

“Making certain that you keep your word and protect Lilliana,” he informed her coldly. “She cannot lose her daughter.”

“She’s not going to and her grandchild will be returned to her.”

“Still interfering in the Balance.”

“I’m doing what you want me to and you know it. Cassie’s child must stand at the North and Zorinda’s Regina at the South in the fifth realm. The dagger there has been found and neutralized but the Home Office and the Sons and Daughters are still a threat to all the realms. You need to go before someone catches you.”

“You forget I’m a master of disguises,” Loki said and glamoured himself as of Adora’s teammates, Doctor Miles McCabe. “I will see Lilliana myself.”

“Don’t let Miles see you.”

“He won’t…and no one will remember I’ve been here, even Lilliana.”

The god walked down the hall and found Lilly still in the waiting room asleep. He touched her shoulder gently to rouse her from her slumber.

“Doctor McCabe?” she asked sleepily.

“Your daughter’s going to be fine Doctor Bergmann,” he assured her. “But she has a long road of recovery ahead of her.”

“Thank you,” she murmured, “May I see her now?”

“She’s sleeping now but you can go in.”

He followed her down the hall but the moment he entered her daughter’s room he felt a strong dark presence that chilled him to the bone. He waved his hand, freezing everything in the hospital.

“Come out, come out wherever you are, darling or are you too afraid to tango with me?” he challenged.

Silence.

“You want to do this the hard way? Fine!”

He approached the bed recoiling with shock when he realized the source of the darkness was the young woman asleep in the bed.

“What have you done you bitch?” he hissed.

He heard laughter and looked up to see Alemedia waving at him from the TV screen. “You’re too late Loki. I’ve already darkened her heart and when she bears the child she lost its heart will be as dark as hers!”

“You’re going to use her to divide the Guardians again! Over my dead body! I WARNED you I would not allow you to keep interfering in the Balance bitch!” He teleported himself into Ephesis.
Ephesis
The Ozian Hell Realm

Alemedia laughed from behind the glass of the sphere she was still trapped in.

“You’re too late Loki. You can’t reverse my spell.”

“Maybe not bitch but don’t think you can keep infecting innocent souls with your darkness without my knowing about it.” He glared at her. “I will unite the Guardians in all six realms and the next time we won’t just trap you…we’ll destroy you!”

He pressed his hands against the dome and began chanting in Norse.

“You bastard son of a Jotun whore!” she yelled.

“Find some way to amuse yourself darling,” he sneered. “Because your time is running out.”

Portland, Maine

When he returned to the hospital everything was still frozen. He waved his hands over Cassie’s sleeping form and chanted softly. He couldn’t reverse Alemedia’s spell but he could attempt to lessen its effects.

“I’m so sorry Lilly,” he said softly. “I’ve done all I can….all we can hope is that she has enough of your light in her to overcome the darkness she’s been tainted with.” He kissed her frozen cheek.

He would watch over them as best he could in the meantime.

“I will not let your daughter die a second time Glinda. I swear on my life I will not!” he vowed.

“You’re certain there’s no way we can reverse her spell?” Adora queried.

Loki shook his head sadly. "I've lessened its effects as much as I can." He slumped against the wall.

"And drained yourself in the process," she scolded.

"We all have our weaknesses."

"You need to return to Asgard to recover your strength."

"I cannot....open the Bifrost.....you...will...have to...or summon my brother..."

Adora rolled her eyes. "And listen to him hitting on me the whole time? I'd rather ask for Odin or Frigga than Thunderass!"

He laughed weakly.

Adora summoned a horn and blew into it.

"Who summons me?” demanded the Bifrost Bridge Guardian. "By the Norns! What in the Hel has he done now?"

"He's drained himself trying to protect one of my kin and needs to rest Heimdall."

"He'll be resting for weeks by looks of him." Heimdall conjured a litter and floated the unconscious
god onto it. "I haven't seen him this way since Narvi's death. Fret not little angel. We'll take care of
him."

She watched her friend disappear onto the Bifrost, biting back tears. Once again an innocent had
paid a high price for her family's sins.

She waved her hand and released Loki’s freezing spell.

I’ll watch over her Loki. Rest, old friend.

Don’t disappointment me, Ozmalita.

Cassie’s recovery from the mercury poison was a long and painful one but out of the tragedy Lilly
found a dear friend in Doctor Natalie Durant. Though Natalie lived in Bethesda she and Lilly spoke
on the phone several times a week and Natalie would fly to Maine to visit her and Cassie.

Asgard

Sigyn’s hands tightened on her stick as she watched Odin at Frigga at her husband’s bedside, their
hands in his.

If I had that bitch goddess here I would beat her into the ugliest thing in the realms.

The King and Queen of Asgard had been horrified at their son’s condition the moment he arrived at
the palace. Not only had he used a great deal of magic, they suspected he’d also surrendered part of
his life force to a member of the Ozian Greek pantheon but they were not certain whom.

“The goddess Ozmalita was unable to tell you anything?”

“She’s been questioned at length Frigga. She doesn’t know who Loki gave part of his life force to.
We can only hope that person was worthy of it,” Odin mumbled, feeling the Odinsleep begin to
overtake him but he didn’t dare let it claim him until his son’s energy was restored otherwise his
recovery would take months instead of weeks.

“She is worth it Father,” they heard him murmur.

“Loki!” Sigyn cried, kissing him softly. His eyes fluttered open.

“I’m so sorry darling…I had to….she will be a child….”

“You’ve done this for a child?” Odin inquired gently.

“A child not yet born Father but whose soul has been tainted by darkness as has her mother’s.
Alemedia intends to use them to carry on Demeter’s vengeance. I intend to stop it!”

“You may not be able to, son.”

“I know Mother, but I had to try.”

Moments later he was asleep again. His parents released his hands.

“We’ve done all we can. He will need to rest a few days more,” Frigga informed her daughter-in-
law. As she was walking out of the room a vision flashed before her eyes of her son glamourd as a
tree cradling two sleeping children in his arms.

The time for the realms to unite is coming Mother. The child I’ve saved is one of keys to it. She is
the great-granddaughter of Glinda Strogoff.

Whom you’ve now made a demigoddess by surrendering part of your life force to.

She needs to know what she’s up against and be able to survive it.

She will. Now sleep, son.

Storybrooke, Maine
Nine months after the Final Eclipse

Rumple nearly jumped out of his Armani suit when he heard his cellphone ringing in his pocket, the ringtone still set to the Rolling Stones' Sympathy for the Devil.

"Pleased to meet you
Hope you guess my name
But what's puzzling you is the nature of my game..."

"W...What the hell was that?!” Blue gasped.

"Hope,” Rumple and Belle answered in unison as they gazed down at their newborn daughter and damned if they didn't see her father's impish grin on her lips. "So that was what she meant when she said you'd see her again and only if you continued the path you were on. How is that possible, Rumple? How can our daughter be the spirit Hope from Pandora's Box?"

"You know that in our world we believe our hearts and souls are born before our physical bodies. Most of them remain in limbo until they merge with their bodies. Others are created by lovers who need them to serve either as a guardian or a guide in difficult times until they are born into their physical bodies and more often than not, the guardian they've created later becomes the child they raise if they follow the right paths. That day you were in a situation where you felt all was lost but what may have seemed like an act of desperation on your part was the invocation of the most powerful form of true love's magic Rumple,” Blue explained.

Rumple gazed down at his infant daughter again, an unfamiliar memory flashing before his eyes. He saw himself and Belle in Neverland sleeping when the spirit he saw in Pandora's Box appeared before them. He was about to awaken when she cast a spell over him sending him back to sleep and brushing a lock of hair from his eyes, something Belle often did and smiling at him as she spoke.

"We will meet soon Rumplestiltskin, but not yet. You've only just begun to follow the path you must take for your redemption but the road is long and there are many dangers still ahead but now that you have back one of your strongest sources to light your way you will succeed. You, Belle, are his strongest light, the first to see the man behind the beast and to retain your faith in your love even when he gave you cause to doubt him. You've bound yourself to him heart, body and soul and in doing so, you have begun the process of banishing the darkness from his heart but it cannot fully be banished unless he agrees to surrender it. To do so he must defeat its source as a mortal."

The next memory he saw was after his father was defeated. He lay on the street in Belle's arms with Bae, Henry and Emma standing near them as the spirit reappeared. When he asked her how she escaped the box he was confused by her answer. Now it made perfect sense.

"I was never a prisoner there. I merely appeared because your heart called to me. And now that have you destroyed the Dark One's essence, you have been given a second chance to be the man you always wanted to be and you will retain your magic, in a limited form. Be aware, using it
will extract a price from you physically and you can only be healed through the strength of those who are bound to you by love and blood so wield it with caution."

"Will we meet again?"

"Perhaps...but in a different form and only if you continue on the path you're now on."

"Do you Seers ever give a straight answer? It would save us all a lot of trouble, now wouldn't it?"

"You can't always get what you want." the spirit sang.

"Ummm...am I hearing things or did she just start singing a Rolling Stones song?" Bae had asked.

"She did. What's up with that anyway?" Emma inquired.

"Well, are you going to answer me, Hope?"

"I've given you enough clues that will eventually lead you to the answer. Follow the path you're on and you'll have the answer in time. I must be going now."

Hope made his cellphone ring to play Sympathy For The Devil. He'd assumed then she was just mocking his musical tastes but in reality, she'd given him the strongest clue to her identity.

The next memory he saw wasn't his. He could see the spirit from Pandora's Box walking down the street changing into the beautiful little girl their child would look like when he discovered his wife was pregnant holding an Ipod and browsing through the songs until she found Sympathy For The Devil. She was singing along to it before she vanished.

"If what you've done before this is any indication, I'm going to have my hands full with you, aren't I, little imp?" he murmured as he took the baby from Belle's arms and cradled her against his chest and kissed her forehead then kissed his wife.

They heard a knock on the door and turned to see Archie in the doorway pushing Az in a wheelchair while she cradled her own precious bundles in her arms. Three hours earlier she’d given birth to twins they’d named Ambrosia Azkadellia Ozopov Hopper and Andrew Tyler Ozopov Hopper. Andrew’s birth had been a pleasant surprise for them, every test they’d been given hadn’t shown the second child.

“Oh Belle, she’s beautiful!” Az cried. “What’s her name?"

“Hope Marie Strogoff-Gold,” the new mother replied. “How is DG?”

They heard screaming down the hall.

“Does that answer your question?” Archie chuckled. Rumple rolled his eyes and shook his head.

“Belle dinna carry on like that. Ye’d think DG dinna give birth before.”

“She hasn’t in centuries Rumple,” Az reminded him.

“I dinna envy Wyatt. He’s got his hands full with that sister o’ yers.”

“….Dottie, for Lurline’s sake will you lay back down!” Wyatt shouted at his wife.

“You shut up! You did this to me!” she yelled. “Oh God will someone give me some goddam drugs!”
“Mrs. Cain, we’ve already given you…”

“GIVE ME SOME MORE!”

“I’ve already given you enough drugs to knock out a damn elephant,” Whale yelled back. “Can’t you do something with her Sheriff?”

“I’m trying!” he cried.

“Dorothia Ozopov Cain ye lay your arse back down in that bed or I’ll be having ye tied down!” Rumple threatened when he limped into the room. “I cannae believe I hae to leave my wife who hae just given birth to deal with yer tantrums! And YE need to get this hellcat under control!” he snapped at Wyatt.

He threw up his hands. “What do you think I’ve been tryin to do?”

“Och, never mind.” Rumple gestured and DG was back in bed. “Now ye do what ye need to and quit fussing.”

She glared up at him. “I’d love to see YOU give birth!”

“But men don’t, dearie.”

“That needs to be rectified,” she grunted. “Oooh.”

“I’ll come back when she’s given birth,” he giggled and vanished.

“Smartass!” she growled.

When he returned to his wife’s room she was holding Hope and Ambrosia in her arms, the babies’ hands glowing.

“He must succeed, or your soul will return to Ozmalita and other families will be chosen for both of us.”

“NO! He WILL succeed Amber! He HAS TO!”

“He’d better! I’ve waited too long to be reunited with MY parents and I’m still in danger while Alemedia walks the mortal realm in her vessels. Now you’re in danger too, not just from her but from the ‘Father From Neverhell’ as your sister-in-law calls him.”

“My father’s not the only one she’s holding. She has your aunt and uncle too!”

“And driving her out of them will be much harder. That’s why we need Rumple’s curse broken now! The Balance will shift in our favor. You know what you have to.”

“I’m going be a chip off the old block, dearie. And gods help him when I am. I’m not going easy on him.”

“I almost feel sorry for him….almost.”

“You will succeed, Papa. You will.”

“Now you’re both where you belong dearies,” he murmured, kissing their cheeks before he handed Amber back to her mother and kissed Andrew who was still asleep in his father’s arms.
An hour later an exhausted but ecstatic Wyatt came into the room.  
“I have a son!” he announced. “Wyatt Nicholas Cain Junior!”

“That’s wonderful Wyatt! How is Deege? Is she alright?”

“Tired….but she wants to see you Az.”

Archie hugged his brother-in-law. “Congratulations.”

“And to you! Two babies!”

“Well twins do run in my family. Come on. Let’s go see my new nephew. Are you coming Rumple?”

“In a bit.”

“Rumple, go and see the baby. We’ll be just fine here, won’t we sweetie?” Belle asked their daughter. He kissed them then picked up his cane and started walking down the hall.

“Next time you might want to use this,” he heard a voice say.

“Dammit mon, are ye tryin’ to scare the centuries off me?”

Loki chuckled.

“You’re a demigod so it would be hard to do but as I said, use my little labor spell.”

Rumple giggled. “Ye all know all about giving birth, dinna ye?”

“Don’t remind me,” the god groaned.

“Won’t be shiftin into a mare in heat again any time soon, will ye?”

“Hel no but now that I know what childbirth is like I’ve made it my mission to make it as painless as possible!”

“Women all over this realm would be falling at your feet for it.”

Loki smirked. “They already do and my wife would beat them all with her ugly stick if she caught them.”

“Would you like to see my new cousins?”

“Of course I would…and your beautiful daughter. But glamoured. I don’t want you beating me with your cane.” He gestured.

“Who is that supposed to be?”

“A doctor that works with Ozmalita,” Loki explained. “Just call me Miles.”

“What’re ye gonna do if he shows up?”

“Oh we don’t have to worry about that. He and Ozmalita are out of the country. An outbreak in some place called Colima.”

Loki smiled when he walked into the room, his memories taking him back centuries when he’d visited DG in her first life as Queen Dorothy Ozopov after the birth of her daughter, Ozma. He
discreetly gestured and cast his spell ensuring that all the women would have easier births the next time around.

“This son of mine is gonna have a bit of the dragon in him like his daddy,” DG murmured, cradling her son against her chest. “I don’t remember seeing you here before but there’s something familiar….”

Loki released his glamour spell. “It’s been a long time….Dorothy.”

“Loki! Wyatt, I know you remember him.”

Wyatt laughed. “He probably remembers me as a rust covered wreck.”

“But here you are as you were meant to be Wyatt. The circle is complete and now you’ve given birth to a new generation of Guardians.”

“We just want to enjoy a few years of peace with our families. Is that too much to ask?”

“Peace is never too much to ask for Archie but the time the realms will unite is coming and we all need to be ready for it.”

“You’ll join us?”

“How could I not Rumple? I want the Balance restored as much as you for our children.”

“And our grandchildren,” Rumple added.

He gazed down at the babies asleep in their mothers’ arms, longing to be holding one of his own again. It had been years since he’d last held an infant of his own and there were times when he thought those times were too many centuries behind him.

While Rumple watched him, an image passed before his eyes of the Norse god holding a baby girl with a litter of cats flying around her. He giggled.

“What’s so funny?”

“Oh, nothing dearie.”

I’ll just let him find out on his own, the sorcerer thought wickedly.

The time the realms unite, he heard Aramon’s voice echo in his mind.

But he wouldn’t think about it. All he wanted now was a few years of peace with his family, he didn’t care how many there would be.
At Last

Author's Notes: We move forward seven years to the events that set the stage for the Gold Standard/Gold Chronicles crossover stories Regal Mischief and How The Queen Stole Christmas. You will also be seeing scenes that were and were not included in either story from Lilly and Archie's point of view.

At last my love has come along
My lonely days are over and life is like a song, oh yeah
At last the skies above are blue
My heart was wrapped up clover the night I looked at you

Etta James – At Last (Lilly and Archie Strogoff Hopper's love theme)

Boston, Massachusetts

Gold Standard/Gold Chronicles Verse

Spring, 2017

It was his first trip outside the town line since the curse had been broken and Archie Hopper was utterly terrified. He was only a small-town psychiatrist and would be in a hotel ballroom filled with fellow doctors from across the country, none whom received their degrees from a magical curse. Their patients also were not displaced fairy tale characters. Part of him thought about emailing the organizers of the conference and telling them he was too ill to attend but he knew the doctors he'd been talking to in a Facebook forum for the last year or so would want to roast him if he backed out.

You're not going boost your credibility by avoiding meeting with your colleagues and learning from them dearie, Rumple reminded him when he'd expressed his concerns with him over several cups of coffee at the pawn shop.

"Maybe you'll meet someone at this conference," Belle said.

"He's there to learn, not to get married, Belle!"

"But it is past time he was married, Rumple. How long has it been since you've gone on a date, Archie?"

"Ummm….two years," he mumbled. "Every woman I've gone out with thinks I'm boring."

"Why? Because you weren't ripping their clothes off on the first date?" Rumple rolled his eyes. "Why do people in this realm think you have to have sex before you get to know the person first?"

"I've actually written a few papers on that. The mainstream media promotes it. It's not one of the topics we're discussing at the conference but I'm going to suggest it is added especially after those
Fifty Shades movies came out. My Facebook group was discussing a paper written by a doctor from Florida on it."

"What did it say?"

"Doctor Ozopov has been working with patients who have severe emotional and intimacy issues after being with partners who were influenced by those movies. He's not going to be at the convention but I wish he were so I could talk to him. He's a bit of a…should we say…rebel in the community because his methods are unconventional, and he gets in a lot of trouble with the law over his environmental activism."

"It's a miracle he's still in practice then," Rumple laughed.

"His heart's in the right place," Archie said softly.

"How has your search online going?" Belle quizzed.

"Ummm…well I've talked to a few women, but I haven't asked any out yet."

There was one he did enjoy talking to, a child psychologist from Portland named Lilliana Bergmann. She was a forty-four year-old widow with an adult daughter and granddaughter but they'd kept their conversations professional. She'd been invited to the convention, but she was wasn't certain she would be able to get away for the weekend. Another doctor, Leslie Weingard, had been sending him messages all morning that she was looking forward to dancing with him at the party. Leslie was a relationship therapist at the same office with Lilliana and had been flirting with him online for weeks and had called him several times to ask to meet for lunch that he'd found many excuses to avoid. He was flattered but uninterested.

He glanced over at the clock on the nightstand and sighed, knotting his tie and thanking his lucky stars he wasn't speaking at the conference. He was nervous enough without having to be put on display.

"…I can't wait to see if Doctor Hopper is as sexy as he sounds."

Lilly shook her head and reached into her jewelry box for her favorite necklace, a gold coin with a funnel cloud symbol in the center. It had been a gift from Natalie for her birthday the first year of their friendship and Lilly considered it her good luck charm.

"Leslie he's not interested, just trying to be polite."

"Oh, do I hear the green-eyed monster?"

"No, just an observation."

Leslie swung her legs over the side of the bed and thrust her feet into her too small stiletto pumps, smoothing the wrinkles out of her dress.

"Well we'll see whether he's interested or not tonight. He did promise to dance with me."

"It's his life. He can dance with anyone he wants," Lilly muttered. "Come on before we're late."

Most of the attendees were already seated when Lilly and Leslie entered the ballroom.

"That must be him," Leslie whispered when she spotted a man sitting by himself at their table. "Doctor Hopper! Hello!" she called out.
Archie cringed at the familiar voice and looked up to see two women approach him, one in a crimson strapless dress that could have been painted on, the other dressed more conservatively in a cream colored pantsuit.

"I'm Doctor Leslie Winegard. Oh, it is so nice to finally meet you in person!" Leslie leaned forward, much of her cleavage visible to the eye when she shook his hand.

"Likewise," he said cordially. "And you are?" he inquired, his eyes meeting Lilly's, hoping she was the Doctor Bergmann he'd been speaking to.

"Doctor Lilliana Bergmann," she replied.

"Oh, Doctor Bergmann! When we spoke yesterday you thought you wouldn't be able to attend because of some family issues."

Leslie slid into the seat beside him much to his dismay while Lilly took her seat at the opposite end of the table. They glanced over at one of the vacant chairs.

"I thought Doctor Ozopov wasn't coming. There's a placecard here for him," Leslie observed, holding up a card reading Dr. A.J. Ozopov.

Archie chuckled. "He's not. Emailed me this morning. He got arrested...again!"

Leslie and Lilly burst out laughing.

"What on earth did he do now?" Lilly asked. Archie took out his phone and set it on the table for the two women to read.

Sorry I can't be at the ball tonight. I'm at the police station and before you ask, yes I got arrested again. The plant I told you about has been cited for numerous EPA violations and they're refused to clean up the place, so I decided to send them a little message. Well they didn't like it, so they called the cops. They hauled me and my group off but here's the funny part...my wife showed up with the kids in Hendrix dressed like flower children and they decided they wanted to sit in with Daddy. The cops gave them candy. My wife, brother and our lawyer are trying to get me bailed out. Have a good time!

"I'm disappointed. He would've livened up the party," Leslie muttered, furious that her attempts to get Archie's attention proved fruitless when he seemed to only have eyes for her colleague.

"Oh I've no doubt of that. Would probably show up in that old VW bus dressed like a hippie," Archie laughed. Then the room fell silent as the conference began.

Lilly couldn't help feeling elated at Leslie's misery when they returned to their room to change for the 50s themed party being held in the ballroom later that evening.

"I can't believe it. He just got right up and moved!" Leslie ranted, referring to an incident during the conference when Archie Hopper suddenly got out of his seat while some of the doctors were discussing the effects school shootings were having on children and moved to another table by himself. "He gave me his word he'd dance with me tonight and he'd better instead of being stuck up!"

Lilly shook her head and left her to finish dressing.

"You look great Lilly," their chief of staff Michael Barker praised when he met her outside the ballroom. She was wearing a periwinkle blue cashmere sweater, saddle shoes and a grey poodle
skirt with her long, ginger locks pulled back into a ponytail.

"Thank you, Michael."

He linked his arm through hers and escorted her into the ballroom. She spotted Archie Hopper standing in front of the jukebox browsing through the records but before she could approach him Leslie sauntered into the room in a replica of one of Elizabeth Taylor's gold dirndl dresses and black stiletto pumps and started talking to him.

"Do you want to dance, Lilly?"

She smiled. "Yes, I'd like to very much."

Lilly winced when Michael accidently stepped on her toes several times while jitterbugging to 'At The Hop'. Her colleague was a kind man, recently widowed, but he couldn't dance to save his life and across the room Archie was having a worse time with Leslie. She'd stepped on his toes several times in those shoes and he was convinced two of them were broken.

I'd rather dance with her, he thought, glancing across the room at Lilly.

"I…I have to sit down," he mumbled to Leslie once the song was over and limped over to one of the tables.

"I can get you some ice."

You can leave me the hell alone! he thought angrily, removing his shoe and wincing in pain. She reached out and tried to take his foot in her hand, but he glared at her and backed away.

"I think you've embarrassed me and yourself enough, Doctor Winegard!" he snapped.

"You're a stuck-up prick, you know that!" she hissed and stormed off.

And you're a tramp, he thought, glad to be rid of her, at least for the time being. A few minutes later he heard his phone beep and opened it to find an angry text message from her. He got up and limped out into the hallway and dialed a number.

"Hello?"

"Rumple, I'm sorry to call you so late but I need your advice."

Rumple sat up. "What kind of advice, dearie?"

"Legal advice."

"Are you in some kind of trouble?"

"I….hold on…let me go up to my room. I'm at a party downstairs and I'd rather have this conversation somewhere private."

He looked around and dashed into the elevator, relieved when he couldn't see Leslie Winegard anywhere in the vicinity.

"Can you talk now, dearie?"

"Yes." He opened his laptop and waited for it to boot up. "What do you know about sexual harassment laws?"
He heard a crash on the other end of the line. "Archie! Are you being charged with it?!"

"No, I….I think I…I think someone is doing it to me…"

"You'd better tell me everything." Rumple grabbed a legal pad out of his desk drawer and began writing while Archie talked. "Did you save these messages and emails?"

"Yes. They're on my laptop and phone. I'll send what I can to you."

"We need to print them out. First, you need to speak to the person in charge at her clinic and make him aware of the situation. Second, I would suggest filing a complaint with the Board. Then we'll discuss a lawsuit."

"You want me to sue her?"

"I most certainly do! Sexual harassment doesn't just happen to women. Men experience it too, they just don't like talk about it. If I'm right the clinic will try to settle this as quickly and as quietly as possible. Bloody hell Archie," the attorney gasped when he finished reading one of the messages that had been sent to him. "This woman is acting like a bitch in heat! And she's a relationship therapist? I pity her patients!"

"I've been trying to tell her I'm not interested but she's not getting the message."

"She will when you file charges. You need to file charges Archie. Has this escalated beyond sexually explicit emails and messages."

"She…ahh….tried to do something inappropriate this afternoon at the conference."

"I know this is going to be difficult Archie, but I need you to tell me what."

His face was crimson while he spoke. "I kept moving my chair, but she'd just keep moving hers closer. Finally I got up and went to another table."

"Did the other doctor you were sitting with see anything?"

"I don't think so. I was so embarrassed Rumple!"

"And rightfully so. Her behavior was repulsive, and she needs to be held accountable for it."

"I'm worried she's going to say I did something to her!"

"You forget who she's dealing with dearie!"

"Umm…what do you mean?"

"The only words coming out of that whore's lips are going to be the truth from now on, dearie. If she tries to lie, it's going to show."

"Don't tell me you've turned her into a Pinocchio!" he groaned.

"Well…not quite but damned close," the sorcerer giggled.

"What did you do?"

"You'll see dearie, you'll see. I've also warded you so if the whore tries to come near you again, she's going to get knocked on her ass. Call it a magical restraining order."
"Please tell me this ward is just against her."

"It is. Why?"

"Because there is another woman at her clinic that I do like and...I...I've been trying to work up the courage to tell her. She's the other woman who was sitting at the table with us."

"Hopefully she's not a tramp like the other one!"

"She's not. Her name's Lilliana Bergmann. She's a child psychologist from Portland, widowed and has a daughter and granddaughter."

"Belle will be pleased."

"I want to go back downstairs and dance with Doctor Bergmann but I don't want to run into that awful woman again."

"The wards will take care of her. Go enjoy yourself."

"If my feet can handle it."

"Why?"

"That woman stepped on my toes...and I think she broke two of them."

Rumple grinned on the other end of the line. "I'd fix it, but it works to your advantage, dearie."

"How! Rumple, I don't want to miss out on dancing with Lilly. If she'll let me..."

"I'd like to add the medical bills for your broken toes to the damages that trollop will be paying."

"Rumple!"

"Listen to me, Cricket. That women needs to be taught a lesson. We're going to ask that her license be suspended, she enters a sex addiction treatment program and anything else I can think of."

"I can't dance with Lilly if I have broken toes, dammit and I do want to dance with her!"

"All right, all right, I'll think of something! Dinna get your knickers in a wad, dearie!"

Archie glanced over at the clock. The party would be over by midnight and it was already after nine. Suddenly Rumple teleported into the room nearly making him jump off the bed.

"Warn me next time you do that!"

"Desperate times call for desperate measures. Now calm yourself down and let me take a look at that foot."

Archie removed his shoe and sock and held his foot out. Rumple assessed it with his magic, confirming his friend did indeed have two broken toes.

"What the hell was the bitch wearing? Cement blocks?"

"Stilettos."

He snorted. "Of course. Heels up to the ass and can't walk in them."
Rumple began to repair the injuries with his magic. He wanted his friend to enjoy himself at the party, but he also wanted to make certain the trollop got her just desserts as well. The woman reminded him too much of Milah.

"Now listen to me carefully Archie because here's what we're gonna do…"

Everyone was still dancing when he returned to the ballroom. He scanned the crowd for Lilly but she was nowhere to be found. He sighed, ordered a glass of scotch from the bar and returned to his table. Part of him wanted to just call it night but it was not yet midnight and he hoped that Lilly would soon return.

Leslie Winegard was furious. Men did not reject her. She rejected them when she no longer needed them and the high and mighty Archie Hopper was going to be taught a lesson he would never forget. She stormed into the ballroom determined to do just that when a gust of wind hit her full force and she tumbled to the floor, the other gusts treated to a sight they weren't interested in seeing.

Lilly stood in the doorway her eyes wide with shock. To everyone else it appeared as if Leslie had simply tripped over her own two feet but what she'd seen was undeniable. Leslie had been blasted back by a protection spell that had been cast over Doctor Archie Hopper and he seemed to be as shocked by it as she was.

*He's from there! He's from my world!* she thought. *But who is he?*

On the floor, Leslie pulled her skirt down to preserve what little modesty she had left while her superior glared at her from where he stood.

"She's not wearing any…" another doctor whispered to her companion.

"Disgusting," an older doctor snorted. Some of the male doctors were smirking and whispering to each other.

"Get up Doctor Weingard," Michael said through gritted teeth.

Leslie bit her lip and rose to her feet. "I'm sorry Michael…I…"

"I think you should leave before you cause any further embarrassment."

She nodded and turned and fled the room. Soon the gossip died down and the party resumed. Lilly returned to her table and sat down, unsure what she should do but she had little time to dwell on it when Michael approached the table still seething.

"Were you aware of Doctor Weingard's state of undress, Doctor Bergmann?" he asked coldly.

"Michael, you know I would have told her had I known!" Lilly protested.

"We'll discuss it in the morning," he muttered.

"I'm sorry Michael."

He shook his head and walked away. Lilly stared into her glass of scotch, suddenly wishing she were somewhere else.

"Hello Doctor Bergmann." She heard a chair being pulled out and Archie sat at the table across from her.
"Hello Doctor Hopper."

"I was wondering if you would ahh….like to dance."

"Will I be blasted back if I do?"

He flinched. "Pardon me?"

"It's alright. I know what you are. I'm from there too."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"The Enchanted Forest. I'm from there…well, one of the other realms. My name there was Lilliana Von Bergmann. My husband, Otto Von Bergmann was a noble I was sold into marriage to pay off my father's gambling debts." She made a face. "Papa boasted to Otto of my fertility and he expected me to bear him many sons. My daughter's birth was difficult, and I miscarried a son."

"I don't understand…how did you get outside the boundaries of the curse?"

"Once word of it reached our realm some of my husband's friends paid to have a magic bean stolen from the giants. We came through with it but we were still cursed for twenty-eight years along with everyone else. I've had to move and change jobs several times during the curse. Cassie suggested we move to Storybrooke but I've spent a fortune remodeling my house in Portland. Now I'm thinking I should so that Meredith can be closer to her father. Cassie isn't certain who it was, but I think it may be Doctor Whale. They've had an on-off relationship for eight years."

Archie nearly choked on his Scotch. "Whale? A father? I can't see it."

"Neither could I when he used my uncle's remains for one of his 'experiments'. What did you do in our land?"

"I was Jiminy Cricket, advisor to Snow White but before that the son of thieves and con artists. I'm not proud of that time in my life."

Archie was relieved to find someone from his own realm to speak freely with. He went on to tell her about his adventures with Geppetto while the boy grew into a man.

"One, two, three o'clock, four o'clock, rock
Five, six, seven o'clock, eight o'clock, rock
Nine, ten, eleven o'clock, twelve o'clock, rock
We're gonna rock around the clock tonight…"

Archie stood up, held out his hand and smiled. "Now, Lady Von Bergmann…about that dance?"

She took his hand and allowed him to lead her out onto the dance floor.

"Put your glad rags on and join me, hon'
We'll have some fun when the clock strikes one
We're gonna rock around the clock tonight
We're gonna rock, rock, rock, 'til broad daylight
"We're gonna rock, gonna rock, around the clock tonight!"

"You are a wonderful dancer!" Lilly cried over the music.

"So are you!" He picked her up and swung her around, many of the other guests gathering around to watch them, feeling like they were watching a pair of professional dancers from the era.

"At last my love has come along
My lonely days are over and life is like a song, oh yeah
At last the skies above are blue
My heart was wrapped up clover the night I looked at you…"

"At last my love has come along
My lonely days are over and life is like a song, oh yeah
At last the skies above are blue
My heart was wrapped up clover the night I looked at you…"

Lilly expected him to want to sit down but he drew her closer and gazed into her eyes.

"I've been waiting all night to dance with you like this," he said softly. "I'm sorry if I…if I'm being too forward but from the moment we started talking online…"

"I felt it too," she whispered. "I haven't…I haven't had the best luck in relationships."

"Neither have I," he confessed. "But I'd like to get to know you better."

She smiled. "And I'd like to get to know you better Doctor Hopper."

"Archie," he corrected. "Lilly."

"You smiled, you smiled oh and then the spell was cast
And here we are in Heaven
For you are mine at last…"

They held each other closer as the hands on the clock inched closer to midnight and finally when the chimes rang in the new day they parted with great reluctance.

"Good night Archie," Lilly said softly.

"May I walk you back to your room? I….aghhhh!"

"Archie, what's wrong?"

"Damm foot." He sat down and took off his shoe and sock, grimacing.

"Oh my God! Archie, your toes! What happened?" Two of his toes were swollen and a third was starting to swell.

"Doctor Weingard stepped on my feet earlier."

"And you didn't tell me?"

"I wanted to dance with you so much…"

"Well now you're going to the hospital. Come on." She draped his arm over her shoulder and helped him to his feet. "Please call us a taxi," she instructed one of the bellhops.
"Lilly, you don't have to…"

"I'm going," she said firmly.

At the hospital the doctor confirmed Rumple's diagnosis of two broken toes on Archie's right foot requiring him to be in a cast for at least six weeks.

"Archie, I am so sorry," Lilly said during the ride back to the hotel. "I'm going to talk to Michael about having our clinic cover your expenses."

"I'll be all right." He smiled. "But at least they held out long enough for me to dance with you. Would you like to have dinner with me tomorrow?"

"I'd love to if you feel up to it."

"I'll feel up to it. Good night Lilly."

"Good night, Archie."

He braced himself against the doorway while he watched her walk down the hall to her own room. Only when he heard her door close safely behind her did he retire to his bed for the night, replaying their final dance in his dreams.

From that night on they saw each other as often as they could once his lawsuit against Leslie was settled out of court, meeting for lunch or dinner in Portland but Archie was always uneasy around Meredith who made it clear from the day they met that she resented him despite his many efforts to win her favor. The child was fiercely jealous of anyone who took her grandmother's attention away from her.

"You have got to stop letting that child run your life," Adora complained to her one afternoon over lunch. "You've been seeing Archie over a year now and she needs to learn to get used to it."

"He tries, bless him, he tries to get her to like him, but she won't budge an inch and Cassie is no help at all. She has no control over her whatsoever!"

"And Meredith always being around gives you no privacy at all!"

Lilly sighed. "You know I've had…intimacy issues since Otto died but not with Archie. We've kissed and held each other and oh there have been many times I've wanted him to spend the night, but he doesn't feel comfortable being too intimate with me while Meredith is in the house."

"So make Cassie get her head out of her ass, be a mother to her daughter and let Archie spend the night."

"We've been invited to Rumple's Halloween party tonight." She smiled. "We're going as Herman and Lily Munster."

"And you're going to dance your feet off no doubt. Are you taking Meredith?"

"I promised her I would."

Adora groaned. "She's going to be a holy terror to everyone!"

"Give her the benefit of the doubt, please Natalie!"

"I'd rather bet on horses. Better odds," Adora grumbled and stabbed at her salad with her fork.
seemed that Loki's enchantments had done little to neutralize the darkness in the child's soul.

Rumple Gold's Victorian

Gold Standard Verse

Halloween, 2018

She's going to be a holy terror to everyone.

And she had been from the moment of their arrival at the Gold house, first by insulting Archie and his car then insulting their hosts and young Regina who gave as good as she got.

Archie couldn't help being amused by Meredith finally meeting her match in the former Evil Queen. He knew Meredith would be pleasant for a while, but it never lasted long and sure enough she was back to her nasty self once Rumple's ward Jimmy took them in the kitchen for a snack.

"...I am very disappointed in you, Meredith nor will I tolerate this behavior any longer. You will treat the Golds with respect, and you will treat Archie with respect. And you will clean up the mess in the kitchen," Lilly scolded her granddaughter after she'd been nasty to Regina yet again and made a mess in the kitchen that she attempted to blame on the younger child.

The children would stay in the playroom while the adults had their party downstairs.

She is up to no good. I feel it, Archie thought while they put Meredith down for her nap.

"No good night kiss for Archie?" Lilly prompted.

She gave him a brief peck on the cheek.

"G'night Gramma. Night....Bug."

"Meredith!" Lilly groaned.

"It's better than nothing. Come on. Let's go join the party."

"At least I don't have to worry about you breaking my toes!" Lilly joked while they were jitterbugging

"I did have two toes broken by Doctor Weingard in those killer heels!"

"She wasn't wearing saddle shoes?"

"No...was dressed like Elizabeth Taylor, remember?"

"I try to forget. You had to spend six weeks with your foot in a cast because of her."

"At least I got to dance with the woman I wanted." He lifted her up and spun her around then set her back on her feet and kissed her ardently. "Do you want to leave the party early?"

"We promised we'd play Strip Costume poker," she giggled.

"After?"

"Yes," she murmured.
His lips nuzzled her neck. "Maybe I can stay a while after Meredith goes to sleep."

"I thought you didn't want to…"

"You're all I want tonight," he said huskily.

"And you're all I want," she whispered.

They were barely able to concentrate on the game, eager to go back to Lilly's house to spend the rest of the night alone, something they'd been resisting for over a year but no longer had the will to do so any longer.

"Unca Rumple! Meredith's pukin all over the wall an the floor upstairs!" Regina yelled when she came downstairs.

"I'd better go check on her," Lilly said worriedly.

Archie sighed, hoping this wasn't another one of her acts. He walked into the dining room and found Regina in tears being comforted by her mother, her bag of Halloween candy empty.

"But it was mine! Why'd she havta be so mean? I woulda shared if she asked!" she sobbed.

Lilly brought Meredith back downstairs, her face pale. "Rumple, we'll need to get going. Meredith's not feeling well...maybe she's coming down with the flu..."

"No she's not, Lilly. She ate Regina's candy," Archie accused. Meredith glared at him from her grandmother's arms.

"Archie, I know she's been difficult all evening, but she wouldn't…"

"She did!" Regina yelled, pointing to the wrappers on the floor then stood up and faced her rival. "Didja eat all of it or didja stash some? Huh?"

"I didn't stash nothing!" Meredith yelled back. "And I didn't eat your stupid candy!"

"Oh yeah? Then how come you're pukin' up chocolate?"

"Cause of that dirt crap I ate earlier. Prolly had something rotten in it!"

*Like hell it did,* Archie thought angrily. She was forced to turn out her pockets and they were full of candy she'd intended to eat later.

"You are still grounded, Meredith...and you'll be using all of your allowance to replace the candy you ate," Lilly informed her.

"But m'not gonna have any money left!" she complained,

"You should have thought of that before you helped yourself to Regina's candy without asking her," Archie lectured.

"Yeah cause I woulda shared if you asked!"

Meredith snorted. "Yeah right!"

"Now what do you have to say for yourself, Meredith?" Lilly pressed.
"I'm sorry….and I'll get you some more candy," Meredith added shamefully.

"Okay. If you get me more I'll let you have some."

"You will?"

"Uh-huh…'cause Mommy and Daddy an' Unca Rumple always say it's polite to share," Regina recited.

"Give her this when she gets home, Lilly. It will help her stomach," Rumple said and handed her a cordial.

"Thank you, Rumple, and again I'm so sorry for all this."

"It's all right, dearie."

"Come on Meredith, let's get you home," Archie said softly and picked her up, shocked when she didn't struggle or protest. He carried her out to the car and placed her in her booster seat. "Good night. We did have a good time."

"Good night!"

Meredith slept through most of the ride home, still too nauseated to protest when Archie carried her into the house and up to her bedroom.

"I'll be downstairs," he whispered in her ear.

"Gramma I don't wanna take medicine!"

"Honey, it'll make your tummy feel better."

She crossed her arms over her chest and clamped her mouth shut.

"Meredith either you take this, or I take you to the hospital!"

"NO! Don't wanna go to the hospital!"

She opened her mouth and sipped from the spoon then lay back and closed her eyes.

"Good night sweetie," Lilly murmured and kissed her cheek. She closed the door and went downstairs in time to see Archie putting his coat on. "Where are you going?"

"I think it would be better if I went home…"

"No, don't go. Please," she pleaded, taking his hand and leading him over to the sofa.

"Lilly, we shouldn't….not with Meredith…."

"We don't have to make love, I just want you to stay with me," she murmured.

He sat down beside her and took her in his arms. "I love you, Lilly…I'll stay as long as you want me to."

"All night?" she asked hopefully.

"All night," he whispered and kissed her again, pulling her onto his lap. "Oh Lilly, I want you so much…"
"Archie…" She lay back on the sofa and pulled him down to her, returning his kiss with equal passion.

"GRAMMA!"

Archie groaned and buried his face in Lilly's shoulder.

"I'd better go see what's wrong."

"I'd better go home," he mumbled.

"Archie, I'm so sorry…"

"No, no it's all right…"

"Please stay," she pleaded.

"I don't think I should…"

"I don't want you to go. Archie, please!"

"GRAMMA!"

"She needs you. Go to her."

She nodded, biting back tears and went into her granddaughter's room. Meredith was sitting up in bed glaring at her.

"What took ya so long? Is that stupid bug out there?"

Lilly crossed her arms over her breasts and scowled at her granddaughter. "First of all, his name is Archie and second why are you still awake?"

"Just am."

"That's not an answer!"

"Not tired. Read me a story!"

"Meredith…I…"

"Read me a story!" she ordered.

"Meredith!" Archie snapped when he came into the room. "That is the last time I want to hear you talking to your grandmother like that!"

"You shut up! You're not the boss of me!"

"And you're not her boss either," he countered.

"Why're you running around lookin like that? Were you doin the dirty deed with my gramma, you dumb bug?" she asked, pointing to his disheveled clothing.

"That is our business, young lady." Lilly said angrily. "And I don't want to hear you call Archie that again or I am taking away all your books and your TV."

"So what? Do it," the child challenged.
"Keep smart mouthing me and you'll lose more. I mean it."

Meredith glared at them but said nothing. Lilly grabbed one of her books off the shelf and started reading her a story. An hour later she was asleep.

"Lilly, I really think I should go home," Archie said to her when she returned to the living room.

"No," she moaned.

"We are never going to have moment's peace as long as she can't stand the sight of me."

"Then we'll go away for a weekend!"

"And she'll find another excuse to keep you here."

"Archie…"

"Natalie's right! You let her run your life and mine," he said angrily. "I love you Lilly but dammit we've barely had any privacy since we started seeing each other!"

"That's why we need to go away!" she cried.

"And what happens when we get back? Everything's going to be the same."

"No, it won't! Archie, don't go!"

"I'll call you tomorrow," He cupped her face in his hands and kissed her. "Good night."

She stood at the door and watched him drive away, paralyzed with fear that this would be the last time she'd see him.

He didn't call the next day or the day after that. Little did Lilly know that her granddaughter had unplugged the landline phone and blocked the couples' numbers from each other's phones before they left for the Halloween party the night before. Lilly was despondent, moving through the house like a ghost, barely speaking to anyone. On the third day she lay in bed, wanting to stay there and sleep the rest of her life away.

"…Lilliana Bergmann, you get out of that bed right now!" Adora yelled when she stormed into her friend's bedroom later that morning after spending most of it trying to comfort a devastated Archie who called her in desperation after three days of silence from Lilly.

"Leave me alone!" Lilly cried and flipped over, burying her face in her pillow.

"Oh hell no! You're gonna get your ass out of that bed, get on the phone and call Archie or go see him!" Adora ordered.

"He doesn't want to talk to me…" she sobbed.

"Then do you want to tell me why he called me begging me to come here and try to get YOU to talk to HIM?" Adora demanded angrily. "He's been trying to call you for two days and do you know what that granddaughter of yours did? She blocked your numbers on your phones and he called this morning and she told him you don't want to see him anymore. He's heartbroken, Lilly!"

"Then why didn't he come to me?" she wailed.

"After all that crap he's been fed? I wouldn't either. Lilly, honey this is the last straw. You have
GOT to stop letting Meredith run your life. Archie is the best thing that could've happened to you and you're going to let him go because it's what SHE wants. Make Cassie actually be a mother for a change and live your life. Go to Archie. He needs you...and you need him, or don't you love him anymore."

"I do. I DO!" she sobbed.

"Then fight for him, honey."

"Where is he?"

"He's staying at the hotel where you first met."

"Natalie, I...I don't think I can drive....would you be able to..." Lilly mumbled.

"I will. AFTER we have a long talk with that granddaughter of yours!"

**Boston, Massachusetts**

He sat at the bar, a glass of Scotch in his hand that he had no desire to drink, a black velvet box on the counter in front of him. Three days ago, he had everything he ever wanted today he had nothing for the woman he loved and wanted to marry no longer loved him. The ring he'd saved up months to buy for her would sit in his nightstand drawer collecting dust. He'd planned on proposing to her after Rumple's Halloween party until Meredith's antics forced him to hold off until a better day, a better day that would never come.

He glanced over toward the dance floor, fighting back images of their first dance in that room a year earlier. Unable to bear it any longer he slammed his glass down on the counter and stormed out of the bar and into the lobby. All he wanted to do now was go back up to his room and sleep but even his dreams were haunted by memories of her.

"Archie?"

He tensed at hearing the familiar voice.

"Lilly."

"Can we talk?"

"What is there to talk about? I think you've made it clear you want to end it. There's nothing more to say." He pressed the button, hoping she would leave before the elevator reached the lobby.

"Will you please look at me?" she begged.

"Go home Doctor Bergmann." The doors swung open and thankfully no one was inside. The last thing he needed was an audience when all he wanted to do was cry, scream or both.

"No," she said angrily, holding the door open and following him into the elevator. "We're going to talk."

He glared at her and jabbed at his floor number on the console. "I wanted to talk two days ago but you wouldn't give me a chance. You let your granddaughter speak for you. It's over, Lilly. Go back home." He turned his back.

"Goddammit!" She pressed the stop button, thanking her lucky stars the hotel's elevator was still old enough to have one.
"What the hell are you doing?" He brushed past her and pressed the button again. She gave him a slight shove and pressed it again. "I am too tired to be playing games with you!"

"And I'm tired of letting people run my life!" she shouted. "Now we are going to stay in this elevator until I've said what I need to say."

"Not if hotel maintenance comes up here. Now move."

"No." She blocked the console with her body. "You're going to stand there and listen to me!"

He crossed his arms over his chest and glowered at her. "I'm listening."

"I wanted to call you, but I didn't know Meredith stole our phones the night of the party and blocked our numbers."

"I called you this morning. On your landline!" he snapped. "And you didn't answer the phone. She did and told me you didn't want to see me anymore."

"I was asleep and she didn't tell me. Natalie told me you called her."

"I did because I wanted to believe Meredith was lying but you didn't call me back so I thought…"

"You thought it was over? Well it's not over! I won't let it be over and I don't give a damn whether my granddaughter likes it or not! Tell me you don't want it to be over either!" she begged through her tears.

"I don't," he confessed. "Lilly, I love you. I love you so much I don't want to spend another day without you." He stepped back, reached into his pocket and knelt beside her with the ring in his hand. "Lilliana Von Bergmann, will you do me the honor of being my wife?"

"Yes!" she sobbed. "Yes!"

He screamed with joy, jumped to his feet and took her in his arms, kissing her breathless.

"You've made me the happiest man in all the realms! I'm gonna be a good husband to you, I swear I will!" he promised, covering her face with kisses.

"I love you, Archie… I love you and I'm going to be the best wife in all the realms!" She threw her arms around his neck and kissed him back. He backed her against the console while they kissed, unaware that they'd accidently pressed the button to restart the elevator.

Out in the hallway several guests were impatiently pressing the button.

"Oh, didn't anyone tell you? It's broken," a bellhop said. "You'll have to use the one across the hall. That way."

"Again? They really need to fix that damn thing," a guest complained while they were leaving. The bellhop leaned against the wall, sighing with relief. He heard a giggle and turned to see Adora standing there. She cast a silencing spell.

"Love the uniform."

Loki snorted. "I only hope it works long enough to fix the mess Meredith made. The darkness is consuming her quicker than I thought. We have to bring her back to the light or…"

"The Fifth realm circle will be broken as it was in Nonestica."
"We have to unite the realms and the couple in there is the key to it!"

"What have you Seen, Ozmalita?"

"A wedding and when that wedding takes place the time for the realms to unite will come."

"Whose wedding?"

"Theirs." She pointed to the elevator. Suddenly it started moving.

"What the hell?" Loki growled. "Did you do that?"

"No."

They flicked their wrists and teleported themselves upstairs.

"The elevator's moving!" Lilly gasped. They broke apart when the doors opened and a group of impatient guests stood on the other side, a few of the men smirking at the lipstick smudges Lilly had forgotten to wipe off his cheek and neck.

"Sorry…ahh…." Archie stammered. Lilly held out her hand. "He proposed!"

"Oh, how lovely!" Adora praised in her glamour as an elderly lady.

"Lucky bastard," one of the men muttered. Loki smirked in his glamour as an elderly man.

"If you'll excuse us…" Archie grabbed Lilly's hand laughing while they ran down the hall to his room.

"They thought we….in there?!" Lilly giggled into his shoulder while he shoved his key card into the lock and opened the door. He swung her up in his arms, carried her into the room and kicked the door shut behind them. They tumbled into bed eager to continue their celebration of the first night of the rest of their lives together.
The Time The Realms Unite

Warning: This chapter contains major spoilers for How The Queen Stole Christmas with scenes that were included in it but will be told from the POV of the Gold Chronicles characters as well as scenes that were not included in it. Kat's Rumple will be referred to as Gold while mine will have his original name and my Archie will use his real name of Jiminy.

Seven Springs Mountain Resort

Seven Springs, Pennsylvania

Gold Standard Verse

Winter, 2018

Archie and Lilly planned to spend their honeymoon at a resort recommended to them by Doctor Ozopov in one of his recent emails. It was called Seven Springs and located in Pennsylvania. Most people travelled there for the skiing in the winter but there were many other indoor activities that they could do. It was also an hour's drive away from the Flight 93 Memorial and Archie and Lilly wanted to go there during their visit.

"Forgive me if I want to spend the rest of the day in bed," Lilly murmured once they were alone in their room.

"Do you hear me complaining," her husband chuckled.

"No, I…oh!" she giggled when he pulled her onto the bed with him and kissed her deeply. Seconds later his phone rang.

"Oh this better be an emergency" he groaned and pulled it out of his jacket. "Hello? Victor, Victor, slow down! I can't understand a word you're saying. WHAT? Who has her? WHO HAS OUR GRANDDAUGHTER?" he demanded of the frantic physician

"Meredith? Archie, what's happened to Meredith?" Lilly asked frantically.

"She's been abducted…by the Queen of Hearts….Regina's mother. Regina is gone too. Snow and Cas are under the sleeping curse."

"Oh no! NO! Merri!" Lilly screamed, her fingers caressing her pendant anxiously.

"Lilliana….the time the realms unite has come….unlock your memories….she heard a voice pleading.

"We'll catch the first flight out Victor," Archie was saying while Lilly sat on the edge of the bed, frozen in fear. After he hung up, he took her in his arms, terrified when her limbs felt like ice to his touch. "Lilly! Lilly, it's all right darling. We'll find her... Lilly, darling….speak to me!"

Images began to flash before Lilly's eyes that terrified her.

"Lilliana, Lilliana, take this…take it!"
She held out her hand, a coin with the symbol of a funnel cloud in its center in her palm, a coin that matched the one she now wore.

"Mama, I will stay and fight!"

"They're coming! Glinda, get her out of here now!"

"Papa, I am not leaving you here!"

"You must! They will kill you. SHE will kill you as she killed our good Queen Dorothy and your cousins."

"But where will I go?"

"The Enchanted Forest. You must bind your powers and live as a mortal or Zorinda will find you! When the time is right you will return and destroy the darkness. Go! GO!"

"Mama, Papa, I love you..." she sobbed.

"And we love you Lilliana. You are Lilliana Strogoff, daughter of Glinda the Good and the Great and Powerful Wizard of Oz. Never forget us, darling. Now go....go!"

She ran out of the palace, her vision blinded by tears. She heard screeching in the skies and a flock of mobat demons swooped down on her. She conjured a fireball and threw it at the leader then tossed the coin with her free hand, a funnel cloud spinning toward her.

I am Lilliana Strogoff, daughter of Glinda the Good and the Great and Powerful Wizard of Oz. I am the Guardian of the West Gate and Keeper of the Blade of Fire. I will bring the Balance between darkness and light.

She now held a baby in her arms, a boy barely a day old and removed a ruby tear shaped pendant from around her neck and pressed it against his chest. "Rumplestiltskin..." she murmured.

You are now the West Guardian, my son.

She conjured a piece of parchment and quill and scribbled a quite note.

This is your son. His name is Rumplestiltskin. Please take care of him. You are all he has now.

A girl with her face now stood before her, her heart in her hands. Her twin sister....Zorinda. She could only watch as Zorinda crushed her heart into dust. She would die but her son would live.

Ah so when Alemedia resurrected me, Ozmalita resurrected you.

Another face appeared before her eyes. A face she'd seen before in the memories of a terrified young girl under a deaging spell. The Queen of Hearts.


Come and find her Lilliana. My Zelena will destroy you...unless I do it first.

"Lilly, Lilly, it's alright. We'll find her."

"We will," she said fiercely as she detached herself from his embrace and rose to her feet. "But first...there are some things I need to tell you." Her lips trembled. "Please don't think that I kept them from you deliberately. I just didn't remember. That was the price I had to pay for being
reborn. My memories were cloaked until the terror of Meredith's abduction unlocked them."

"Reborn!"

"My true name is Lilliana Strogoff and I died almost four hundred years ago in another realm..." she began.

"W...What? What do you mean another realm? Not the realm Victor is from?"

"No. I was born and died four hundred years ago in Oz. I am the daughter of Glinda the Good and the Great and Powerful Wizard of Oz."

"Lilly, darling, you're in shock..."

"No I'm not!" she cried and he was blasted back onto the bed "Archie...oh my God...I am so sorry! I didn't mean to hurt you!"

"You have magic!" he exclaimed.

She held out her hands. Gold sparks emitted from her fingertips.

"I don't understand. When I died my powers should've passed to my son."

"Son? You mean the son that died."

She shook her head. "He lives...and his name is Rumplestiltskin."

Archie's mouth dropped open. "It's not possible! You can't...you can't be Rumple's mother!"

"I'll explain everything on the way. We need to be an open field for this to work." She smiled through her tears and held up the pendant. "And this will take us to Meredith!"

"What is it?"

"My good luck charm. An Ozian travel storm token. Natalie gave it to me for my birthday the first year we became friends. She said it would bring me good luck and I never believed her until now. She's from my world. It's the only way she could've gotten it."

He grabbed the keys to their rental car off the nightstand. "Just tell me where you want me to go!"

They drove for miles until Archie finally spotted an open field. He quickly turned off and shut off the engine. Lilly removed her pendant and tossed it, reaching for her husband's hand.

"Whatever happens don't let go!" she cried over the rising winds.

"Lilly, my gods...that's a tornado!" he screamed. "We have to get out of here!"

"No, we need to get in it!"

"Are you insane? We'll be killed!"

"Do you love me?"

"Yes."

"Do you trust me?"
"You know I do…"

"Then hold onto me and don't let go!" She threw her arms around him and held him tight as the cloud spun toward them. Archie closed his eyes, praying they wouldn't be torn apart.

*Take me to Oz*, she commanded it.

**The Haunted Forest**

**Enchanted Forest Five**

**Gold Standard Verse**

When Archie opened his eyes, they found themselves standing in a forest at nighttime. In front of them was a sign that read: **HAUNTED FOREST: I'D TURN BACK IF I WERE YOU.**

"I don't believe this! Lilly, we've walked onto the set of the Wizard of Oz!"

"No, we haven't. This is the Haunted Forest of Oz."

"It's real?"

"Very real. It was once the home of the dark witch Bastinda until Dorothy and my parents imprisoned her." She held out her hand and a lantern appeared in it.

"You told me you would explain everything so tell me…who are you? Who did I marry?"

"I'm still the same woman you fell in love with Archie. My past doesn't change that."

"But I don't know anything about your past except what you've told me. You were born in Victor's realm to a minor noble who basically sold you to your first husband to pay off his debts. You have a daughter named Cassandra and Meredith is your granddaughter. You're a child psychologist from Portland."

"In this life. In my previous life I was Lilliana Strogoff, the daughter of Glinda and the Wizard. I am also a direct descendant of the Ozian gods Aramon and Lurline and Hades and Persephone."

"Hades and Persephone are Greek gods, Lilly," he corrected.

"They are but they fled this world and created their own centuries ago," she explained while they walked. "Persephone's mother, Demeter had another husband chosen for her but when she fell in love with Hades and got pregnant Demeter cursed them."

"More curses," he grumbled, knocking branches out of his way with his umbrella. "What kind of curse?"

"That their children and their descendants would fight each other until their line died out," she replied grimly. "We had our Wars of the Roses centuries before it was fought in England but our houses were not Lancaster and York. They were Strogoff and Ozopov."

"Your surname sounds Russian."

"It is. Aramon was originally from Earth, born under the name Ivan Strogoff. He was a powerful magician in the court of Ivan the Terrible but he accidently discovered our world while he was trying to become powerful enough to defeat a rival witch. He fell in love with Hades and Persephone's daughter Lurline and she made him a god by giving him ambrosia. She named him
"Aramon which means 'wise one' in my language. Their daughter became the new Queen of Oz."

"Who were the Ozopov?"

Lilly went on to explain that a century before she was born cousins from Lurline's bloodline were married, one of them bearing the surname Ozopov.

"They had to seek the goddess' blessing to be married."

"Almost like the papal dispensation Henry VIII needed to marry Katherine of Aragon?" Archie inquired.

"Exactly the same. The goddess' blessing was given by the High Priestess of the Temple of Lurline. It was when they were wed that the curse started doing its work. Only queens ruled Oz since its beginning but Dimitri Ozopov wanted to change that so he murdered his Strogoff bride and ordered that all her female relations be killed. Most of them were. Others went into hiding. My grandmother was one of them. She raised Mama in obscurity but when the dark witches Bastinda and Nessarose threatened to destroy Oz the Ozopov were left with no other choice than to ally themselves with us."

She began to tell him of the legend of the Guardians of the Balance and the Talons of the Dragon, the two ancient orders charged with maintaining the peace and stability of all the realms created by Hades and Persephone.

"You're saying its possible there are six Enchanted Forests?"

"I'm saying there are six. Six worlds running parallel to each other. We may lead different lives in those realms or not exist at all."

His eyebrows rose into his hair. "Five different versions of me? I don't know whether to be fascinated or terrified but go on."

She told him of the arrival of Dorothy Gale, a young girl from Kansas brought to Oz by the goddess Ozmalita, chosen to stand at the South Gate, her powers unlocking the moment she arrived on Ozian soul.

"How much of the books and movies are true?"

Lilly shook her head. "Very little. You can't kill dark mages like Bastinda and Nessarose by dropping houses on them or throwing buckets of water. They are Alemedia's daughters, fathered by a mortal she seduced when her attempted seduction of Aramon failed. Only a completed Guardian circle could have defeated and trapped them in Ephesis but Dorothy was still a child and not strong enough with her magic. She eventually defeated Nessarose with Mama and Papa's help along with the Scarecrow, Tin Man and Lion."

"What about Bastinda?"

"She escaped the prison they trapped her in right after Zorinda and I were born." Lilly frowned. "And that's when I think my sister's soul was tainted by darkness."

"Tainted? How?"

"Before he was stripped of his own powers Hades bound Alemedia's as well. She cannot walk the mortal realm without a vessel." Lilly knelt and drew a figure in the ground with her finger. "So she created these. Three daggers. The ones who claim them become her vessels and serve her will."
"That's Rumple's Dark One dagger!" Archie exclaimed. "He was one of her vessels!"

"He was but I don't think he knew it. My sister was the first Dark One and what you've said proves a theory my mother had...that she has daggers hidden in all six realms and she intended for one of those daggers to fall into my son's hands and fulfill a prophecy that the darkest of curses would be taken by a Strogoff and broken by a Strogoff who would pay the ultimate price and turn the dagger on himself." Tears rolled down her cheeks. "But my son is alive...I've dreamt of him even with my memories cloaked."

Archie helped her to her feet and hugged her. "We'll find him darling...and we'll find Merri."

They continued walking until they spotted a castle in the distance. Lilly frowned.

"Something's not right..."

"What do you mean?"

"That's not Bastinda's castle."

"Honey, we've arrived a few hundred centuries too late for that."

"No...Archie...I don't think this is my Oz. I think it's yours."

"But this is where we wanted to be, isn't it?"

"I hope so. When I tossed the token I told it to bring us to us but I was thinking of my Oz...in Nonestica." She gasped. "No...It couldn't..."

"What?"

She shook her head and continued walking. When they approached the front doors to the castle Archie saw what looked like a circle with an eye in the center on them. He reached for the handle and attempted to open one of them but was blasted back.

"Of course she'd ward them," he panted as he rose to his feet.

Lilly held up her hand and pressed it against one of the markings, The door glowed and swung open.

"How did you do that?"

"That is the symbol of the Houses of Strogoff and Ozopov," she explained and ran inside, a sword appearing in her hand. "Zorinda!"

"Dammit Lilly, wait for me!" Archie yelled and ran in after her. He only had an umbrella and his fists but anything would do in a pinch. He was expecting a flock of guards, flying monkeys, anything to attack them but the castle appeared to be deserted. He could hear Lilly running through the halls calling out her granddaughter's name. He finally found her standing in a hall of mirrors holding a silver wand in her hand.

"Lilly?"

"Mama's wand," she murmured. "It's been used recently...."

"Lilly..."
'She enchanted it so that only a light mage could use it.' Lilly waved her hand over it and an image appeared in one of the mirrors of Regina and Meredith wandering through the castle.

"Merri, look! It's a hall of mirrors like I saw in my dream! Maybe he's in there!"

"Let's look!"

Regina grabbed a torch and waved the wand over it to light it.

Meredith took Regina's hand in hers and to both girls shock their joined hands started to glow, extinguishing the torch.

"Nothing can hurt us if we stay together," Meredith murmured. 

"Stay back," they heard a voice caution. "I repel magic and could drain you!"

"That sounds like Unca Rumple!" Regina cried. "It's okay Unca Rumple. It's me. I'm gonna get you out!"

"No please. I beg you. Keep back!"

Behind one of the mirrors was a man the mirror image of Rumple Gold but he was not Gold nor was he Lilly's son yet the null magic field he gave off seemed to have no effect on the children.

"It is Rumple!" Meredith exclaimed.

"Uh-huh and I'm bustin him outta there!" Regina pointed the wand at the mirror and began to chant in Ozian.

The wand sparkled with purple light and the glass shimmered as the wand obeyed the commands of the newest of Glinda's descendants.

"Gina it's working! It's working!" Meredith cheered.

"Let him OUT!" Regina screamed. The mirror shattered.

"You did it!" Meredith cried and threw her arms around the younger girl.

MacNamara scratched his head, puzzled. "How...how didn't I drain you?"

"You're free Unca Rumple! Free!" Regina hugged his legs.

"I'm sorry, sweetie, but my name is MacNamara," he said to her. Her face fell.

"You don't 'member me! She cursed you!" Regina wailed. "Okay...now I got it. I gotta give ya true love's kiss to wake you up!"

"Umm...Gina...I really don't think he's Mister Gold," Meredith protested.

"Yes he is. He's just cursed that's all."

"No, honey. My name is Robert MacNamara. I'm a US Marine Colonel, Ret."

"You're a soldier?" Meredith asked him.

"Yes, I am. Well, I'm retired now, but I worked Special Ops for twenty-five years. Now I just do defense contracts for the government."
“So how come you look like my Unca Rumple?” Regina demanded. "They make ya look like him so you can come to Storybrooke and do crazy experiments on us?"

“What?” Robert stared at her. "No. I wouldn't do that. What do you mean?"

"Like zap us and stuff like that. Cut us open..." She shivered.

"I have a question of my own,” Pallux spoke up. "Commander Ozopov released you eighteen years ago. How in the world did you end up here?"

MacNamara looked horrified. "You mean scientific experiments? No Marine would ever do that." He looked at Pallux.

Pallux scowled at him. "Your mission was to deliver the Book of the Ancients to the chief Guardian of this realm and we both know you had another, more personal reason for finding him, don’t we?"

"Yes. But I won’t discuss that now. It's classified," Robert snapped. "As to how I ended up here, the green witch nabbed me as I was on the way through the forest to use the portal the Commander showed me. And I've been her prisoner for all this time-only time isn’t the same here as elsewhere now is it? Because I haven't aged."

"No but you still look like Unca Rumple," Regina reminded him. "And now that we got you out, you wanna help us get back at her?"

Pallux laughed. "You're going to enjoy this, MacNamara. These girls can cook up some pretty hefty mischief."

"All right girls, I'm in."

"Yay! Let's go witch hunting!" Regina cheered.

"Lilly, who was that man? He looks like Rumple. Is that your son?"

"No," she murmured. "If he were here, I'd feel it." She held out the wand. "Take me to Meredith and Regina," she commanded it. The wand floated out of her hands and down the hallway. "Follow it Archie!" she cried.

The wand took them deeper into the woods. They could see a faint orange light in the distance.

"Smells like something's cooking." Archie observed. When they stepped out from behind the trees they could see two mobat demons turning a spit with a human tied to it. "Oh…my God….they're…they're…EATING someone!"

"Ummm…yes…" Lilly fought back the urge to vomit.

"Let's get out of here before we're the next course and are those….Barbies?” Archie took off his glasses and wiped them on his jacket.

"They're lifesize Barbies but how…?"

"There's only one person I know that would have made that possible, Regina. They're here."

"Are you sure Archie?"

"Rumple told me Regina had a dream once where she made a group of Barbies come to life to terrorize a wicked witch named Zelena and you told me before we got here that Zorinda has a
daughter named Zelena. She has the girls. I'm certain of it."

"Ding dong the witch is dead

Which old witch

The wicked witch

Ding dong the wicked witch is dead," the mobats sang. "You're looking for the witch? She's right here!" They pointed to the spit.

"You…you cooked her?" Archie sputtered.

"We were hungry."

He felt the bile rise in his throat and pulled Lilly aside. "Honey, you don't think they…"

"That is what I am going to find out! I am Lilliana Strogoff, West Guardian, now WHERE IS MY GRANDDAUGHTER?!" A fireball appeared in her hands.

One of the mobats flew over to her and tucked in its wings in submission.

"Your granddaughter and niece are safe, Mistress. Skytreader took them home."

Lilly choked back tears and pressed her hand to her chest. "Oh thank the gods! Archie, they're safe! They're safe. HE took them home!"

"Who took them home?"

She smiled. "A very old friend."

Loki stepped out of the trees with his great-grandson Robert at his side. Lilly clenched her hand into a fist, pressed it against her shoulder and knelt at the feet of the man who had been like an uncle to her most of her life.

Still like many women who encountered the attractive Norse god, her mother included, Lilly had taken a fancy to him in her pubescent years.

"Hello Loki. It has been a long time."

Loki smiled. "Too long, darling. But the Fates wheel comes full circle as always. And the Light is reborn." He walked over and hugged her.

"I couldn't rest...not until I was certain my son was safe...and I longed for a different life…"

"There's nothing wrong with that, Lilly. Blood is the tie that binds the most." Loki said softly, releasing her.

"I'm still trying to process it all...my wife a four-hundred-year old reincarnated demigoddess..." Archie murmured.

"It's a bit of a leap of faith," Loki admitted. "You should talk to my great-grandson over there. He has just as much adjusting to do considering he has my immortal family and his own to deal with. And his sister and brother don't even know he exists yet."

"I love Lilly no matter what she is...or was...but then...I now have a stepson three years older than
Loki laughed. "You'll get used to it. We immortals sort of quit counting years after awhile. And Bobby there has a great-aunt who is only two. That's my youngest, Astra."

Ah Lita, you have chosen well, Loki thought as he observed Lilly's interactions with her bondmate. "Where is my granddaughter, Loki? Is she safe?"

"I sent her home to Rumple's house with Regina in Storybrooke."

"Oh thank the gods!" Archie breathed a sigh of relief. "Lilly and I thought Zorinda might have taken her to Oz but when we tried to access Lilly's world through a portal we were sent to thins one."

"It's almost as if my world, as if Nonestica, no longer exists!" Lilly exclaimed.

"I'm afraid it doesn't darling," Loki said sadly. "It was destroyed eight years ago. The horror of its destruction was felt across the worlds...all the gods wept."

"A whole world was destroyed? How did that happen?" Robert demanded. "Why?"

Archie gasped. "You couldn't prevent it? With all your powers?"

"Only the Nonestican Guardians could have prevented it," Loki replied.

"There was a prophecy spoken by our god Aramon after Nonestica's creation that if the balance between darkness and light was not restored before the second double eclipse, my world and all in it would die." A tear slid down Lilly's cheek. "Lurline was so angered by Aramon's words that she stripped him of his powers and locked him in the Ozian Hell realm. There would be two double eclipses within thirty days of each other exactly five hundred years to the day the prophecy was spoken."

"So how did it happen? Was it like a nuclear war?" Loki's great-grandson inquired.

"Imagine every disaster movie ever made."

"My God!"

"Your son, dear Lilly and his fellow Guardians were able to save people from all the realms...except a great number of the adult population of Oz. His cousin sealed all the portals to Oz off once the children and those who wished to leave were evacuated."

"Then Aramon's words were true...the emerald that stored Lurline's life force was found and destroyed, triggering the destruction."

"Indeed it was. By Alemedia using one of Lurline's own descendants from the House of Ozopov as her vessel before she returned to one of the two she was controlling at the time."

"How was my stepson able to save everyone they could?"

"His cousin Lavinia sent a message to him before the final eclipse. The Guardians combined their powers and opened portals to all the realms to start the evacuations. Regina was sent through to evacuate the Enchanted Forest and barely escaped as she was still there when the destruction began. The Forest was the last realm to fall. We still hear the screams of those left behind to this day."
"How is it that all of you aren't crazy from feeling that?" Archie wanted know.

Lilly leaned against the trunk of one of the trees, weeping brokenly. "She divided them...it was the only way the prophecy came to pass."

"It is not easy, believe me, Doctor. But in death there is life and those who survived have given birth to new generations who honor those they lost."

Loki glanced over at Lilly. "And you are correct. Hades's bitch of a daughter Alemedia split her essence between the South Guardian and her bondmate to stir up discontent against Lurline's bloodline in Oz."

"Two Dark Ones..." Lilly murmured.

He went a put an arm around Lilly, letting her lean against him. Then he handed her a green handkerchief with a stylized L on it.

"Thank you," she sniffled.

"He was the Savior as Aramon said he would be." She smiled at Loki. "And now the mantle passes to your great-grandchildren, my friend. Those of your blood are now the Guardians of this realm."

Yes, but first they have to pass the tests," the god sighed. "And defeat Zorinda."

"And they will."

Loki sighed heavily. "The bitter blood feud between your houses served the darkness' purpose well, darling. The circle, as you know, Lilly was created to maintain the Balance between darkness and light. It was also meant to unite the warring Houses of Strogoff and Ozopov."

"You make it sound like the Wars of the Roses, Loki."

"It was Bobby. And it began when Lurline and Alemedia still walked the mortal realm. Lurline was crowned Queen of the Realm. She ruled over all of Nonestica alone for a century until a man named Ivan Strogoff crossed over into that world from Midgard."

"Midgard?"

"That's what the Norse pantheon calls Earth, Archie." Lilly clarified.

"Oh."

"Ivan was a powerful sorcerer from the land you know as Russia, Bobby. It is also the same place your sister Rhea's captor Baba Yaga crossed over from but in that world her name was Irina Fedorovna."

"She was a sorceress and Ivan's apprentice at one time according to what my mother told me," Lilly added. "She wanted to marry Ivan but he refused her, so she started studying the dark magic from the witches and warlocks of Scotland and Ireland."

"The McDermott clan. Lilly, your son's father is one of their descendants." "What?" She was horrified.

"You didn't sense his aura, darling?"
"No…I just thought he was a local boy. I was on the run from Zorinda, terrified…"

"And vulnerable. You may not like hearing this Lilly, but I suspect your meeting with Malcolm all those centuries ago was no coincidence. I believe it was Alemedia's plan to breed a Strogoff vessel on you and to give Dorothy and Nick Chopper part of her darkness to divide the Ozopov."

"Why?" Archie demanded angrily. "Why her? Why do this to Lilly?" He drew her closer.

"Lilliana had the purest heart in that incarnation of the circle, Archie. At that time Lilly stood at the West Gate, Zorinda the South, Ozma Ozopov the North and her sister Oksana at the East."

"Zorinda killed them all but me. She found me right after Rumple was born. I felt…" Lilly burst into tears. "I felt the only place he would be safe was with his father and HE didn't want our son…he wanted his power…the power of a demigod."

"Not Ozma darling. She went into hiding and was restored to the throne two decades later," Loki corrected.

"So what happened that started this whole blood war?"

"My family was cursed Bobby," Lilly replied. "I am a direct descendant of Hades and Persephone. We were cursed by her mother Demeter to fight each other until our bloodline died out."

"Wait a minute…the Greek gods Hades and Persephone?"

"Yes. Lurline and Alemedia are their daughters. They created Nonestica and the five realms that run parallel to it but Alemedia had Persephone killed and Hades is trapped in what you call the Underworld but to us it's the Ozian Hell Realm Ephesis."

"Hades was contained because his actions were causing major shifts in the Balance. When Zeus stopped his heart and stripped him of his powers all the pantheons breathed a sigh of relief but Alemedia is far worse." Loki's eyes narrowed to slits. "SHE is partially responsible for our family's tragedies, Bobby. I once threatened to call a blood feud against the Greek and Ozian pantheons but it was Ozmalita that stayed my hand."

"Who is Ozmalita?"

"She's had many names when she's walked the mortal realm but her latest incarnation is Natalie Durant," Lilly replied. "She is Hades and Persephone's youngest daughter and the Keeper of Souls. She decides whether a soul goes to Paradise or Ephesis."

"Ozmalita also chooses the bondmates for the Guardians and helps to maintain the Balance though she too has disrupted it on occasion." He smiled at Archie. "You are not aware of it but met you years ago."

"You did? How?"

"Why that little sneak…" Lilly giggled. "Archie, Natalie is Ozmalita."

"What?"

"Once I learned Ozmalita resurrected you I made it clear she was to choose a bondmate worthy of you Lilly, so she brought me to you Archie. You were sleeping and though Ozmalita may have chosen you, your bond had to grow on its own and it did."
"No offense but please don't meddle in my love life!" Bobby exclaimed.

"I won't as long as you date suitable women."

Bobby grinned. "You mean the ones who entertain the Seventh Fleet."

"You touch one of those and I'll turn you into a eunuch….if it doesn't rot off first!"

"There's plenty left if any of you care for a bite," one of the Cannibal Barbies said while she picked her teeth with a small bone.

"No, thank you. That one would make me sick," Loki declined. "Too much bile."

Archie held up his hand. "We ahhh...had a big lunch on the plane."

Lilly covered her mouth with her hand and giggled.

"I know I shouldn't be laughing but I couldn't help it!"

One of the mobats tossed some meat in a bowl and poured in garlic and parmesan cheese.

"To each their own," Robert shrugged.

"It's nice to hear you laugh again, darling," Loki remarked, his emerald eyes twinkling.

"I have reasons to now. I have finally met a man I could love and who loves me. Our granddaughter...well...she's had some issues, but we'll work through them and I will finally get to see my son!"

"You will. And your granddaughter is the new Guardian of the North, Lilly." Loki informed her.

"What…what? Merri? But how?"

"She has proven herself worthy of the burden, Lilly. She stands at the North as Zorinda's daughter stands at the South. One born in light, one born in darkness. Now that your powers have returned, you see the truth, don't you."

Lilly nodded sadly. "Merri's soul was tainted by darkness…Alemedia's darkness and so was my daughter's. I've regained some of the Eye of Aramon but my son now has its full power."

"I tried to lessen its effects the best I could Lilly."

"I know you did old friend and I thank you for that. The rest is up to us now."

"Regina is the other guardian?" Archie asked.

"Merri's symbol would be earth themed and Regina's the chalice for water," Lilly clarified.

"She bears the cricket," Loki told her, smiling.

"Oh, how wonderful! In your honor Archie!" she cried. "She could have chosen any earth symbol she wished but she chose the cricket!"

"Then let's go home. That granddaughter of mine is getting the biggest hug from her cricket grandpa."

Lilly reached into the pocket of her slacks and took out her travel storm token. "You might want to
stand back...these travel storms can be fierce at times."

She started to hand Loki back his handkerchief, but the god shook his head. "Keep it. A token to remember the handkerchief trick I played with you as a child."

She chuckled. "That smeared green ink all over my face that it took two days to wash off!"

"Ah, but I made you laugh. So it was worth it," the God of Mischief smirked.

"May Loki bring you laughter wherever you go," Lilly quoted softly.

"Thank the gods you two are old friends otherwise I'd be thinking you're flirting with my wife," Archie laughed.

"He was more of an uncle to me but...the ladies in my father's court swooned over him."

"You get that a lot, don't you?" Robert remarked.

"I do," the god nodded. "And you have inherited your share of it, grandson."

"My father prided himself on being the king of tricks but you unseated the Great and Powerful Wizard of Oz! "Lilly laughed.

"Now that was one of my best tricks," the mischievous god agreed. "I enjoyed that immensely."

"You had to prove he was worthy of your Glinda." Lilly smirked. "Mama had a bit of a crush..."

"On Loki?" Archie queried.

"Yes. He was a friend of the family, but Mama flirted with him constantly when she was a teenager. He called her Glinda the Naughty."

"You were flirting with girls when you were married?" Robert frowned.

"No. I was between marriages then," Loki answered. "Sigyn's only been my wife for the past nine hundred years."

"And Loki tried, tried to keep Mama honest but she chased him!"

"And how!" Loki chuckled. "I went for a swim in one of the natural forest pools and she stole my clothes! Then she jumped in the water after me. And a procession was coming by so I couldn't get out. I ended up transforming into an otter. Then I tried to slip out of the pool, but Glinda started shouting that her pet otter had escaped her and one of the lords chased me with his dog until I dived back into the pool to get away from the stinking drooling animal . . . and right into Glinda's arms."

"Then my grandfather caught you!"

Robert started laughing. "I'll bet you had a hard time explaining that one away!"

"Not as hard as Mama!"

Her grandfather Ozarian had been less than pleased seeing his daughter behaving like a wanton.

"Ozarian was furious, he had seen everything that went on through his Seeing Globe," Loki explained. "He wanted to tie her to a post and whip her, but I refused to let him do that. I don't
believe in beating children who misbehave. So I told him I would deal with her myself."

"My grandfather was vicious like Zorinda."

"What did you do?" Archie wanted to know.

"He was a nasty piece of work, wanting to whip a fourteen year old for being spirited and having a crush," Loki frowned. "So I pretended to be angry and Glinda and I tricked him. I pretended to paddle her in front of him, it was all an illusion, and then I told him she was going to be my servant for a month. That was true. But she served as my apprentice and I taught her magic."

"And she called herself Glinda the Good," Lilly added.

"Because I was always telling her to be good," Loki said.

"And she was from that time on." Lilly tossed the coin into the clearing and a large funnel cloud formed.

"You never heard of the slippers?" Robert joked.

"Zelena had them," Loki murmured. "Let's see if they survived the bonfire."

Lilly gestured and the coin returned to her hand. "If they create portals it will be easier to use them."

Loki strolled over to where the girls and the monkeys were eating. "Ladies, would you happen to know if you removed a pair of silver slippers from this bitch before you cooked her?"

"We did." Witch Hunter Barbie set a pair of silver shoes on the table.

"Thank you, darlings." Loki drawled. He picked up the shoes. "Lilly, these belong to you."

"Me? Why?"

"Better check for fungus!" Robert joked.

"I'm going to disinfect them first, Lilly," Loki said and did so with a quick scouring spell. "There! As to why, do you wish me to give them to someone else to use after you finish with them? They are an Ozian relic."

She smiled wistfully. "I miss laying by the lake at Finaqua."

She took off her boots and put on the slippers, tapping the heels three times. Archie clasped his hand in hers and the couple vanished in a puff of green smoke.

**Storybrooke Five**

**Gold Standard Verse**

The couple reappeared outside Rumple Gold's Victorian. They ran to the front door and began to pound on it frantically.

"Okay, okay hold your water!" they heard the Golds' adopted son Jimmy shout from the other side before he opened it. "Lilly! Archie! Thank God you guys are here."

"Where's Meredith? Is she all right?" Lilly asked worriedly.
"She's fine, she's fine, just having a snack with Regina and her parents. Hey Merri! Your grandparents are here!"

_Her adoptive parents_, Lilly thought. _Regina Strogoff….my niece….but she will never know it._

"Gramma! Grampa!" Meredith cried and ran out of the kitchen with Regina at her heels, her arms outstretched. Lilly scooped her grandchild up in her arms and held her tightly, the others astounded to see a glowing shield over them.

"Whoa! What is that?" Jimmy exclaimed. "Alina, Henry? Did you do that?"

"That's not our magic," Alina searched out with her mage's senses, gasping in shock when she discovered its source. "Lilly! It's coming from you!"

"I know it is," she sniffled when she handed Meredith to Archie.

"Grampa, I'm really sorry I was so mean to you! I won't be anymore!" Meredith sobbed into his shoulder.

"It's okay honey. We're just so glad you're safe!"

"Skytreader got us home. He's really nice Grampa."

"I know. We talked to him before we came here. He's an old friend of Gramma's."

"He is? How come you didn't tell me, Gramma?"

"Because I didn't remember, sweetie but I am so happy he was able to find you and take care of you."

"Lilly, what's going on? Why is that shield over you?" Belle asked.

"You all might want to sit down. It's a long story."

"And you two must be hungry. Come on. I'll make you a snack," Alice Carstairs offered. Regina and Meredith went into with the Gold's housekeeper for a snack of macaroni and cheese and hot dogs while Lilly began her story. The others stared at her in shock once she finished her tale except Jimmy who didn't seem surprised at all.

"Hook used to talk about there being six worlds but I thought he was full of crap. Now you're telling us its true?"

"It is. Sadly I am from the original one that no longer exists."

Charming laughed. "And you're that world's Rumplestiltskin's mother and Archie is his stepfather! How is he handling that?"

"I'll know soon enough when I meet him," Archie mumbled. "He didn't even know Lilly was reborn until now."

"Because the Ozian Keeper of Souls cloaked my memories and bound my magic. Had she not done so Rumple would've been able to locate me but so could Zorinda. She wants to finish what she started four hundred years ago. She wants me dead."

"And our daughter but over our dead bodies first!" Snow growled.
"No, she wants to turn Regina back into what she was...a child born in darkness...like Merri and Cassie."

"What?" Alina exclaimed.

"Meredith isn't aware of this and neither was I until my powers returned but she is also a soul that's been reborn. My daughter Cassie was pregnant during the Final Eclipse but she miscarried her first child when she was exposed to toxic levels of mercury at a restaurant. Ozmalita, the goddess of souls took Merri's soul into her keeping but she wasn't aware it had already been tainted by Alemedia's darkness."

"Who is Alemedia?" Henry wanted to know.

"She's our version of Satan," Jimmy replied.

"Great, so the devil's a woman. Knew you ladies always had a bit of evil in ya!" Jeff teased. All pairs of female eyes in the room gave him a look, babies included. "Whoa! Okay, okay I'm sorry! Don't roast me!"

"So what do we do about Cora now that we know who she really is?" Bae asked.

"There is only one weapon powerful enough to defeat her. Aramon's Talisman. It has the power to render any mage, even a god powerless for a short period of time but if you hold it against their hearts it strips them of their powers completely."

"Where do we find it?" Emma demanded.

"Our only hope is that my son was able to retrieve it from Oz before Nonestica was destroyed. Its hiding place was the original temple of the goddess Lurline. It was eventually turned into the burial vaults of the royal Houses of Strogoff and Ozopov but Nonestica was destroyed eight years ago. If we've lost the pendant your Rumple and my son are the only two people powerful enough defeat Zorinda. A demigod can only be killed by another demigod and only a god can kill another god."

"Whoa..." Bae muttered. "This is gonna be one helluva battle."

The others nodded in agreement. A short time later Loki arrived with Bobby and everyone was stunned when Archie's Nonestican counterpart also arrived, a powerful magician in his own realm. Rumple had also returned home along with Rhea. Lilly enjoyed seeing the Laufeyson siblings united but she still longed to see her own son.

"Okay Rumfather, cut the crap and show yourself!" Jiminy Ozopov laughed after they heard him angrily curse his father.

"I would if I could dearie but I'm still laid up from these damn gallstones as you know!" she heard her son snap.

"Are you astral projecting again, Strogoff?" Loki demanded. "You know that's exhausting in your condition."

"Yes I know and Belle is sitting here with a book ready to throw at me but I wanted to see everyone there."

Loki sighed. "You as stubborn as any of my grandsons. I could have sent you pictures."
"I get it from my mother."

"Can you appear if I anchor you darling?" Lilly inquired softly.

"I don't know Mama. You gave most of your magic to me before you died."

"I can lend you some of mine. But be warned, my magic will feel like the best thing you ever felt in your life, but once I remove the link it's going to knock you on your back for a few hours." Loki informed him.

"That will make Belle happy. I would ask my great-grandfather or whatever the hell Hades is but I'm pissed at him at the moment because he should've made sure Zorinda was locked up!"

"All right, you can throw fireballs at Hades later," Loki chuckled. "Ready?"

"I'm ready."

Lilly's eyes filled with tears as her son appeared in the room in a grey dragonscale leather coat, silk shirt and pants. He was the mirror image of Gold but there was more silver in his hair. Lilly gasped knowing what those silver strands signified. Her son had surrendered large portions of his life force to others.

"Mama...I've waited so long for this...to see you!" he sobbed, holding her tightly.

"I know darling," she wept. "Thank you Loki! Thank you so much for letting him come to me!"

"You're welcome, Lilly. You know me. I'm a sucker for family reunions."

"Look at you! Look at him, Archie."

"If I didn't know there were six of you, I'd think I'd need to get my eyes checked," Archie joked and held out his hand to his stepson.

"Dinna be expecting me to call ye Dad, dearie. Ye're three years younger than me."

"Try a few centuries!"

Meredith hopped off the sofa and stared up at him. "Are you really my uncle?"

Rumple knelt beside her grateful Loki's powers had restored his leg for the time being. He knew it would hurt like hell along with everything else later, but it would be worth it to see his mother again.

"I am and I hae two wee ones close to yer age."

"How come you talk funny?"

"My accent ye mean? It's my natural accent. But I can talk more like Mr. Gold if you like," he said and switched to his English accent.

"That's better. I can understand you now."

"I have more grandchildren, Rumple?"

"Yes Mama. Bae is my oldest then I have Hope, Nathaniel, Ian and Fiona."
"Wonderful! More grandchildren to spoil and send home!" Archie said with a smirk.

"Thanks…Dad!" Rumple groaned. "They're spoiled enough by me and their mum! Mama, I think you, Archie, Merri and Regina should go back to Juno with me."

"Why?"

"We have stronger wards there. Zorinda's going to try to come after you again now that you have your memories back and she's not finished with Regina yet. She will try to reverse her deaging. And Snow, you and David should come as well."

"I can stay here and keep an eye on them Rum," Jiminy spoke up.

"I may need you to check the other Storybrookes. Alemedia is not a fool. She's created more Dark One daggers and I have no doubt she's hidden them there. They all have to be neutralized and if Zorinda gets hold of one of them she becomes the Dark One again."

"We have to tell the others where the other Storybrookes are. We might need their help monitoring them. And they need to be told about the Home Office."

"I haven't forgotten that. Has Archie seen them in Storybrooke Two?"

"No. Not since Pan was killed there. Doesn't mean they won't try to go back."

"All right you two. What is going on?" Lilly demanded. "Are we under another threat besides my sister?"

Rumple sighed deeply. "Yes, Mama."

"Out with it. Now!"

"Everyone is having such a wonderful time."

"Rumplestiltskin Strogoff-Gold, if you know there is other danger, you will speak up or by the goddess I will summon a seeing globe and find out myself! Now what is this Home Office you're talking about?"

"They're based in England, Mama and they're...they're killing people from all the realms. Mages are their primary targets. We thought it was just some cult Pan made up until I got a call from one of the other Jiminys from what's called 'The Wish Realm'. He worked at the NSA here and was using his job as cover to track them."

"Storybrooke Two's Archie had a twin named Silas. Silas was a Dark One working for them, killing fairy tale creatures and mages across the country," Jiminy added. "My brother David almost caught him in San Francisco but he got away. Silas is dead now but there are still a lot of members in that organization."

"Do you think my sister might be working with them?"

"It's possible."

"Birds of a feather," Gold muttered.

"You heard all that?" Rumple asked him.

"I'm not deaf yet, dearie," he quipped.
"You can thank the bastard that spawned me for it. The Home Office started when he tried to abduct the Darling boys and took their sister instead. It made them want to destroy all magic but they changed their minds after they helped us defeat Pan. I cannot say the same for their followers. They left the order and formed their own branch that destroys all magical creatures and the safe havens we create."

"That's another reason why we're here. We're trying to warn everyone about them so they can be ready," Jiminy said.

"Then we should start work on the talisman and the emerald soon," Lilly suggested.

"Is it always like this where you're from? Not a moment's peace?" Emma inquired of Jiminy and Rumple.

"Not always dearie. We had seven years of peace and quiet but that was because we didn't know what was going on in the other Storybrookes."

"The Balance is shifting...the darkness has grown more powerful in those seven years because the other realms were not closely monitored," Loki added.

"Not to mention the pirate menace in our seas," Rhea snarled.

"We're all gonna need a LONG vacation after this!" Bae joked.

"Cool! I wanna go to New York again!" Regina squealed.

Gold groaned.

"Something wrong Rumple. You're looking a bit pale," Robert observed. "Why does the idea of going to New York again make you look like you want to crawl in a hole?"

"Oh brother dearie if you only knew!"

"And beware on Thanksgiving. You eat turkey expect the Queen here to be outside your house staging a protest," Jeff added.

"W...What? But you're supposed to eat turkey on Thanksgiving!" Robert gaped at the child.

"Nuh-uh! You better eat pizza Unca Bobby or m'gonna find out where you live an protest till you do!"

"If I wanna eat turkey, I’ m gonna eat turkey," Robert said defiantly. "Just try and stop me."

Regina jumped off the sofa and ran over to him, her chin puffed out. "You're on, Unca Bobby!"

"Uh-oh, Regina's layin the smackdown!" Henry laughed.

"My poor uncle has NO idea what he's getting himself into!" Alina giggled.

"This I have to see!" Loki snickered.

"Well take a seat an bring some popcorn 'cause I'm gonna do it!"

"We don't eat turkey at our house. Grampa doesn't want to," Meredith spoke up.

"Yeah 'cause he was on MY side!"
Jiminy Ozopov doubled over laughing. "This...this reminds me of us that night we got arrested...right, Rumfather?"

"Dearie, I was not the one who decided to stage a sit-in in the lobby of the police station. That was Belle's idea and you and Az encouraged it."

"What's a sit in?" Regina wanted to know.

"Never you mind Regina Nolan!"

"But Daddy I wanna know."

"No you don't."

"I'll find out," the former queen said determinedly.

"Might as well tell her Dad. She's gonna keep at it til you do anyway," Emma advised.

"Later."

"But Daddy..."

"Later, Regina," Snow said firmly.

"Okay Mommy."

"I suppose we'd best get started making the talismans," Gold said.

"I'll go get dinner ready. I have a feeling you mages are gonna be working up quite the appetite," Alice offered.

"Ah, make my son a light meal please. He just had gallstones removed and is on a strict diet."

"Mama!" Rumple protested. Gold laughed.

"Laugh it up Gold and we'll be seeing how funny it is when YE are havin gallstones removed, dearie!"

"I eat healthier than you obviously, dearie!"

The two Rumples glared at each other.

"Do we have to put you in separate corners? Behave Rumple!" Daria scolded her son.

"And YOU Rumple, take that scowl off your face or you will be facing a wall!" Lilly threatened her son.

"Mama, I'm three hundred and fifty-six years old, not six!"

"I don't care if you're five hundred young man! I'll still put you in the corner!"

Archie snickered.

"Ha ha, very funny...Dad!" Rumple snorted.

"That's right I am your father and you're supposed to respect me."
"Wanna be turned back into a cricket, dearie?"

"Do it and I'll bind your magic for a month," Lilly grinned, summoning Aramon's Talisman to her.

"Mama!"

Meredith was giggling. "I can't help it Gramma. It's too funny."

"Yes it is but Mama in all seriousness I want you and Archie to come to Juno with me."

"I may not have all my powers but I'm still a Guardian Rumple!"

"You don't know, do you?"

"Know what?"

He stared at her.

"I'm not afraid to face my sister again. Stop staring at me like that!"

"You have more to protect this time, Mama. Archie, Meredith and your baby."

"What?" his parents gasped.

"Gramma's gonna have a baby?" Meredith asked her uncle.

He nodded. "Merri, why don't you go sit with Regina while I talk to Gramma and Grampa a bit."

"Okay. Gramma, that's so cool! I'm gonna have another aunt or uncle!" she said excitedly and ran to tell Regina.

"She handled that better than I expected," Archie murmured, taking Lilly in his arms. "Rumple, are you sure?"

"I sense her aura."

"Her?"

"Yes, Mama." He giggled. "And it's a good thing you got married when you did. You're going to be showing soon."

"How long?"

He smirked. "Since that weekend in Boston."

"But that was after Rumple's Halloween party."

"I don't understand. I haven't had any symptoms."

"Because you couldn't, Mama. You were still under Ozmalita's memory spell. The minute you awakened Zorinda could sense you…and she can sense my sister too. I can't lose you again, Mama. Come to Juno with me."

"But Rumple needs our help!"

"He'll have all the help he can get. From all the realms."
"The time the realms unite…" Lilly recited.

"That time is now, Mama."

_We go to the mattresses_, he sent to his wife.

**The Spinning Wheel Bar and Grille**

**Gold Chronicles Verse**

**Juno Beach, Florida**

**That same day**

"Everybody listen up!"

Belle snapped her fingers, turning off all the television sets in the barroom and the game rooms.

"Storybrooke Five is under attack and they might need our help!"

"Under attack from what?" asked their bartender Will Scarlet.

"Zorinda and pirates of the Captain Hook variety. We're going to the mattresses, gentlemen. I want everyone back here in one hour ready to move."

"Okay Belle Corleone," Will joked.

Everyone ran out of the bar and back home to get ready.

Once the bar was deserted Belle picked up the phone dialed a number.

"Hey Gramma, what's up?"

"We go to the mattresses Henry."

"Got it….MOM!" he yelled and ran downstairs to the patio where his parents were having glasses of iced tea.

"What is it Henry?"

"We go to the mattresses."

"Bae, go get Zee and Angelo and tell them to meet us at the Grille!" Emma ordered and vanished in a puff of smoke.

An hour later Rumple arrived with his parents, niece and cousin.

Jiminy moved to the front of the crowd with Az.

"Pongo! Demon form!" he commanded.

"Perdy! Demon form!" Az ordered.

The two Dalmatians ran out of their kennel and took their mobat demon forms.

"Okay, Tin Man, let's roast some pirates!" DG cried and leaped onto Wyatt's back.

Henry slammed the tip of the staff into the ground and a swirling blue portal appeared before them.
Wyatt let out a roar in his dragon form and flew through the portal with his wife still riding on his back, the mobat demons flying behind him. Jiminy turned to Az and kissed her passionately.

"I love you Dellia. Wait up for me and sculpt us like one of those French girls."

"Always," she whispered and kissed him back. A few feet away his twin was bidding his wife farewell.

"This isn't a bunch of crazy teenagers shooting up a bus David. These are pirates," Beth reminded her husband.

"Remind me to ask your father to tell you about the time he and I sent a crew of them screaming back to the ocean the day they tried to break into your grandfather Hubert's castle. And I was a cricket then. Besides, you know who always has my back." He glanced over to where his fellow former police officers waited, all of them wearing bulletproof vests they'd kept from their years with the SFPD. "This Storybrooke may not be our home but these people are our family too and we need to protect them. They'd do the same for us." He kissed her. "Wait up for me Sleeping Beauty…and wear something nice."

She grinned. "Hmmm…a visit from your favorite cheerleader may be in order."

"Oh boy!"

"It's time to go David," Phillip reminded him, Aurora and Mulan at his side in their battle armor.

"You're going in Mama?"

"I do know how to fight Elizabeth," Aurora said testily. "And you can thank Philip, Mulan and Snow for that."

Snow laughed. "Just like old times, isn't Emma."

"Yeah but thank God we don't have Captain Guyliner to deal with," Emma muttered. "Remind me if I ever go to Storybrooke Two to beat some sense into my counterpart there. Marrying that dick. Hey Bae. I thought you were staying behind with your dad."

Bae shook his head. "I go where you go Swan. Papa understands."

"You bring my son back in one piece dearie!" Rumple ordered.

"Don't I always. I…oh my God!" She doubled over with laughter as Zelena flew past them on a broom. "Zee's going in?"

"She's part of our air support," Snow explained and pointed to Blue and her coven of fairies shrinking themselves before they followed Zelena through the portal. "Let's go!"

Archie stood on the sidewalk, his arm around Lilly and a hand on his granddaughter's shoulder while they watched the survivors of Nonestica marching into battle for people most of them had never met but felt a kinship with. Little Regina stood beside them holding Princess's leash with one hand and her mother's hand in the other. They were terrified for the safety of those who stayed behind in Storybrooke yet grateful that so many people were willing to help, heroes and former villains yet that day they would all be heroes.

"Lilly, why don't I take Meredith with Regina and me to Missus Ozopov's house?"
"Thank you Snow. Do you want to go to Missus Ozopov's house with Regina?" Lilly inquired of her granddaughter. Meredith nodded enthusiastically.

"Okay. We'll see you later then." Archie and Lilly hugged their granddaughter and returned to where Rumple was sitting, taking a rest. He gestured and teleported them to his mansion, a large Seeing Globe set up in the middle of his living room. Lilly gasped in shock.

"Mama's globe! Rumple, how did you find it?"

"It was among the many other magical items the previous Dark Ones stole, Mama."

"It looks like the Wicked Witch's crystal ball in the Wizard of Oz."

"Bastinda stole it from my mother, Mama stole it back and Zorinda took it from her."

"Show us Storybrooke Five," her son commanded it. They made themselves comfortable on the sofa and watched as a fierce battle raged on land and sea in Storybrooke Five most of the day. Zorinda had been defeated but she'd summoned two of the most feared beasts in the Greek pantheon. Scylla and Charybdis. Charybdis, or 'Biddy' would prove to be little match for Loki, but it was his great-grandson Rumplestiltkin Laufeyson-Gold that would defeat Scylla.

"Well, now that you've taken care of that mess….get yer arses over here so we can celebrate!" Rumple yelled into the glass. "Evangeline! Get the grills fired up dearie!"

"Already on it Rumple!" she called back.

Rumple stood up and held out his arm for Lilly. "Archie, may I escort my mother to dinner?"

"Go on. You've waited long enough for it."

He watched with a smile as mother and son walked out onto the patio together. He was hoping he would have some time with his stepson alone before all the guests arrived and while was helping Evangeline and Belle he seized the opportunity and approached Rumple.

"I'd like to talk to you for a bit if you don't mind," Archie said to him.

"We can use my office." Rumple stood up, leaning on his cane, waving Archie off when he moved forward to assist him. "Now what's on your mind?"

"I don't want things to be awkward between us. My being married to Lilly doesn't mean she's just going to forget you. I don't know that much about her life before I met her, but I do know that she's always loved you before she remembered you."

"I lived most of my life thinking she was just another one of my father's byblows that dumped me off on him because she dinna want to take care of me. I dinna know how yer Rumple's life with his da was Archie but mine wasna a walk in the park."

"I gathered that when you basically wished for him to rot in Hell."

Before his stepfather's astonished eyes Rumple reached into his chest and pulled out his heart. He waved his hand over it and it divided into pieces. He floated one of the pieces over to Archie.

"W…What do I do with that?" he gulped.

"That's where all our memories lie, dearie."
"Why is your heart split like that?"

"Because not all the pieces belong to me. They belong to those I love and whom love me. Their hearts are divided the same way. That piece you hold in your hand belongs to me and it has all my memories…and the ones Mama gave me before she died all those years ago. Hold it in your hand and see as I see. Feel as I feel."

You have no idea how long I've waited for this. Once I'm done with you I'll find that bastard you've spawned and crush him into dust too."

You'll never find him.

You should've paid more attention to your lessons, Zori. Even the Dark One's powers or the talisman can't break a protection spell on a heart's memories.

No matter. I'll find your brat without them.

"Lilly," Archie moaned, clutching the heart piece tightly.

A child can't have a child, Rumple!

"You bastard, you miserable heartless BASTARD!" Archie sobbed. "He was just a child…your child. She trusted you with his life damn you and you ABANDONED HIM!"

I know how to recognize a desperate soul…and it was your destiny…the darkest of curses by a Strogoff shall be taken and through a sacrifice in the name of true love the curse by a Strogoff shall be broken...

You coward. You promised. Don't break our deal!

"It was the curse," Archie sniffled. "Alemedia knew Bae was one your anchors and she had to separate you. Just like she separated you and Belle."

"T...The...darkest of curses by a Strogoff was taken… and with my sacrifice…in the names of those I love…let this curse and all those created by it at last...be...broken!"

He now saw Rumple on Main Street in his own Storybrooke, sacrificing himself to end the Dark One curse and save his family from his father's version of the Dark Curse.

"You should've been my son. Mine! Not his!" Archie growled and embraced the older sorcerer.

"I wish I had been," Rumple murmured. "Ye would hae been a better da to me than mine was. Promise me ye'll be a good da to my wee sister."

"I intend to be."

Archie handed the heart piece back. Rumple merged it with the others and shoved it back into his chest.

"Is everything all right in here?" Lilly asked worriedly.

"Dinna fash yerself Mama. We're fine."

"Good because I don't want my son and husband fighting."

"Oh we willnae fight as long as he's a good mon t'ye."
"Oh come here!" she laughed and hugged them. "My handsome men. Come on. Our guests will be arriving soon and hungry!"

An hour later everyone from Storybrooke Five arrived as well as some of their friends from Hyperion Heights.

"Rumple, you have something on your mind. What is it?" Lilly asked her son after dinner.

"Mama, I know you and Archie are already married but would you be willing to do it again?" He glanced over at his stepfather. "I never got the chance to give her away."

"You will now. I'd marry your mother as many times as she or you want me to."

"You are going to have the Ozian wedding you should, Mama. Oh how I wish you'd been able to attend mine!"

"Then I suppose you and Belle will have to get married again, now won't you?"

"Yes we will," her son replied with a smile. "Mama, I was thinking we could have your wedding here...over Christmas."

"Having my son give me away to the man I love is the best Christmas gift I could ask for," Lilly said softly. "But there's something else on your mind, isn't it?"

"Just as it's on his mind, Mama," he said, indicating Gold. "I want to do what we couldn't do for Nonestica. I want to bring all the realms together. All of us in one place, where we can protect each other."

"Then do it honey."

"You think I can?"

"I know you can! I know you can find a way together." Lilly encouraged.

"But first I want to walk you down the aisle and give you away."

**Juno Beach, Florida**

**Christmas Eve, 2018**

"...Who gives this woman to this man?" Storybrooke Two's Archie Hopper asked.

"I, Rumplestiltskin, of the House of Strogoff, do give my mother Lilliana to this man in matrimony," Rumple announced proudly.

"And who gives this man to this woman?"

"I, Geppetto, representative of the House of Hopper do give my friend Archibald to this woman in matrimony."

"Archie, Lilliana, you may now speak your vows."

The couple faced each other, hands joined.

"You came back to this world to be reunited with the son you gave your life for; a sacrifice I know you would make again willingly but you were also sent back to find the missing piece of your
heart," Archie said softly. "You could've chosen any man in all the realms, but you chose me, a former thief and cricket. I feel like I'm the luckiest man in the realms. I didn't know you were a goddess when I met you and I didn't need to know you were to love you." He reached out and caressed her cheek. "I love you in this life Lilliana Strogoff Hopper, my goddess of light and every life beyond. I would say so much more but I would prefer to say it when we're alone."

"I was born a goddess and I died a goddess, but I was reborn a mortal woman and as a mortal woman I fell in love with a mortal man. I didn't care that he was former thief or a cricket. They were just little bricks on the road to you becoming the man you were meant to be, the man who held the missing piece of my heart without my knowing it. But when the day comes that I must return to Paradise again, my heart is filled with joy that I will not be making that journey alone and no matter how many more times I'm reborn, I know you'll be there waiting for me. I love you forever Archie Strogoff Hopper."

"Archibald Hopper, is it your intention to bind yourself heart body and soul to your bride?"

"It is my intention."

"Lilliana, is it your intention to bind yourself heart, body and soul to your groom."

"It is my intention."

"Ah, I am sorry we are late."

"Aramon!" Rumple gasped.

All eyes turned to see a man with jet black hair and long black robes standing there with a young woman on his arm. The Ozians, including the bride clenched their hands into fists, pressed them against their shoulders and knelt.

"Ah, Loki...how long has it been comrade?"

Aramon's cane tapped a rhythm on the tiled marble floor as he approached the Norse god that had been his closest friend in the days when he could walk the mortal realm freely.

"Too long by half, friend Aramon," Loki replied in Russian.

"You can blame the witch I called my wife's sister for that. She stripped me of my powers and exiled me in Ephesis until my descendants freed me. I warned Lurline and Alemedia I would be the last one standing and I am."

"I am glad you are," Loki replied, switching to English and embracing his fellow deity. "You and I, we don't quietly into that good night."

"No, we do not but tell me...why are some of these ladies staring at me? Do I have a stain on my robes?"

Little Killian Gold nudged his grandfather. "He really does look like Sev Grampa!" referring to Severus Snape of the Harry Potter novels.

"He can take any form he wants to, but he's always looked like Alan Rickman to us," said Belle.

"I admired the man's work greatly," said Aramon.

Loki introduced Aramon to his daughter, Miri and nephew Modi.
"And now, if you will allow me, I would like to complete the final ritual of the ceremony. Child, release your glamour spell."

"Mama!" Lilly sobbed.

"Glinda!" the others exclaimed for it was Glinda The Good herself.

Aramon tapped his cane three times and a puff of smoke appeared in the room revealing a man wearing a top hat and a long cloak.

"I am the Great and Terrible…"

"…Wizard of Oz…" Loki chuckled. "In your dreams maybe, Alexander or are you going by the Mystic Man now?"

"I'll use the name I was given in my first life. I am the father of the bride after all."

"Papa," Lilly sobbed and threw her arms around them.

"Lilliana…our light," Glinda whispered.

"I've missed you both so much!"

"As we've missed you, darling girl," said the Mystic Man.

Aramon placed his hand on Lilly's head.

"Your journey to find your heart has been a long and painful one my dear but now we must make that bond complete. Rise, my children. Glinda and Alexander, you may begin."

Glinada reached into her daughter's chest and removed her heart, placing it in Lilly's palm as the Mystic Man removed Archie's. They waved their hands over the glowing organs and the guests unfamiliar with the spell watched with awe as they split into two pieces, one glowing red in the couples' palms the other hovering above them glowing white.

"Lilliana, take the unclaimed piece of your heart in your hand and speak the name of the person it belongs to," her mother instructed. "But first you must recite the incantation if you remember it."

"See as I see

Feel as I feel

Let our two hearts become one

Not even in death shall this bond be undone!" she recited passionately. "Archie Strogoff Hopper!"

Her heart piece floated over to where the groom stood.

"Archie, if you wish to claim this heart, take it in your hand and hold it to your chest until it disappears. You will feel a bit of pain at first," The Mystic Man informed his son-in-law. The groom did so without the slightest hesitation, the piece vanishing once he pressed it against his chest.

"Archie take the unclaimed piece of your heart in your hand and speak the name of the one it belongs to. You must recite the same incantation. Do you remember it?"

"See as I see
"Feel as I feel

Let our two hearts become one

Not even in death shall this bond be undone!" he repeated. "Lilliana Strogoff Hopper," he murmured before he released his heart piece. She held it against her chest until it vanished, and Glinda and the Mystic Man returned the other pieces to their bodies. They then stepped back.

"I am now yours, heart body and soul Archie Hopper and I will love you in this life and the next," Lilly said through her tears, her hand on his chest as his was on hers, covering their joined hearts.

"I am now yours heart, body and soul Lilliana Strogoff Hopper and I will love you in this life and the next."

"And by the will of the gods and the state of Florida, I now pronounce you husband and wife. Archie, you may…HEY! I didn't get to that part yet!" Archie Two protested when the groom swept his wife into his arms for a kiss.

"Do the short, short version!" Archie commanded as he briefly broke their kiss.

"Good. You're married. Kiss her! There! That satisfy you!"

"Finally!" Archie exclaimed and kissed his wife again.

"Oh, come on! You didn't have to wait that long!" Archie Two grouched. "Now do us a favor and save the rest of it for later!"

The couple gave each other heated looks.

"Dinna even think about skipping out on the reception, dearies!" Rumple wagged a finger at his parents.

Lilly grinned. "Oh, you mean like Az, Jiminy, Wyatt and DG did?"

"Yes."

"Come on Meri!" Regina and Meredith jumped out of their seats and began throwing rose petals on the couple. Archie scooped up his granddaughter and hugged her.

"You did a fabulous job, Meri!" He kissed her cheek. "Your gramma and I are so proud of you."

"I want a ceremony like that when I get married Grampa."

"Hopefully NOT until you're in your Fifties!"

"Like you?" she countered with a smirk.

"It may be later," he teased and set her back on her feet, a lump rising in his throat when Lilly's parents were waiting for him at the doorway. "You…your Highnesses…"

"You can relax Archie. We know you will be a good husband to our daughter. Our grandson will see to that," Glinda chuckled.

"My stepson," Archie laughed. "And he's older than me!"

Lilly hugged her parents again, not wanting to let them go but she knew their time in the mortal
realm was limited and she knew they would want to talk to their old friend Loki. Everyone was asked to wait outside while the ballroom was being reset for the reception.

It was a wonderful evening with plenty of laughter and hijinx from the guests. After Archie and Lilly big goodnight to their guests the parents started getting their children ready for bed. Many of the couples enjoyed seeing the heart division spell and expressed a desire to have it done on them before Christmas morning. The realms were uniting but there was one last task to be done.

**Juno Beach, Florida**

**Christmas Night, 2018**

"We call upon all of the powers of the light...let our worlds here and beyond at last unite!"

The Guardians of the Six realms along with Loki and the newly resurrected Persephone Diosa stood in the center of Rumple's ballroom, hands joined as they chanted in Ozian, their friends and family gazing into the mirror as a wonderous sight met their eyes, five realms merging into one and a world that was lost made anew with love, the strongest magic of all.
Once the dust settled from uniting the realms a mass meeting was held to discuss one of the major issues facing the residents of what was now called The United Realms. Many of them bore the same names and many times it was difficult to distinguish one from the other.

“I don’t mind being called Jiminy by anyone outside of my friends and family,” Jiminy spoke up. “My colleagues in the medical profession sometimes call me AJ because that’s how I sign my name to the correspondences I write.”

“I can go back to using my original name. Jasper,” the second David Molk offered. “And Beth can use Rose.”

“There’s no need for that. There are a lot of people with the same name in this realm,” Regina argued. “I think we can tell who’s who without everyone having to change names.”

“May I make a suggestion?” Archie spoke up. All heads turned in his direction.

“What is it, dearie?” Weaver asked him.

“I was married in the Nonestican Ozian tradition and took Lilly’s maiden name as part of mine, so my name is now Archie Strogoff-Hopper.”

“And I have been using Mama’s name in her honor for eight years.” Rumple spoke up.

“So have we,” added his son and daughter-in-law.

“Rumple isn’t my biological father, but he was a second father to me…as he was to us all,” Regina
said, indicating her other selves. “Had the Fates decided differently he would’ve been my father.”

“Jiminy’s and my actual surname is Whitmore,” David said. “But he was renamed Ozopov when he arrived in the OZ and he’s been using that name for years. I added his cursed surname onto mine.”

“I actually like the idea of the men adding our maiden names to theirs,” spoke up Belle from the former Storybrooke Four. “In our case Rumple’s name would be Rumplestiltskin Bordreaux-Gold.”

Her husband smiled. “I like it, dearie.”

“Mine would be Rumplestiltskin French-Gold,” Rumple from the former Sixth Storybrooke said.

Daria stood up and addressed her children. “Dearies, I feel that our new name should be Laufeyson-Gold, or Laufeyson-Sparrow in Rhea’s case. After all, we are all the descendants of Loki Laufeyson.”

“Mama, I’d still like to keep the name MacNamara in honor of my adopted parents,” Bobby spoke up.

“As well you should, son.”

“But I will also use Laufeyson, Mama,” he added.

Daria nodded in approval.

“What about those of us not married?” Meredith’s father asked.

“Victor you are part of the House of Strogoff through Merri,” Lilly reminded him. He nodded.

Little Regina’s parents stood up. “What do we do about Regina? She is technically a Strogoff though she doesn’t know it.”
“We can tell her that Cora was a distant relative of hers until she’s old enough to understand Snow,” Rumple advised. “It’s not really a lie, dearie. Most of us are related in one way or another, we just haven’t gone far enough back in the family trees to trace it.”

“Though I’m engaged would I be able to take Melanie’s name?” Rumple from the former Storybrooke Two inquired. Melanie smiled.

“You can…IF you keep your word and marry her,” Rumple French-Gold warned his counterpart.

“Oh, I intend to dearie.”

“You better!”

“Settle down now or you’ll be spendin the night in cells,” Wyatt grumbled.

“Easy Tin Man,” DG giggled.

“So it is agreed then? We’ll be changing our names according to the families we were born into or married into?” Rumple asked the audience. “Those who vote yes, raise your hands.”

Every hand in the hall rose in the air.

“I guess we have a deal!” Rumple slammed his gavel down on the table.

Regina, former Mayor of Storybrooke Four rose from her seat. “I would like to make another proposal.”

“Go on, dearie.”

“We held a festival every summer with rides, games and prizes. It was a way to bring all of us together. I think everyone would enjoy it.”
“Like the firemen’s festivals we had back in Pennsylvania!” Beth exclaimed. “It’s a great idea!”

“And food fights at every party?” Bae French-Gold added. His father groaned and slapped his forehead.

Beth snickered.

“Why not? My adoptive mother said her family did it every Christmas.”

“We could make a golf tournament part of it,” Jiminy suggested.

“Remember when we pulled the Caddyshack on those snobs at Greenhaven?” Henry asked him. His father, Robin, Rumple’s adopted stepson Diego and Angelo started laughing.

“No kidding? How come we’ve never heard THAT story?” Bae Laufeyson-Gold demanded of his counterpart.

“Remind me to tell you one of these days. We did a lot of crazy stuff…including the Baby Ruth in the pool!”

“And scared yer brother and sister half to death!” Rumple snapped. “Not to mention every other parent with wee ones!”

“Damn kids,” Rumple-Bordreaux-Gold muttered. “And take those smirks off your faces,” he warned the Scorpions. “I know you’d try it since you watch that stuff!”

“I for one want to see if someone can dethrone the Kings and Queens of the Kissing Booth,” Jeff Hatter laughed. “Rumple and Archie and their wives have held the title back and forth between them for eight years now.”

“I think we can give them a run for the money, can’t we Sleeping Beauty?” David asked his wife with grin.
“Oh, I know we can my blue knight.”

“Bring it on!” Archie Bordreaux-Hopper challenged. “You face me and Marie this year.”

“Expect three of us challenging you because what I do, my brothers do! The Hopper-Molk boys are a united front!”

“Anyone willing to wager on it, come see me at the Grille!” Rumple smirked.

“Aaaannnd here we go!” Diego Rivera chuckled. “Get your wallets out, guys. The Rumfather’s got a regular betting pool going at the bar. Baseball, Basketball, Hockey, you name it. He’s even got a full casino in his man cave!”

“Jefferson Hatter don’t you even THINK about it,” his wife threatened.

“I’m not!” he protested.

“Anyone who wishes for us to hold an annual summer festival raise your hands? Motion passed!” Rumple Laufeyson-Gold slammed the gavel down.

There were other suggestions made that evening. Elsa from the former Storybrooke Four wanted to open a figure skating school once she learned that there were dozens of girls and boys in the Realm who expressed an interest in the sport. She had been an Olympic contender twice in her amateur career, once as a singles skater and second as a pair with her Outsider husband Marcus Colby.

The Realm itself had few problems but they were easily handled by the newly expanded Sheriff’s department. The Emmas that had been the Sheriffs of their Storybrookes were more than happy to hand the reins of leadership over to Wyatt Cain since he’d been Sheriff of his own Storybrooke as well as a former police captain for the last eight years while some officers opted to retire from the force and work as private investigators for David Molk’s firm, Movarro Investigations. They handled everything from cheating spouses to cold murder cases, including one of history’s most famous mysteries, The Princes In The Tower. In David’s first life he’d been a high ranking noble in the English court, serving under the kings Richard III, Henry VII and Henry VIII. He had his own theories on who killed the princes and he and his team presented them in a documentary that aired on the Realms’ own public broadcast station later that spring.
Everyone in the realm was excited for the first United Realms Summer Festival. It had originally been a one-day event in Storybrooke Four but now it had been expanded into a weekend event with double the rides, games and contests. Some of the new events would be an archery tournament, a paintball tournament and a broom race.

“Ladies and Gentlemen!” Rumple Laufeyson-Gold announced over the loudspeaker. “Let the first Summer Festival of the United Realms begin!”

Bobby kissed Kelly Weaver’s cheek. “I think that’s our cue.”

Bobby, Kelly, Stephen Connor, Edgar Navarro, Jiminy, Wyatt, Elmer and dozens of other former soldiers from wars marched onto the Yellow Brick road in full dress uniform with the Happy Army and Minions. Bobby, Kelly, Edgar and Stephen marched in front of the Happy Army and Minions carrying American Flags.

Jiminy, Elmer and Wyatt marched behind them bearing the Nonestican flag, green bands tied around the sleeves of their uniforms and those of the survivor in tribute to their lost land and the thousands that lost their lives.

As they passed, the David Molks stood up along with the former members of the SFPD and active members of the Sheriff’s department. They wore black stripes over their badges in honor of officers killed in the line of duty.

Next came the floats. Because there were so many new residents it was decided that larger teams would be formed, and the float count reduced to twenty. No one minded, it gave them plenty of time for other activities. All the mages in the realm were wearing binding cuffs so that anything they created or any contests they won were done without magic, not that they needed it. Each one had his or her own unique set of talents.

“Oh I wish I could be in the dance contest,” Lilly complained. “Your father and I would wipe the floor with the competition!”

Rumple chuckled. “Ye can after my sister’s born, Mama but I warn you, some of the other couples are verra good.”

Archie patted his wife’s swollen belly gently. “You have a good excuse for sitting this one out honey.”
“And don’t be asking me to enchant you Lilly. It would be breaking the rules,” Loki reminded her. He would be judging the Best Prank competition. The Scorpions would be competing against the Nevengers and the God of Mischief was looking forward to seeing how well the younger generations had paid attention to his lessons.

“I can’t wait for the pie eating contest. Now if I were competing instead of judging they’d all be left in the dust!” Thor boasted.

“So says the bottomless pit,” his brother teased.

Persephone laughed from her lawn chair. “If I were competing in the broom race everyone would eat MY dust!”

Rumple glanced over to where his Scots cousins were sitting, smirking. “I cannae wait to see how Belle and Marie fare against our Fie and Cattie in the Wicker contest. Fie can wallop the best of ‘em even wi’out her Bruiser!”

Little Regina ran into the tent. “Merri, c’mon! The sack race is starting!”

“Okay!” Meredith grabbed her sack off the lawn chair she was sitting on. “You got yours, right?” Little Regina held up the sack she’d decorated herself. It read: I’M NAUGHTY AND NAUGHTY NEVER FAILS with a picture of an apple with an evil smiley face. The girls joined hands and ran out into the field where the rest of the competitors were waiting, all of them Nevengers that were split into six teams. Only children from the ages five to ten would be allowed to participate.

“On your marks…get set…GO!” Charming shouted.

“Come on ye imps ye can do it!” Rumple cheered for his children.

“Act like you’re trying to get away from dust bunnies!” Belle instructed and laughed. Hope and Nathan hopped faster.

“YAY, Go Jonny, go Ellie!” their parents hooted.
“Merri, lookit! We’re close to the finish line!” Little Regina cried excitedly. The girls hopped faster, passing the leaders Neal Nolan and Adrianna Gold with Hope and Nathan Strogoff gaining on them until the Cain children hopped into the lead.

“Wyatt, they’re gonna win!” DG cried. Her husband beamed with pride.

“Eat our dust,” Little Regina taunted playfully when she and Meredith broke through the finish line tape. “Mommy, Mommy, lookit! We did it!”

“You certainly did!” Snow scooped her daughter up in her arms and hugged her. “You and Merri make a great team!”

“Oh-huh!”

“And the winners of the sack race are: Team Five with Team Six in second place, Team Four in third place. Great job kids! Everyone come up and get your prizes for being such good sports!”

“YAY!”

The Charmings backed away from the bins as a mob of excited children raced onto the stage to grab their snack bags and began trading treats.

“Will the parents of the Nevengers ages four and under please bring them to the Purple tent!”

Sigyn stood up with Astra in her arms. “Come on sweetie. It’s time for your game.”

“Bye bye Papa, I go find bottle now.”

Loki grinned at her. "Go get 'em, princess!"

The littlest Nevengers would be participating in a crawling and bottle hunting race, their older
teammates gathered inside the purple tent to cheer them on.

Belle Laufeyson-Gold knelt to address the young participants. “We have bottles hidden all over the tents and the ones that find the most bottles wins. Get ready….go!”

“Mama, I find one!” Little Daria waved a bottle in her hand.

“I find two!” Astra held up two bottles. The Belles began collecting the bottles in baskets with each child’s name on it.

"It's a good thing we didn't have one of those contests when Loki and Thor were toddlers. It would have started a fight when Loki found his bottle first and Thor had a tantrum and beat him up."

"Yes, he was always beating me up for something," Loki lamented.

"The two of you were trouble from the time you could walk," Odin smirked.

"I was not!" Thor protested. He pointed at Loki. "HE was the one in trouble! I was an angel!"

"Yeah when you were sleeping, Brother!" Loki hooted.

“One…two free four….” AJ Dearly-Hopper counted while he searched.

“Oookie bottle Mama! Oookie bottle!” squealed DJ Molk.

The proud fathers were filming the event on their phones.

"Mama I find lots here!" Ilyssa pointed to a small pile of bottles.

"Ariel! I wanna keep Ariel bottle!" cried Aria Gold.
Astra crawled over to her father. "Papa, lookit...I find you in bottle! See!" She handed him a bottle with a drawing of her father on it.

"You are such a smart girl! Good job!" Loki praised.

"Huh! She's her daddy's daughter all right," Thor laughed.

Ian Gold swatted Thor's leg. "Hey you move...I see bottle!"

Rumple burst out laughing. "That's it, lad ye tell 'im to get outta t'way or ye'll run him over!"

"Rumple!" Belle scolded.

Astra frowned. "Say pwease! Nicely!"

"Mister Thor could ya please move so's I can get my bottle?"

"Gramma Frigga I see bottle by yous feet!" Dylan pointed.

"Yoooho good going mates. Get 'em all!" Killian cheered.

Belle French blew a short whistle to signal the end of the contents. "Okay Mommies, bring your baskets over so we can count together."

"Mommy I don't fink I got lots," Little Gideon lamented.

"It looked like you did to me sweetie," Melanie reassured him. He smiled.

"Okay everyone count with us...one, two...three four..."
"Oh my...we have a four-way tie!" Aurora announced.

They set four baskets in the center of the table. "Astra Laufeyson, Rumple Hood, Miri Gold and DJ Molk!"

"Don't take much to find bottles. Dumb babies!" Sapphira snorted.

"Sapphira!" her soon-to-be stepfather snapped. "That will be enough out of you!"

Astra glared at her. "I'm NOT dumb, you big meanie!"

"Uh oh!" Thor smirked. "Them's fightin' words to a Laufeyson!"

"Hey, we not dumb we smart but you mean!" AJ Dearly Hopper wagged his finger at her.

"Yeah you what Papa calls an ole crabass!" Ian added.

"Ian James Strogoff-Gold ye watch that mouth or I'll be taking the Irish Spring t'ye!"

"And where do you think he gets it...hmmm?" Belle glowered at him.

"Crabass, crabass, crabass," DJ parroted.

"Rumple! Now see what you started," David complained. "David Andrew Molk Junior you stop saying that or no cookies later."

"No ookies?"

"No," his parents said firmly.
"Kiss my butt, ya blue butthead!" Miri cried.

"Mira...nda!" gasped her mother. "Where did you learn that?"

"Killy!" Miri replied.

"Killy say butthead farts blue," Aria giggled.

Sapphira clenched her fist. "Say that again, ya dumb baby!"

"Oy! You touch my baby sister an' I'll make ya walk the plank, ya scurvy dog!" Killian yelled.

"You touch my daughter I will make your ass so red you won't sit for a month!" Emma growled.

"Go Mom!" Henry cheered.

"Come along Sapphira." Melanie took her daughter's arm and escorted her out of the tent.

"Papa, don' want Fira to be me sister, she mean!" Gideon wailed.

"She's how Meredith used to be," Lilly whispered to her husband. He nodded in agreement.

"Loki, is there any way we can help her like you helped Meredith?" Adora asked.

Persephone frowned. "I'd hate to see her become what I was under my daughter's curse." She glanced over to where her youngest, Robin lay sleeping. "And I'd die before I let her curse my Robin."

"Melanie and I are not going to stop trying to banish the darkness with love."

"It won't be easy Rumple."
"I don't care. I won't fail."

Marie drew a line on the white plush carpet with lipstick. “Okay, is everyone ready to crawl to the red line.”

“Uh-huh!”

The fathers moved everything out of the way for the children to crawl without fear of bumping into something and injuring themselves. "Go!"

"Come to Papa, princess!” Loki cheered at the finish line, holding out his arms.

"I comin' Daddy, I comin!’" Aria crawled faster.

"This is so adorable," Selene crooned, pointing her phone at her husband, waiting to meet their son at the finish line along with the other fathers.

"Uh-oh....Papa....I got warrobe malfunkon!"

"Whoa, whoa time out, time out, naked baby!"

“Chip off the old block, isn't she Bae?” Rumple Laufeyson-Gold reminded his son when he picked up Ilyssa.

"Papa!" Bae snapped. "Not that old yarn again!"

"What yarn?” his wife queried, handing her husband a onesie.

The other parents were laughing so much they had tears in their eyes.

“Here he comes, look at that, look at that
There he goes, look at that, look at that

And he ain't wearin' no clothes

Oh yes, they call him the Streak…” Killian sang.

Thor was laughing loudly until Frigga nudged Odin and said, "Remember the Bubble Incident, dear?"

"Mother!” Thor almost choked to death.

"The whole palace still remembers that!” Odin chuckled.

Lilly smirked. "Oh, I remember that story!"

After Ilyssa was dressed the race resumed and Bobby Bordeaux-Gold crawled across the finish line and into his father’s outstretched arms victorious.

"It's the shapeshifter in him," his mother declared proudly.

"I tired now," he murmured and dozed off.

“I think all our little Nevengers are ready for a nap.” The other parents nodded in agreement and started bringing in their childrens’ favorite blankets, pillows and stuffed toys.

Belle French and Mulan offered to sit with the sleeping toddlers while their parents went outside to watch or participate in the next series of events. The first was the pie eating contest.

Six tables were set up and the participants would be feasting on apple, cherry and blueberry pies made at Granny’s Diner. A large throne was carried out onto the lawn and Thor sat down, a can of beer in his hand. Loki rolled his eyes and shook his head.
“Okay boys on the count of three…one…two…three…DIG IN!” the god yelled.

“I got apple up my nose!” Rogers whined.

“Oh shut yer trap and eat, rookie!” Weaver yelled.

“Oh my God….look at Robin’s hair!” Kelly nudged her sister Roni and giggled. His hair was covered in cherry glaze and pie crust.

“Awww man…who farted…I’m gonna barf!” Jeff Hatter groaned.

“Eat Hatter and barf later!” his wife commanded.

Modi ignored all the other contestants griping and just ate, devouring pie after pie as it was put in front of him.

“Hey, we need more pies out here!” Friar Tuck yelled.

“Oh, hold your horses they’re coming!” Ruby snapped. “Granny…where did all the pies go? The guys haven’t been eating that much!”

"I have no idea!" She looked around and saw a large pile of empty pie pans behind the tent.

"Modi! Come on boy! Do me proud!"

"That boy's an eating machine!" Loki muttered. "Damn near eats me out of house and home!"

Jimmy was trying desperately to keep up with them, but his stomach was not cooperating.

"Eat, eat EAT!" chanted the Scorpions not participating.
"Granny, we only have three pies left! What the heck is going on?"

"Omm nomm nomm nomm!"

The competitors froze.

"Everybody hold it!" Thor commanded and rose from his throne. He crept behind Granny's tent, blinking his eyes several times. "Ummm...excuse me? Anybody missing a Cookie Monster baby?"

"DJ!" Beth and David exclaimed.

"Me eat pies!" DJ clapped his furry hands together. "Me eat em all up Mama!"

Thor picked him up and carried him over to his throne, "Okay kid you sit here while I count."

"So who won?"

"My money's on the kid!"

Thor put his hands on his hips and scowled at the older men and teenagers. "Shame on you! You got your asses kicked by a baby!"

"I think he's distantly related to us, Dad!" Modi protested. "You know you were always going down to Midgard before you married Mom."

"You ever see me shift into a Sesame Street character? No way!"

"Me tummy hurt..." DJ wailed.
"Oh, DJ how many times do we have to tell you not to eat so much," Beth moaned. "And how did you sneak past Belle and Mulan?"

"Me hungry."

"That's an understatement," Loki chuckled. He snapped his fingers and a bottle with a potion appeared in his hands. "Here, this ought to help."

"Well....our first place pie eater was my son, Modi. In second place Friar Tuck and the winner is....DJ Molk...also known as Cookie Monster!"

"Thank you, Loki." David grabbed a bottle out of the diaper bag and poured some of the potion into it. "DJ this will stop your tummy from hurting, okay?"

"Me tired now Dada."

Thor conjured a little crown and placed it on his head. "You earned it kid."

Belle and Marie Bordreaux picked up their brooms. "Now it's time to show everyone who are the Wicker queens!" Belle boasted.

"Go get 'em Mama!" her eldest son cheered.

"All right the contestants for the Wicker Wars get your brooms and get ready to start smackin!" Charming announced.

Fiona and Catriona McDermott were waiting for them when they arrived.

"All right lassies, don't be thinkin 'cause I'm auld I cannae wallop with the best of ye!" Fiona waved her broom at the sisters.

Four mannequins were set up on the lawn. "Ladies, the rules are simple. The team that gets the most smacks in in two minutes is the winner! On your marks….get set…BEAT!"
“Belle! Marie! Pretend they’re Charming!” the fourth Snow White giggled. Her husband glared at her.

“Not funny Snow!”

“Well you did get your ass blistered by them twice!”

“Pretend they’re Jeff and Robin after they screwed up our Christmas decorations!” Archie Bordreaux-Hopper instructed his wife.

“Fie, Cattie, remember when ye walloped the daylights out of everyone who made my house into a frat house!” Rumple called out to his cousins.

“Who do we want to give the beast beatdown…the Bordreaux! When do we want it? Now!” the original Scorpions cheered.

“Mum! Grammie, ye gonna let a bunch of fairy tale lasses shame the MacTavish? Give ‘em royal hell!” Catriona’s daughter Channon yelled.

“Wow this is gonna be really close! That old lady’s good!” Jeff Hatter mumbled.

“I’d wear my arm out,” Rumple Laufeyson-Gold giggled.

“Gosh I’d hate to be on the receiving end of an ass beating from that old broad,” Bae Weaver mumbled.

“Well I was and I’m telling ya, it hurt like HELL!” Bae groaned. “When she says you can’t sit for a week, she means it.”

“Whoa! She smacked the dummy right in the nuts!” Killian laughed.
"They're lucky I'm not competing," Sigyn grinned.

"You can say that again!" Loki giggled. "Right, Thor?"

Thor scowled. "Shut up, Loki! You need to control your wife!"

"Excuse me?" Sigyn frowned. "How was I supposed to know my brother-in-law was climbing into my house at two in the morning?"

"I was trying to not wake you and Astra! The door was locked."

"And you were drunk" Loki taunted.

"Get a dose of the ugly stick, mate?" Rogers chuckled.

"And how! He not only looked like a horror, he felt like one." Loki answered.

"So were you drunk when you were at the club with Snow, Emma and me," Regina taunted Loki. "Still the finest ass in Vegas, right girls?"

Mother and daughter nodded in agreement.

"Speaking of that Loki, how DID you end up in a club featuring male strippers?" DG inquired silkily.

Daria spit out her soda. "Grandfather!"

Thor smirked. "I know how."

"I don't know if I want to," Sigyn groaned. "But then mortal women have always passed out at my husband's feet. Not that I blame them."
"Loki and I decided to check out Vegas for a few days, but we got a little drunk...and he gave me the slip. Next thing I know there's a near riot at a strip club and a mob of women chasing after our Speedo clad Trickster here."

"We wanted to see what was under it," Emma giggled. "Did you see all the money in it, Thor?"

"When was this?" Rhea demanded, laughing.

"It was about when...2013 or '14 Snow?"

"2013 Regina," Emma replied. "Bae and I got married six months later."

"Yeah...you, me, Bae, and Channon had a double wedding," added Diego Rivera.

Sigyn eyed Loki. "Perhaps we should reenact it?"

"For your eyes only."

"YES!" Emma, Snow and Regina shouted.

"Dammit," Regina grumbled at Loki’s reply.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it was a close match but the winners of the Wicker Wars are.....Belle and Marie Bordreaux for their eighth straight title!"

"We'll need to up our game Mum," Cattie said to her mother.

"Will all the participants for the cook off please go to the food tent for the announcements of the winners!"
"HOPPER'S HOTTER 'N HELL RULES!" yelled young Bae Bordreaux-Gold and his cousin Gisella.

"No one has been able to beat our Archie at the cook off. No one," Penelope Bordreaux informed the others.

Alina smirked. "That's because you haven't tasted my father's cooking yet...or Alice's. They'll give him a run for his money!"

"Well my Papa wins the bake off every year!" Adriana boasted.

The Grannies were the judges. The former Storybrooke Four's Granny took the microphone and addressed the crowd. "This was a tough one to call ladies and gentleman since we have twice the amount of entries than we've had in previous years."

"There goes my title as Chili King," Archie-Bordreaux-Hopper joked.

"Our first place entries were from Rumplestiltskin Laufeyson-Gold and Alice Carstairs!"

"YEA!" Henry, Grace and Alina shouted.

"Our second place entry was from Archie-Bordreaux-Hopper."

"Well honey, you're still in the top three," his wife reassured him.

"Our third place entry was from Zelena Strogoff-Sabitini!"

"Congratulations to all the contestants...and now we will announce the winners of the bakeoff!"

"He gets that from me," Loki declared proudly.
"Yes, we should have made you the God of Cooking and Mischief," Frigga laughed. "Especially since you trained all our palace chefs."

"I hope Papa's cake wins again," Adriana said.

"I dunno Driana, we got lots more good bakers this year," Neal mumbled.

"As with our cookoff, this one was also a tough one to call," Storybrooke Four's Ruby announced. "In first place for the eighth time we have Rumplestiltskin Bordreaux-Gold!"

"Yay, Papa!" his daughters squealed.

"In second place we have Mattie Harrington!"

Beth hugged her adoptive mother.

"In third place we have...Lilliana Strogoff-Hopper!"

"I may be pregnant, but I can still make a mean cheesecake," she grinned.

"And where'd you learn that from, hmm?" Loki teased, arching an eyebrow.

"Me," Adora spoke up.

"You spoiled him and Jeb, Adora," DG complained. "The last time I tried to make your cheesecake they spent all day in the bathroom."

"Ummm Dottie, that's because you added too much of something. I have no idea what!" Wyatt exclaimed.

"No Adora, Loki taught me how to make it," Lilly corrected. She smiled at the memory. "I made
an unholy mess in the kitchens the first time I tried it, but he was so patient with me."

"Your father was horrified," Loki smirked. "I can still recall the look on his face."

He shifted his face into the Great and Powerful Wizard of Oz. "Lilliana! Princesses don't bake cakes!"

"I said I don't want to be a princess, I want to be a baker!"

"I nearly had to pick him up off the floor!" Loki laughed, shifting back. "He wanted to know what I was teaching you. And I told him how to make her husband happy. Because every lady should know how to cook one thing well."

"Oh, she makes me happy with more than just her cooking," Archie murmured.

"Dinna be going into details...Dad!" Rumple groaned.

"Yeah we know how well she makes you happy since you got her pregnant before the wedding!" Whale teased.

If looks could kill the doctor would've been dead on the spot.

"Scorpions and Nevengers, it's time for the Prank Wars. Would our judge please report to the Maroon tent!"

Sigyn laughed. "Those kids are gonna have to step up their game if they want to impress the God of Mischief!"

"I told Meredith to pull the handkerchief trick. Loki will love that!" Lilly whispered into her husband's ear.

"They have to pull the pranks on him?"
"Yes."

Archie whistled. "That's gonna be a tough sell."

“…All right my young tricksters, I am going to bend the rules a bit and allow both teams to use magic. Each time will have six chances to prank me. Do me proud, darlings!”

Both teams were given fifteen minutes in soundproof domes to discuss their strategies. When time was up, Loki blew a whistle and released the spell. “My littlest tricksters, you're up first!”

“Go for it Driana!” Adriana’s teammates cheered. She stepped forward holding one of her father’s cakes in her hands. “Here Mister Loki! We made you a cake!”

“Smells delicious!” he praised and took a bite. There was a flash of light and a purple creature with wings, one eye and a horn sat on the chair.

“*It was a one eyed, one horned flyin purple people eater!*” the Nevengers sang and hi-fived each other.

“Good one!” Loki laughed and shifted back. “Scorpions….you’re next.”

Henry stepped forward holding a cologne bottle. “This’ll make Sigyn go crazy for ya!”

The others snickered behind their hands.

“We’ll see, now won’t we?”

He sprayed some on and a flock of hens flew into the tent.

“Be our rooster, be our rooster!” they squawked.
“Nice!” Modi hi-fived him.

“There’s some serious eggs gonna be laid by those hens!” Andi giggled.

"Someone's been reading my How To Prank Your Brother book!” Loki grinned.

Meredith now approached him holding a handkerchief. "You gotta wipe off all that hen poop now."

"Thank you, Meri," Loki said, and took the handkerchief and wiped his face with it.

"Oh my God...that is awesome! Mister Loki, you better look in the mirror!" Jonny laughed.

His face was covered with warts.

"Ooooh somebody's been kissing frogs! I'm telling!" Ellie taunted.

Loki stuck his tongue out at her. "I was the Frog prince, little scamp!" Then he put a finger to his lips. "Now don't tell anyone!"

"I already saw!" Lilly chuckled.

He took another handkerchief out of his pocket and wiped his face again, and it was back to normal. "Your grandma teach you that one, darling?"

"Yep!"

"I thought so! Because I played that on her. And several other people!" he giggled wickedly, recalling how he made the pompous court ladies scream with that trick. Until Frigga made him stop.
Now it was Modi's turn and he knew just the prank to pull. He discreetly gestured to the arms and legs of the chair.

"Well...?" the others demanded impatiently

"Wait for it..."

"Scorpions, you're up again....what the.....?" A set of a shackles bound his arms and legs to the chair.

"Try and get outta that one, uncle!"

"Oooh oooh who is this handsome man in my lap! Gimme a kiss sweetie!" the chair purred.

Everyone was laughing when it started making kissing sounds.

"He can't get up! He can't get up!" the Nevengers tittered.

"Loki! Are you molesting the furniture again?" Thor came in and started waving a finger and laughing.

"Bite your tongue, Thor!" his brother chuckled. "Now I know where your son gets it!"

"My turn!" Hope cried.

"Get him good Hope!"

Loki teleported out of the shackles. "Good one, nephew!"
Hope tapped her small foot three times. "Well Mister Loki, you ready for me, dearie? I'm waaaitiiingggg..." she sang.

Her brother Nathan covered his mouth with his hand to conceal his smirk.

"Bring it, imp!"

"I just did!"

Now all he had to do was open his mouth again.

Loki opened his mouth to speak and suddenly....riiiiiipppppp.

"Oh man! Who cut one?" Becky moaned, pulling her shirt up over her nose.

"Help! I need a gas mask!" Bae coughed and mimed falling over.

Loki opened his mouth again. "Buuuuurrrp!"

"Keep talkin Mister Smart Guy," Hope taunted. "Cause every time you do, you're gonna cut cheese or you're gonna burp!"

She gave her father a thumbs up.

Loki wriggled his fingers and cancelled the spell. "Very clever, Hope!"

"Thanks! My daddy taught me that one!"

"I figured as much!" Loki winked at her.
"Scorpions, you're up," Loki said, looking at them.

"What kind of music do you like, Mr. Loki?" Alina asked conversationally.

"Rock and roll, a little pop, this and that," Loki answered.

"Then maybe you'll like this," Alina said then clapped him on the back setting her spell in motion.

Suddenly the god became to sing--or wail rather, like a humpback whale.

"Alright, Alina!" the girls hi-fived her.

Aroonoonn! Errrrrrnnnn!

Everyone burst out laughing.

"What's he tryin to sing, Jonny?" the Nevengers asked their resident Dr. Doolittle, John Wayne Hopper.

"Ummm...hold on a minute...translatin...yep. He's singin Jump by Van Halen!"

"Cool!" Killian exclaimed.

It was now the Nevengers turn for their fourth prank. Little Regina approached the chair, her hands tucked behind her back, shuffling her feet nervously.

"Go on Gina...you can do it!" her teammates encouraged.

"Mister Loki....I gots to tell you sumpin."
"I'm listening," the god replied, his eyes twinkling.

"You gotta lean down so's I can whisper it."

"This is gonna be good," Alina whispered to her nephew. Henry nodded in agreement.

"Okay, darling. Tell me," Loki said, doing as she asked.

She flicked her wrist and the roof of the tent was torn off by an animated tree.

"YOU'RE GONNA GET A BIIIG WEDGIE!" she shrilled.

One of the branches reached inside the tent and lifted the god out of his chair by his underwear.

"YEAH, SHE HUNG 'IM IN THE TREE BY HIS UNDIES!" Storybrooke Four's Roland cheered.

"Hey, didn't big Regina do that to your dad?" Henry laughed.

"Yep," Roland smirked.

"I told ya you could do it!" Meredith hugged her friend.

"Now why didn't we do that Bae?" Andi demanded of her boyfriend. He shrugged.

"Look!" Killian hooted. "He has snake undies!"

"No way! Lemme see!"

"Hey Mister Loki, crack kills!" Jasper Molk laughed and pointed.
"I see London, I see France I see Mister Loki's underpants!" the Nevengers sang.

The god shook his head and blinked down from the tree.

The pressure was on Miri now that it was her turn to perform her prank for the Scorpions.

Each team now had only two pranks left to go and their side needed to pull out all the stops to top the tree wedgie.

“Now what have you got in store for me, darling?”

Miri grinned as her father was now wearing a hula skirt and started dancing to Rupaul’s Supermodel.

“Work

*Turn to the left*

*Work*

*Now turn to the right*

*Work*

*Sashay, shantay*

*It don’t matter what you wear*

*It doesn’t matter what you wear*

*They’re checking out your savior faire*

*And it don’t matter what you do*

*Cause everything looks good on you*

*Supermodel...*

“Wooo Hooo! Mom, Regina, check it out!” Emma Strogoff hooted. “Shake it baby, shake it!”
The Scorpions were doubled over laughing when Loki turned his back to the crowd and started shaking his rear while many of the women were trying to stuff dollars bills into his skirt…or take a peek at what was under it. Loki quickly released the spell before a riot broke out and chuckled.

“Someone’s been talking to the Strogoff women!”

“You bet she has!” Emma cackled. “Next time you're wearing the Speedo, buddy!”

Her husband facepalmed himself. “I’m STILL hearing about it after all these years. Sheesh!”

“It’s your turn Amber,” Loki informed one of the eldest of the Nevengers. She opened her hand and blew a cloud of pink dust into the god’s face then stepped back to admire her handiwork.

“What’d you do?” Henry Strogoff asked her.

Before their eyes the god began to talk and act like Elvis Prestley.

“Ambrosia Azkadellia Ozopov Hopper, were you sneaking a peek at our potion books again?” Jiminy demanded of his daughter and started laughing.

“Yep,” she declared proudly.

“Loki’s funnier on the vapors than the Mystic Man was,” Ambrose remarked. “I didn’t know you knew how to make them, Jiminy.”

“I don’t make them. Dellia and I needed the recipe to figure out how to detox someone from them.”

“Come ‘ere darlin and let me give you some hunka hunka burnin love,” Loki purred at Az. She giggled.

“I’ll take some!” Granny yelled.
“Oh boy….there’s gonna be another riot!” David groaned.

“Oh, relax. Clever one, darling! And Jiminy….hide that potion book better!” Loki chastised the former cricket. “All right Henry Laufeyson….hit me with your best shot!”

“Gladly!” the young sorcerer snickered and ran his hands through his own hair.

“Well?”

“You might wanna take another look in a mirror, Brother!” Thor exclaimed. His long, jet black locks had been transformed into a green afro. Next they changed into a pink pompadour, yellow and green rastas, a striped shag and a blue twirl.

“The afro was the best!” Alina hi-fived him.

“Good one Henry! All right Nevengers, it’s your turn.”

A nervous Cami Molk stepped forward.

“Mister Loki I’m a frost mage like Elsa an since you’re a frost mage too my stuff’s not gonna work on you real good.”

He knelt down and smiled at her. “You can do it, little one. Just try.”

“Okay….” She rubbed her hands together and blew into them. A cloud of blue smoke surrounded the god and when it cleared, he was dressed as Elsa from the movie Frozen complete with white blond hair and began sing and act out the “Let It Go’ scene from the movie.

“Let it go, let it go

Can't hold it back anymore

Let it go, let it go

Turn away and slam the door

I don't care what they're going to say
"Let the storm rage on"

"The cold never bothered me anyway!" he sang and winked at her.

"Yeah! Way to go Cami!" the Nevengers exclaimed.

Loki released the spell and returned to his chair. "You did such a great job that you’re all winners!" he declared and conjured them all little trophies.

The final event of the day was the United Realms Broom 500. The contestants were required to fly around the realm and the first one to the finish line would win.

"Show ‘em how it’s done Elmira," the Storybrooke Four team cheered on their resident wicked witch, Elmira Gulch.

"Leave her in the dust, Zee!" Zelena Strogoff Sabitini’s family encouraged.

"I was flying before you were even a thought in your parents heads, my pretty!" Elmira taunted the younger witch.

"Portalo sulla strega!" Zelena retorted.

"All right my pretties, get on your brooms and fly!" Persephone yelled over the loudspeaker.

The audience was able to watch the race on a large screen with various obstacles for them to fly through including a flock of her mobat demons, DG and Wyatt Cain and two Maleficients in their dragon forms, enchanted trees throwing apple bombs, storms and thick patches of fog. An hour later Elmira Gulch flew through the finish line with an exhausted Zelena just ten minutes behind.

"Not bad for an old witch, eh?" Elmira demanded of her competitor.

"Si," Zelena murmured and shook her hand. "You have got to teach me your tricks for dodging that fog!"

"Happy to!"
“Get plenty of rest tonight dearies because the party starts again tomorrow at nine!” Rumple announced while the guests started walking back to their tents. Everyone would be camping out on the fairgrounds. The Belles were having an evening story time for the younger children before bed and bath time, the Grannies would be cooking dinner and the Rumplers the dessert.

At the Storybrooke Four camp Maurice Bordreaux made an unsettling observation.

“Has anyone noticed that there are only two of me here?”

The others nodded.

Belle Weaver was walking past their camp back to her own when she overheard the conversation.

“Two of our fathers are dead,” she confessed sadly. “Mine and Belle Strogoff’s. Mine was murdered when the Home Office invaded our realm.” Her eyes narrowed to slits. “They smuggled aircrafts armed with ballistic missiles in and bombed everything. Those of us who are here now were lucky to escape. Belle’s father is in Ephesis. She doesn’t like to talk about it…and Belle Laufeyson’s father wants nothing to do with her so he may as well be dead.”

Maurice stood up and embraced her. “I’m so sorry Missus Weaver.”

“Oh, it’s all right,” she sniffled. “But thank you for your kindness.”

“I know what you’re thinking Papa and I approve,” his own Belle spoke up.

“So do I,” added Marie.

“Can you do it Rumple?” he asked his son-in-law.

“Daria Laufeyson and Lilly Strogoff seem to have ‘adopted’ me and the other Rumplers so yes another magical adoption can be done. It won’t bring Belle Weaver’s father back, but it will help her in her grief.”
When Rumple returned to his own camp Belle was getting ready to put their youngest children to bed.

“It’s been a great day,” she murmured and kissed him. He knelt down and kissed his sleeping childrens’ foreheads. “But you better get some rest yourself because I know what you’ve been doing at the borders.”

“I’m taking no chances sweetheart. We can’t have another Enchanted Forest Three or Nonestica on our hands. Isaac’s still trying to find out who the Home Office’s government contact is. There’s no way they could’ve gotten hold of those weapons without raising red flags in Washington. If they try a missile strike here our wards are going to send it right back in their faces.” He crawled into their cot and closed his eyes.

“Eye of Aramon, I compel thee
Show me what I need to see!” he murmured.

Belle lay beside him and opened a book knowing it was dangerous to disturb him while he was using his Sight. A few minutes later he emerged more relaxed. “They’re falling all over themselves trying to find us.”

“Good! I hope they keep tripping over their own two feet until they give up!”

“They’ll lie low for a while sweetheart but they willna give up just yet.”

“Well we’ll be more than ready for them when they come.”

But that would be a long time coming. Until then they could all relax and enjoy themselves.

Everyone was awake early the following morning and eager to continue the festivities. The first events of the day were the pet contests. Pongo and Major from Storybrooke Four faced tough competition from the dogs of the other Storybrookes and surrendered the title to the Laufeysons’ Freya and Little Regina’s Princess.

Soon all eyes were on the kissing booths taking bets as to whether Archie and Marie would be able to defend the Bordreaux Gold-Hopper title as best kissers against the Hopper-Molk twins as Jiminy
and David Molk called themselves.

“Pretend we’re back at the Northern Island and you’re sculpting me like one of those French girls,” Jiminy whispered to his wife.

“Valentine’s Day, the first year we were married….the beach…the fairy lights,” David murmured.

“The drive-in, Marie,” Archie coached.

“CRICKETGODDESS RULES!” the original Scorpions hooted.

“KNIGHTBEAUTY, KNIGHTBEAUTY!” chanted the Molks’ children.

“CRICKETSORCERESS, CRICKETSORCERESS!” chanted Amber and Andy Ozopov.

“Whew….it got hotter out here, didn’t it?” the former mayor of Storybrooke Four asked, fanning herself. “I have to tell you, this was the closest voting I’ve ever seen in the eight years we’d had this contest but by two votes only the winners are…David and Beth Molk!”

“Way to go, Molky!” his former SFPD colleagues hooted. The former champions hugged the couple.

Next was the Merry archery contest where the six Merry Men teams would be competing against each other. It was also a fierce competition until the final shooter for Hyperion Heights, young Robin Weaver-Rogers stepped up and took aim.

“Come honey! You can do it!” Her wife Alice cheered.

“And the winners are…Team Three…Hyperion Heights!”

“Good job Robin!” Bobby hugged his future step-daughter.

“Thank you, Bobby!”
Little John hoisted the young woman up onto his shoulders and carried her back to their tent to celebrate.

“All right officers and soldiers, grab your paint ball guns and get ready for the paintball shootout!”

The course, designed by Bobby MacNamara and Bobby Carlyle, contained obstacles every police officer and soldier would face in the line of duty and the team that avoided the most shots would win. To keep things fair, each team had equal numbers of former soldiers and police officers, the crowd able to watch the event on the big screen.

“Well,” Bobby Carlyle laughed when they came out of the course covered in paint. “one helluva battle in there, wasn’t it?”

“Who won?” Bae Weaver wanted to know.

“By one shot the winners were Teams One and Six, in second place we had Three and Five and in third place Two and Four.”

Later that afternoon people began taking turns exploring the adventure rooms the Storybrooke Four people took an interest in after visiting them in Greece and Italy.

The festival closed that night with fireworks being provided by the many mages in the realm as well as singing and dancing with the Rumple, Archie, Granny and David Molk counterparts taking their turns on the mike with most of their significant others joining in. It had been a wonderful weekend and the perfect way to relax after what had been a stressful start to the year.

Lilly was dozing on the gazebo in the garden one afternoon when she heard her phone ring. She sat up, rubbed the sleep out of her eyes and unlocked it.

“Hello?”

“Lilly, honey….can you see if Az or one of the other Archie wives can bring you to Portland?” Archie asked nervously.
“Why?”

“I ahhh….I’m….ahh….I’m in jail.”

“What? What do you mean you’re in jail? What did you do?”

“We broke into a lab.”

“What! What for?”

“The place has been taking animals from the humane society and using them as test subjects on their cosmetic line! Jiminy tried to get them shut down months ago, but they paid someone off to get the charges dropped.”

“So you broke in and did what?”

“Released all the animals and smuggled them back to the realm. They’re in bad shape honey….the vets are doing what they can.”

He didn’t tell her that they were also charged with vandalism to the company officers’ vehicles. He took great pleasure in cutting up the leather seats of the CEO’s Jaguar with his umbrella tip.

“Your son is going to give you hell for this, you know that.”

“He already yelled my ear off.”

Lilly could hear an engine backfiring and turned to see Jiminy’s bus approaching the gazebo. “There’s Az now. Now you behave until I get there!”

“I will. I love you.”
“I love you too.”

“I don’t have to ask if you heard,” Az giggled, leaning across the seat and opening the passenger door.

“No but how can you be so calm.”

“I’m used to it.”

They drove into town to pick up the other Archie wives. Marie was laughing.

“This is almost like what my son did at the mall four years ago! He and Adriana released the pets in the store they nearly wrecked the place. Their hearts were in the right place though.”

“I think the charges are going to get dropped once your Rumple goes in there and shows them all the evidence Movarro dug up on the place. Pay offs, a laundry list of animal cruelty counts, not to mention what they dug up on their personal lives,” Selene added.

"So what do we do when we get them home?” Tracy wondered.

"We make them dinner, give them TLC and tell them don’t be stupid enough to get caught the next time." Az advised when she pulled into the parking lot at the police station. Their husbands were sitting in one of the interview rooms with a very annoyed Rumple, Rumple Laufeyson and Rumple Bordreaux.

“You lot are lucky we were able to get the charges dropped,” Laufeyson scolded.

“Yes…Dad,” Rumple frowned at his stepfather. “I dinna want the da of my wee sister sittin in jail when she’s born.”

“How many times do I have to tell you to stop being stupid enough to get caught…Commander!” Az shook her finger at her husband. “Now I have to sell double the amount of artwork to replace what I took out of the bail fund!”
“You, Archibald Hopper have a date with the couch tonight and this time I’m not coming downstairs with you,” Marie said firmly.

“Yes you will,” her husband taunted. “You always do.”

“There’s a first time for everything!” she snorted.

“Well we did what we came to do,” Isaac boasted. “The place is getting shut down.” The others smirked.

“Oh knock it off and come on!” David rolled his eyes. “Another one for the mile-long rap sheet brother and now you’re a bad influence on the others!”

“What do they say about twins again?”

“Oh, hit the bricks!”

“Come on Dad,” Rumple giggled. “Before Mama decides to lock YE outta the bedroom.”

“Octo mom kids,” one of the officers explained when they were walking out of the police station, the other cops wondering if they needed glasses seeing so many doubles.

“Maybe we should’ve used a glamour,” Selene giggled when she climbed into the back of Jiminy’s bus. “They’re all gonna go blind now!”

“Keeps ‘em on their toes, dearies!” Bobby Weaver joked.

Lilly went into labor three weeks before Thanksgiving and there had been a heated debate between her, Rumple and Archie whether she should give birth at the hospital or at Finaqua. She wanted to give birth at home.

“Out of the question! This isn’t the middle ages, Lilly. I want you in a hospital where I know you’ll be taken care of!”
“I gave birth to Rumple without any help! I delivered Cassie at home.”

“And barely survived both! No. You are going to the hospital and that’s my final word on it.”

“Oh, is it? Rumple…”

“I’m gonna hae to agree with Dad on this one, Mama. Ye’re going to the hospital. Come along and dinna be stubborn.”

She glared at them until another contraction hit her full force.

“End of discussion. Rumple, warm up the car. Come on, honey.”

Lilly groaned and leaned on her husband for support while Rumple sped up to the front entrance in his Caddy. “I’ve already called Belle. She’s gonna go pick up Meri.”

“Good, good,” Lilly whimpered and climbed into the backseat. Rumple threw the car in gear and sped down the road to town. Moments later a squad car came into the lane behind him, lights flashing.

“Pull over!” Rogers yelled over the radio.

“I’m taking my mother to the hospital, ye arse!” Rumple yelled back.

“That’s the oldest excuse in the book!”

“Ooooh tell him to SHUT THAT THING UP!” Lilly shouted from the backseat, clinging to Archie.

“Breathe, honey, breathe…”
“Oh stop it! I’ve done this before…Lokiiiiii when is that spell gonna start!”

“Rogers, sod off! I’ve got this!” they heard Weaver bark as his Mustang pulled up beside the Caddy. “Keep driving, I’ll clear the road!”

“Thanks dearie!” Rumple smiled at his counterpart.

Lilly started laughing in the backseat. “Sooo much better!”

Rumple Laufeyson-Gold was watering his plants when the cars sped past his Victorian. He dropped his pail and limped into the house.

“Belle! Get your coat! Lilly’s going to the hospital!”

“I’m coming!” she called back.

Some of the Nevengers were playing in Killian Gold’s backyard when they heard police sirens.

“Something’s goin down, mates! Let’s check it out!”

They hopped onto the picnic table and peered over the fence to see Rumple’s car speeding down the street with Weaver’s Mustang in front and Rogers behind him.

“HEY MOM! DAD! Better tell Grampa Miss Lilly’s gonna have the baby now!” he yelled.

“Your grampa’s gonna meet us there,” his mother said.

Persephone was outside with some of the members of her peddling class when the cars drove by. “Okay pretties, same time next week. I have to fly!”
She summoned her broom and tossed a travel storm token, opening a portal to Paradise. “Alex! Glinda! Your grandchild is coming! Hop on, quick!”

“I am not going on that!” The Mystic Man crossed his arms over his chest.

“You’ll go and like it!” Glinda snapped and grabbed his arm. Persephone tossed them a set of helmets. They had just gotten them on when she flew back through the portal.

“You scared Merri?” Little Regina asked her friend while they sat in the waiting room of The United Realms Hospital’s maternity ward. The elder girl smiled.

“Nope. Daddy’s gonna make sure Gramma’s okay.”

“Y’know the new baby’s gonna be your aunt.”

“Uh-huh. I know. It’s kinda weird but hey, Henry’s got an aunt his age, right?”

“Yeah.”

Loki looked up from the book he was reading. “What are you gossiping about over there, darlings?”

“My aunt,” Meredith replied. “Uncle Loki, why’s it taking so long?”

“Babies always take a long time to be born, Merri.”

“Mommy said having a baby feels like takin your bottom lip an pulling it over your head.”

“Gina, that’s gross!” Meredith winced.

“It’s what she said.”
Loki chuckled. *Not anymore darlings*, he thought.

“At least Archie isn’t delivering the baby. Now if I were…” Bae Laufeyson-Gold quipped, earning a swat from his wife. His father rolled his eyes and shook his head. His son considered himself an expert on child birthing after he’d been forced to help deliver his twin brother and sister in an emergency.

“What? I helped deliver Daria and Dylan.”

“And now you think you’re an expert. Leave it to the professionals, son.” He glanced over to where an anxious Rumple stood with Belle. “Rumple, sit down dearie before your leg gives out.”

“I’ll be fine,” Rumple murmured.

“You’ve drained yourself warding Lilly’s room, haven’t you?”

“I’m taking no chances. Not after what that witch did to…” he cast his eyes in his niece’s direction.

“The expert here PASSED OUT before Ilyssa was born,” Emma Laufeyson-Gold said smugly. Her husband looked like he wanted to crawl in a hole.

Emma Hatter snickered.

“So did mine…and I whooped his ass with a broom!”

“You go girl!”

Now Jeff Hatter wanted to take his hat and portal out.

“My Bae wasn’t allowed in the delivery room when I was having Lillybelle,” Emma said.
“Why not?” her counterparts asked.

“Because he was annoying the hell outta me,” she replied.

“Liar! You wouldn’t let me in the delivery room because you thought I was gonna pass out. Well I didn’t, did I?”

The Bordreaux sisters burst into laughter.

“What?”

“Oh you haven’t seen anything until you’ve seen a husband high on Stadoll,” Belle Bordreaux-Gold giggled.

"And Archie with AJ and Maureen!” her sister Marie chuckled.

"What did they do? Tell!” Zelena demanded.

"Rumple...Rumple was singing Love Shack while I gave birth to Adriana and he and Archie were singing Chicago songs when we were having the twins and triplets.”

“Archie…I mean…Jiminy made up his own version of ‘White Rabbit, got on the hospital intercom and started singing it to all the women in the maternity ward. We were all laughing…until hospital security broke down the door and hauled him off,” Az laughed. “How did it go, honey?”

“One pill makes you larger
And one pill makes you small
But the ones your doctor gives you don’t do anything at all
Don’t ask Alice, cause she don’t know,” he sang.
David shook his head. “That rap sheet of yours just keeps getting longer.”

"Uncle Loki, were you 'llowed in the room when Astra was born?" Little Regina inquired.

"Prolly not," Little Robin spoke up. "He's one a those older gods that live in the med evil period an they don’t let guys in the room...that's what papa says."

His older counterpart started laughing.

"What?"

"It’s medieval, Robbie."

"I'll call it what I wanna, so there!" he huffed.

"Well, not at first, darling. You see, some of the Healers in Asgard believe its bad luck for a husband to be in the delivery room. Silly superstitious nonsense! But they locked me out even though your Aunt Sigyn wanted me to stay. I almost paced a hole in the floor before I finally decided to break the door down so I could be where I wanted--with my wife."

"And did she curse you out in every language?" Rumple wanted to know.

"DG did," Wyatt muttered.

"That cloud of obscenity still hovers over the hospital to this day."

"Ha ha, very funny Rumple."

Loki smirked. "No. She looked at me and said, "Thank the Norns you're here, Loki! Now just do the spell!" And that's what I did. I invented a spell that takes the pain of childbirth and turns it into tickling instead. So all the Asgardians who have the spell cast on them give birth laughing instead of yelling obscene things at their husbands."
"Now why didn't WE have that?" The wives of the Fourth, Sixth, Second, Third and Fifth realms glowered at him.

"Whoa, Great-Grampa, if looks could kill..." Alina gasped.

"That's what I'd like to know, Grandfather. Why didn't I have that spell when I am Asgardian?" Daria scowled.

"I think you can blame Titania for that," Tracy Hopper spoke up.

"I was giving it to so many women that Odin commanded I needed to be asked to give it. Can you imagine how busy I would've been otherwise?"

"You would've needed a planet full of Red Bull, amigo," Edgar Navarro remarked.

"Says the man who still drinks Slushies," David countered. "You're gonna have Type II Diabetes by the time you're fifty, man."

"I gotta drink it to keep awake when you listen to funeral music in the car."

"It's classical, not funeral music. I could turn on Michael Bolton, you know."

"Do it and I'll puke all over you."

Suddenly a portal opened in the floor. "We're not late, are we?"

"No, Mama you're just in time," Adora said with a smile when Persephone came through a portal with the Mystic Man and Glinda.

"Good because we need to be here to see our new grandchild. Quit laughing Loki! I know damned well what you're laughing about and I am NOT drunk this time. I'm dead, remember?" Jeb
Mysticos reminded the god.

"You can still drink with the best of them in the afterlife," the god teased.

"And I still find you devilishly handsome," Glinda purred.

"Glinda the Naughty strikes again! Knock it off or I'm gonna have his wife get the ugly stick after you," her husband threatened.

"I'm dead. She can't beat me with it."

Regina and Emma grinned at each other. "Still had the finest ass in Vegas, right Gina?"

"Mmm hmmm.," the former evil queen murmured, wishing he would stand up so that she could have a peek.

"Oh I know all about the near riot he caused," Sigyn giggled. "I just wish I'd been there to see it. Next time you get drunk have Thor bring you home instead of wandering into a club hosting male strippers."

"I would have paid every last platinum I had to see THAT!" Glinda exclaimed.

"Did he go The Full Monty?" the Bordreaux sisters asked.

"No, dammit but we saw enough, didn't we ladies?" Emma and her mother grinned.

"Ahhh, can we NOT talk about this," Loki pleaded.

"What's the Full Monty mean?" Little Regina inquired of her mother.

"S'when a guy gets butt naked and dances on a stage. I caught Mom watchin it once," Killian Gold
replied with a smirk.

"Killian Gold!" his mother scolded.

"She asked!"

"That doesn't mean YOU had to tell her! God...."

"Well he learned early," Jimmy Laufeyson-Gold laughed earning a boot to the foot from his girlfriend Miri.

"Cool it handsome before his mom roasts you."

"Why's it taking so long? Gramma shoulda had the baby by now." Meredith complained. "Miss Snow, can I borrow your phone and call Daddy? He needs to go check on Gramma."

"Honey, he may be busy."

"Well he's got five other docs just like him that can help Gramma."

"I wouldn't let ours anywhere near her. Pervert," Marie Hopper snorted.

"Sounds like a comedy club in here!" Meredith's father knelt and picked her up. "Hey Merri! You holdin down the fort in here?"

"Is Gramma okay?"

"She's doing fine. She should deliver any time now. Thank the gods you cast that spell Loki. I'd rather her hear laughing than cursing, not that she'd curse Archie out anyway."

His phone buzzed. "Okay honey I gotta go. Gramma's gonna have that baby now."
"'Bout time. Babies take for-ever getting born. Mommy took really long with Cas," Little Regina groused.

"I wasn't that long Regina."

“Long enuf,” her daughter retorted.

"I wonder what this baby will be?" Miri asked. "Papa wouldn't let me View it." She shot her father a pout.

"My sister's name will be Glinda Alexandra Strogoff-Hopper," Rumple replied.

Suddenly Astra ran up to him, her arms full of candy bars. "Papa! Lookit! Candy!"

Loki gaped at her. "Astra, by the Nine! Where did you get this?"

She pointed behind her. "Uncle Thor!"

"THOR! You didn't!" Loki groaned.

"Brother, I . . .she gave me one of her sad looks!" the Thunder God replied.

"Oh really? Well now guess who gets to deal with a hyperactive toddler, Brother?" Loki said, smirking. "YOU!"

"Serves you right, Thunderdumbass!" Adora taunted.

Sigyn laughed. "That's what you get when you have us raise your kids, Brother! Loki, I need popcorn!"
"If anyone told me I'd be sitting in a waiting room with a group of gods, demigods and fairy tale characters I would've said they're crazy!" Stephen Connor muttered.

"Get used to it dear if you want to be part of this family," Persephone cautioned. The epidemiologist cringed under the goddess’s stare. Wyatt snickered, earning a boot to the foot from his wife.

Rumple gestured and a box of popcorn appeared in Sigyn's hands.

"Uncle Loki, Magni and I weren't that bad!" Modi protested.

Miri almost fell out of her chair. "Uh . . . excuse me? How much mead did YOU drink, cousin?"

"Are you forgetting about the hole in the ceiling of the palace, nephew?" Loki queried. "And the garden party where all your grandmother's ladies went screaming because of the ants?"

"Daddy shrunk himself once and got stuck in an ant traffic jam," Amber giggled.

"Because I'm not as good at that spell as your mother is. Besides, the only time I do it is when I want to go to Otis's comedy night. And before you ask, no. You can’t go. His routines are not fit for young ears. I keep telling him I can make him human to take his show on the road, but he prefers staying a spider," Jiminy added.

"And dinna think ye lot will be sneaking into the Spinning Wheel to get sauced when ye're underaged!" Rumple threatened the teenagers.

Emma Hook glared at the ceiling. "At least I don't have to worry about having to search my house for hidden bottles of rum anymore."

"Honey, we warned you...” Emma Laufeyson-Gold reminded her gently.

"I know, I know," she grumbled. "And I should've listened the day of Lilly's wedding, but I had to learn the hard way. Once a drunk always a drunk and once a pirate always a pirate."
"Not in my case Missus Hook," Jimmy corrected. "Or Rogers or little Killian."

"You cleaned yourselves up."

"My time away made me do some soul searching," spoke up Storybrooke Two's former Mrs. Gold.

"That's good Belle," said Loki.

"We had to work things out...for Gideon and Saphira's sakes. I don't want my son's second life to be as dark as his first and Saphira....we have to keep that dagger out of her hands."

'I wouldn't have reversed the memory altering spell I cast on you and the others otherwise," Loki reminded her.

"At least you and Rumple had an amicable divorce and custody agreement...I would've preferred divorce to being a widow," Emma Hook grumbled. Her own husband had been killed while drunk driving.

"Killian Jones had to return to Ephesis eventually Emma. He was born in my dominion and his soul was mine," Persephone reminded her. "Only Ozmalita or I had the right to resurrect him, not my father. Also an innocent life was in exchange for his return. And we were fortunate he did not kill anyone that night he was driving home drunk."

"I know," she mumbled.

"So when's the wedding, Melanie?" Aurora asked.

"Well...not until Rumple's divorce, the custody agreements and alimony are settled..."

"Here she comes now, wants her alimony
Bleedin' me dry as a bony, bony
Workin' three jobs just to stay in debt, now
Well, first she took my nest egg
Then she took the nest
I said yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah
Yeah!” Bae Gold sang.

“Now look what you started!” Gold scolded his ex-wife. She smirked.

“Cause she took my house
Alimony
My car
Alimony
My shoes
Alimony
And my toothbrush too
Alimony
Too bad
Alimony
So sad
Alimony
And she got
Alimony
Got the gift of grab
Alimony
I'm in debt, debt, debt

Debt, debt, debt…” the other Baes sang. Belle French couldn’t help laughing nor could her ex-husband or his fiancée.

"What is going on in here? Is this a waiting room or a karaoke bar?” One of the Doctor Whales asked when he walked into the waiting room.
"Both!" Weaver chuckled.

"Well?" Glinda demanded impatiently.

"Your daughter's given birth to a healthy, seven-pound baby girl!" he announced.

"Finally!" Meredith exclaimed.

"And my stepfather? Did he pass out?" Rumple giggled.

"No...he puked!"

"You're kidding!?!" Adora burst out laughing. "Oh I am never gonna let him live that down. What's there to throw up about?"

"Plenty!" Archie Bordreaux-Hopper cried. 'That...that afterbirth is disgusting!"

"No he puked before that. Nerves I guess."

"May we see our daughter?"

"Give us at least an hour to get her settled and you can go in Your Highness."

"Doctor Whale, where's my Daddy?"

"He's getting cleaned up Merri but he'll come and get you when he's done."

"Okay, thanks!" She hugged her best friend. "I got a new aunt!"
"I know. Congrats Merri!"

An hour later Meredith’s father came into the waiting room. “Lilly can only have two visitors at a time so you can fight over who goes in first.”

“Rumple, take Meredith in,” Glinda suggested. “Your grandfather and I will go in after you.”

“Thank you, Grandmother. Come along Merri.”

Lilly was sitting up in bed propped up against the pillows a still pale Archie sitting in the chair beside her bed. Rumple giggled.

“Couldna handle it, eh Dad?”

“Oh shut up,” Archie moaned, fighting back the urge to vomit again. “Can’t you do something about this?”

“Uh oh! Uncle Rumple he’s gonna puke again!” Meredith gestured and a bucket appeared in her hands. She thrust it at her grandfather. “Don’t puke on me, Grampa!”

“You…ohhhh…sound…like your grandmother!”

“So why’re you so sick? Was it really gross?”

“No….just nerves. I usually just break out in hives, not this!”

“Try squeezing something the size of a watermelon out of a hole the size of a lemon and then tell me how you feel!” his wife retorted.

“Lilly! God’s sake, our granddaughter and son are in the room!”
“Well I watched four of my five being born so it’s nothing I haven’t seen before,” Rumple quipped. Archie glared at him.

“Now I know you get your smart mouth from HER side of the family!”

“Rumple, would you like to hold your sister?” Lilly asked softly.

“You know I would, Mama.”

He took his sister from his mother’s arms and gazed down at her tiny face. “Hello dearie. I’m your big brother Rumple,” he murmured and waved his hand over her.

“Sister of mine this gift I give to thee

The Eye of Aramon, the truth you will always see!” he chanted and kissed her cheek then knelt down so that his niece could see her.

“Uncle Rumple, she’s all red! Why’s she all red?”

“Newborns are sometimes dearie but ’tis nothing to fret over. As her aunt and fellow Guardian ye must gie her a gift now dearie. Do ye remember the spell I taught ye?”

“Uh-huh.”

Meredith held her hand over her aunt’s face and concentrated.

“Aunt of mine this gift I give to thee

Any form you wish may you be!” she chanted.

“Good one, dearie!” he praised.
“But can I make it so she has to change back if Gramma or Grampa asks her to?”

“You just did.”

“Good ‘cause I really don’t want her getting grounded like I did the time I changed to a skunk and stunk out Modi cause he was pickin on me.”

They all laughed.

“Loki found it amusing,” Lilly murmured.

“That’s because that godfather of yours loves tricks,” Archie shook his head. “You’re all gonna keep me on my toes, make my hair fall out or turn it white before I’m sixty!”

“You signed up for this darling,” Lilly reminded him.

“Twice,” he laughed.

Out in the waiting room everyone was stunned when a group of Lokitties flew into the waiting room.

“Astarte, what are you doing here? They don’t allow pets in the maternity ward.”

“Glorious Father we’ve come to see the new kitten of our man crush,” the cat informed Loki.

“You…you…WHAT?!” the god sputtered.

“Ummm…do I need to dig the wax outta my ears or did that cat just call Grampa Archie her man crush?” Hope asked her elder brother. Bae laughed.

“I said, we want to see the new kitten of our man crush.” The other cats meowed in agreement.
Loki facepalmed himself. “Lilly is going to KILL me! My cats have a crush on her husband!”

“Well he is handsome and charming…for a human.”

“No no, no….you are NOT going in there! She’ll roast you on a spit! If you want mates, fine I’ll get you mates but by the Norns NOT my goddaughter’s human husband!”

“We just look not touch but if he were unwed, we’d bring him back to Asgard,” one of the other Lokitties added.

"Have your own little harem, eh ladies?”

"MEEEEOWWW!"

"Shut up Thor," Loki hissed.

"Huh? I thought only guys had harems, not girls!”

"KILLIAN GOLD!" his parents shouted.

Rumple's cousin Fiona snickered. "Oh, there can be harems of men lad."

"Really? Where?"

"You just forget about it, young man!"

"Dad, she brought it up."

"Yes, but it's on a need to know basis and you DON'T need to know."
While they were arguing Glinda and the Mystic Man went into the room to see their newest grandchild. "Loki, she wants you to go in now." Glinda informed him.

"Us too Father?" Astarte asked hopefully.

"I'm going to burn in Hel for this but come on!"

Thor began whistling Taps.

"Okay smartass you wait....payback is gonna be a royal bitch!"

"Bring it," Thor challenged.

Loki gestured and a bottle of Coke appeared in Astra’s hands.

*Drink up, darling and do me proud!*

A police whistle on a cord dangled from her arm.

“Lilly, darling, you must be tired, so we won’t stay long,” Loki promised and kissed her cheek.

“You will hold your goddaughter first!” she ordered.

“What? You want me to be her godfather?” He glanced over at Archie. He nodded in approval.

“You were Lilly’s godfather so it’s only fitting that you should be our daughter’s,” he replied.

“I thought…with so many friends and family…you’d want…”
“No, I want it to be you,” she said firmly and handed Glinda to him.

“Well, aren’t you a beautiful one Glinda Strogoff-Hopper,” he murmured. “Just as your mama was the day I first held her in my arms.” Sapphire blue eyes the same shade as her father’s gazed up at him.

*But I will protect you better than I protected your mama in her first life, little one.*

He’d always considered Lilly’s death at the hands of her sister one of his greatest failures as a god and godfather.

“You still remember that?” Archie asked, startled. "Even after all this time?"

Loki nodded. "It's not something you forget. First or last."

"I was just a baby, but my heart remembers it," Lilly said.

Loki traced several runes in the air and intoned softly in Norse, "Glinda Strogoff-Hopper, goddaughter of mine, the gift of laughter I give to thee, and the power to know hearts and minds. My blessing upon thee, child." He bent and kissed her forehead and green and gold sparkles drifted down over the baby, who waved her hands and tried to touch them.

Lilly laughed. "Just like I did!"

Astarte flew over to them. "You do make beautiful kittens handsome human," she said to Archie.

Loki almost choked.

"Ummm...thank you Astarte," Archie said nervously. The other Lokitties were rubbing their backs against his legs.
Lilly smirked at her godfather. "Something you're not telling me?"

"My cats . . . have developed an attachment to your husband," Loki answered.

"A purrfect mate!" one of the cats praised.

Lilly thought for a moment, "Well....you can't have my mate, but I can give you the next best thing."

She took Archie's hand and pressed it against her chest.

Moments later several ginger haired, blue eyed cats appeared on the floor.

"Hello ladies," they greeted in Archie's voice.

"Goddaughter of our Glorious Father, we thank you! Now why didn't YOU do that?" Astarte demanded of a speechless Loki.

"He was too busy being horrified," Lilly quipped.

"I don't know. I don't look bad as a cat," Archie chuckled.

"Now we will have our own beautiful kittens!"

Glinda suddenly reappeared in her mother's arms. Archie pointed to the floor laughing. "He fainted!"

"Oh...ohhhh Archie get your phone! You have got to get a picture of that before he wakes up!"

One of the Archie cats nudged his foot. "He's out cold."
"He's not gonna turn into the blue Jotun Frost Giant now, is he?" asked another.

“He will if his brother sees him like that,” Astarte giggled.

"Loki, you ass! You gave that kid of yours Coke and a police whistle and...oh by the Norns! What'd you do to him? Get him drunk?” Thor snickered.

"No, he's a bit shocked seeing us,” one of the Archie cats answered.

"Where'd you guys come from?"

"Lilly made us mates from our man crush. Are they not handsome?"

"Ummm....if you say so. I'm not into cats.” Thor knelt beside his brother and slapped his cheeks. "WAKEY WAKEYYYYY!" he yelled in his ear.

Loki cursed in Norse. "Go 'way Thor. Not time to giddup yet."

"He's really out of it! YO dipshit! Wake up! I wanna talk to you!"

Loki sat up and rubbed his head. “What happened?”


“Eat my staff Thunderbutt!”

“Fight nice boys or I’m summoning Odin and Frigga to put you in the corners,” Lilly teased.

The gods made negating gestures.
“Oh, fine! But behave,” she warned them.

“Tell him not to give his kid Coke and a police whistle. I’m nearly deaf!”

“Cry me a river.”

Zippers appeared on their mouths.

“I’ll take them off if you promise not to squabble like children. Do you promise?”

They nodded.

“Good. Now go be good little gods and let me rest.” She lay back against the pillows and closed her eyes.

“I’ll come by in a few days,” Loki whispered to Archie and teleported out.

“Well dearies, here she is….Glinda Alexandra Strogoff-Hopper!” Rumple announced, casting one of the photographs he’d taken with his phone on the wall of the waiting room.

“Oh, she’s adorable!” Belle exclaimed. “How is your mother?”

“She’s tired but she’ll be fine.”

“And Archie?” Jiminy inquired with a smirk.

“Still a wee bit nauseated but he’ll get over it. They’re leavin’ him in the room with Mama. Doubt he’d wanna go home anyway since Merri’s stayin with her da. Everyone’s invited to the Grille for a feast and if ye leave my club hungry its yer own fault.”
No one ever did.

He stood outside the nursery later that evening, a small smile on his lips as he watched his baby sister sleep. He went in, taking his sister out of her crib and sat down in the chair in the corner of the room cradling her against his chest.

“May you never fight the battle with the darkness I did dearie,” he murmured. “The darkness still lingers but together we will build a world the darkness cannot breach. The darkness kept everyone I loved from me for so long and I gave my life to bring them back to me again. I would give my life again if I had to for you to be safe. All magic comes with a price, my wee sister. When you think the dark path is the right path, I want you to remember the prices I paid, look away and follow the light.”

The baby opened her eyes and looked up at him, her tiny hand reaching up and touching his scarred chest. He covered her tiny hand with his large one and both began to glow.

“Nothing can hurt us if we’re together and we’re going to be together a long time Lindy,” he murmured.

For there was no greater bond than that of family and no magic stronger than love.

Author’s Notes: We now come to the end of this part of the Gold Chronicles saga but the story is far from over, dearies. I started this project four years ago and were it not for the encouragement of so many people I never would’ve been able to finish it. First, I would like to thank my co-author. Kat, your Gold Standard started this journey and I feel that I have grown as a writer working with you and nothing pleased me more than us finally bringing the worlds we’ve written together. Second, I would like to thank the readers. You know who you are and finally stay tuned for the sequels Once Upon a Time In Miami and Vegas, Cold Heritage, Nemo, Dreaming of a Knight and Blue, Place In This World and The Gold Chronicles one shots!
Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!