Seasons of Rumbelle

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Category: F/M
Fandom: Once Upon a Time (TV)
Relationship: Belle/Rumplestiltskin | Mr. Gold
Character: Belle (Once Upon a Time), Rumplestiltskin | Mr. Gold, Snow White | Mary Margaret Blanchard, Prince "Charming" James | David Nolan, Baelfire | Neal Cassidy, Emma Swan, Henry Mills (Once Upon a Time), Evil Queen | Regina Mills, Red Riding Hood | Ruby, Ariel (Once Upon a Time), Victor Frankenstein | Dr. Whale, Huntsman | Sheriff Graham, Grumpy | Leroy, Jiminy Cricket | Archie Hopper, Captain Hook | Killian Jones, Greg Mendell | Owen Flynn, Tamara (Once Upon a Time), Cruella de Vil (Once Upon a Time), Wicked Witch of the West | Zelena, Widow Lucas | Granny, Maurice | Moe French, Knave of Hearts | Will Scarlet, Gaston (Once Upon a Time), Mad Hatter | Jefferson, Milah, Queen of Hearts | Cora, William Smee

Additional Tags: Romance, Drama, Humor, Angst, Fluff, Smut, AUs, Inspired by movies, Inspired by books, Inspired by TV shows, Prompts Accepted, Ratings Vary from K to M, Read at your discretion, maybe some violence, Character deaths if pertains to storyline, Mainly all Rumbelle, Will have some minor character pairings, Snowing - Freeform, Swanfire - Freeform, Red Cricket - Freeform, The Scarlet Letter, Edward Scissorhands - Freeform, Otherworld, x-files, The Time Traveler, Broadway, Lost - Freeform, student teacher, A Long Fatal Love Chase, One Night Stand, Elizabeth Gaskell’s North and South, Sherlock Holmes - Freeform, Labyrinth - Freeform, Let the Right One In - Freeform, Rebecca - Freeform, indecent proposal, Dead Again, The Lost World, Will add more AUs and tags, Top Gun - Freeform, The Best Man, Angel Inspired, Strange Magic, Ghost Whisperer Inspired, Best Friends, Rumbelle as Children, Ravenous - Freeform, role-playing, Doc Martin inspired


Seasons of Rumbelle

by EriksTrueAngel

Summary

A series of Rumbelle AUs based on books, movies, and TV shows. Ratings for each prompt will vary so read at your discretion. Next... The Lost World- It is two years later and Lord
Rumpton has a promise to fulfill. Completed! (For now...)

Notes

This is also posted on FF.net under the same name and title. As of right now, I do have about 58 chapters posted so before I add any new prompts/requests from this site... I will add what I have written so far. So forgive me if it appears like I'm ignoring your prompts. For the sake of each series I have written, I am going to add all the prompts and requests in order and not the mash-up you will find on FF.net.

At the end I will include my original author's note so you can see how I set this up for each universe and tease some future additions.

Disclaimer: I do not own any of the characters from Once Upon a Time. I'm borrowing them to fill in the need to write so many plots about them and honestly... it's so easy to do.

My first set is based on The Scarlet Letter. You will see bits and pieces from the novel as well as the movie starring Demi Moore and Gary Oldman. Now, if you’ve seen that version… the only good thing it has going for it is the developing relationship between Hester Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale. Everything else about the movie is crap and quite laughable. So the only thing coming from that movie is how they fall in love with my own additions.

See the end of the work for more notes.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Reverend Gold anxiously awaits for Belle to leave her prison cell to face her punishment. (Rated K)

The Scarlet Letter

The good Reverend Rumford Gold was ill.

Not physically, at least not to the naked eye. He was ill emotionally, mentally. He was ill in the heart and for what he had done to the only person that truly mattered in his congregation. The one person he tried with all his might and his faith to keep a pure mind and chaste intentions towards…

My Lord when will this end? He thought frantically while maintaining a calm façade and posture to the rest of the good people in Storybrooke. Why can’t they leave her be?

Of course, he very well knew that her fate had been sealed. The people of Storybrooke demanded justice and cried for the wrath of God to quiver within His humble servant who had committed such a heinous crime. As far as he knew, she had not shown an ounce of remorse or regret for her actions. In fact, she had been defiant and resilient towards her persecutors—never once breaking down or showing her fear in front of them.

He knew her to be brave, yet he was afraid that her bravery would work against her and it had come to pass. Due to her insubordination and lack of humility to the Church and to the town’s leaders, Mistress Annabelle French was a sinner and her punishment will be swift and humiliating.

Already he could see the frenzy anticipation within the eyes of the crowd gathering around the town square. All of them… they wanted this. They wanted to see her fall. And for many of them… they envied her. With all her good grace, natural beauty, and golden heart… half of Storybrooke broke the Commandment- Thou shalt not covet thy neighbor.

It disgusted him. They should all be awaiting a trial of their own and face the judge for their earthly punishment before meeting the ultimate Judge.

More so… it should be him facing the town’s devils.

Mayor Mills rose from his seat and took his place in front of the crowd. With his outstretched hands, the town fell into hushed silence as he began to recount the crimes the prisoner was found guilty of doing.

Each blow was a stab to Reverend Gold’s heart that he gripped the edge of his seat to keep himself from trembling. However, in his mind… he heard that list being recited towards him.

“And lastly, Mistress French has been found guilty of that foulest of all sins: adultery!”

From that final proclamation, Mayor Mills pointed to the jail’s doors and on cue… the doors opened with a flourish to expose the fiend for the whole of Storybrooke to see and above all… to witness the physical proof of her crimes.
Annabelle French calmly stood for everyone to see, her head held high and her deep cobalt eyes gazing straight ahead and not at those who at once began to mock and scorn her. The guards behind her urged her to move and she began her ascension to the platform, her countenance never wavering. However, from the good Reverend’s standpoint, he could see the tightness of the corner of her mouth as she pressed her lips firmly together, biting her tongue from responding to the slander.

She was certainly a vision to behold after those long nine months behind the closed doors. The imprisonment had yet to fade the glowing light surrounding her as his chest tightened painfully and his heart raced at finally seeing her face. He was a fool for being away for as long as he was, for believing that distance was a kinder gesture in preserving her honor and to keep him from betraying his calling. He thought he had done the right thing, for her and for him, but he can see now that was a grievous error on his part.

Halfway in her trek, he took notice for the first time the bundle that was clutched protectively in her arms, to her breast. His breath hitched in his throat as he recognized for what she held so carefully, so dearly to her heart and he ached to look upon the face of the child that she carried so resolutely, so fiercely. No one had whispered the gender of the babe and he was impatient to have that knowledge for himself.

His gaze shifted and he was now looking at her… staring into her eyes and she was looking back at him. Her expression hadn’t changed but he saw the emotions in her eyes and it was the silence within her that he knew what she was telling him.

They told him on his arrival… they told him how she refused to give up the name.

Hours felt like they ticked away when it was minutes and she was standing on the platform, standing before Storybrooke.

The moment had come and Mayor Mills took great delight in reveling in this reveal, commanding her to show to the world who she was and how she will forever be known with this mark for years to come.

There was a shift in her embrace and the reverberating gasps of the people were instantaneously as she turned in a small circle to reveal her sins.

Standing out on her modest gown of black… the bright crimson letter ‘A’ blared on her chest.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle meets Reverend Gold for the first time. (Rated K+)

The Scarlet Letter

“Drat! Drat! Drat!” Belle mumbled to herself as she hurried to harness her horse to the wagon. She heard the tolling of the bell that was calling to all of its parishioners to gather for mass and she was running late. It did not bode well for her to be tardy considering that already several of Storybrooke’s well standing residents did not approve of her.

And all because she was an unchaperoned woman who sailed across the ocean to find a home to settle in before her husband came. It also didn’t help that she chosen a home that was several miles away from town, preferring the serene and beautiful scenery of the forest and the vast surrounding lake than to the nosy neighbors she would have gained if she picked a home closer to the town square.

As it were, Annabelle preferred the isolation and beauty that this untouched land provided. She felt liberated, freer than she ever imagined possible. She felt like one of the heroes in the books she read… the ones that were considered improper for a young woman to lay her eyes upon.

However, her husband encouraged her love of reading to expand to the academic to the frivolous entertainment that should be scorned. It invited the possibility of a heightened discussion and lively debate, which was typically frowned in the circle of society. Yet, her husband wanted her to be knowledgeable so they could share an intellectual banter and she was grateful that he was of the mind that a woman could be just as smart and provide new insight as much as a man could.

She was also fortunate that he entrusted her to find a home for them in this new country, and in doing so, giving her this opportunity of freedom. She cared for her husband but she did not love him. His absence was not disconcerting or painful and she knew she would mourn the days when he will eventually join her. Until then, she would take full advantage of her independence that she tasted and work the land as best as she could.

Of course, she will have to do better in the working the land part instead of engrossing herself in a wild adventure tale. And remembering that it was the Sabbath and she could not be late for church.

Soon, Belle was on her way as she ordered her horse at a full gallop. It was bit risky in pushing the speed of her horse as the wagon creaked and groaned with each bump and turn of the path through the woods, but Belle could not be late, especially when Reverend Gold was returning from his missionary trip to convert the local tribes to God.

Since her arrival to Storybrooke, Belle had heard such great things from this highly favored and admired clergyman that she was looking forward in hearing his sermon. It would not look good for her to enter in mid-speech and earn his disapproval.

“Ya! Ya!” she shouted, flicking the reins against the horse’s dappled back. “Ya!”
So intently focused was she that Belle failed to remember that a heavy rain poured the night before and there was a probable chance that there would be mud, and naturally, the wheel became inevitably stuck.

Fighting back another “drat,” Belle looked behind her to see that... yes, indeed the back wheel was lodged deeply in mud. Biting her lip, she faced forward and urged her horse to move back as she tugged on the reins, yet the wagon was immovable and there was no way she could back up and try again. Her only hope now was to try moving forward, but the mud was proving to be a wily enemy, intent to keep her right where she was.

A strand of hair fell across her face and Belle impatiently pushed it behind her ear and in her haste she knocked her bonnet off her head. With a cry, she gazed as the cap fell into the mud.

She was late and her head was not covered. Today was certainly not shaping to be in her favor.

Knowing there was little she could do about the muddied bonnet; Annabelle hopped down and threw the article into the wagon to clean it later. For now, she had to concentrate on freeing her wagon.

She whispered a prayer of thanks at remembering to wear her thick, leather gloves as she positioned herself by the wheel to help push it as the horse pulled. With each grunt and pant, she pushed with all her might to find herself only soaking her skirt with mud as well as her boots rather than obtaining her actual goal.

Growing frustrated at the utter obstinacy of the wheel, Belle gave it a sturdy kick. She jumped as a chuckle came from behind her.

Whirling towards the intruder, Belle could only glare as a man sat upon his horse and watched her with amusement dancing in his eyes and the corner of his mouth twitching with mirth.

“How long have you been watching me?” she demanded coolly, not caring a wit that her appearance was no longer acceptable in the standards of propriety. Her efforts had loosened her bun and her chestnut tresses were falling past her shoulders, her complexion flushed and her blue eyes brightened with the exertion.

The stranger smirked. “I believe it was about the fifth ‘drat’.”

Her brow arched indignantly. He must have been sitting there for at least five minutes and never once announced his presence or offered his help. Combined with the fact she was undeniably late, her mood was not to be trifled with let alone be mocked.

“Well, if only I had the help of a gentleman who could assist me. Alas, there seems to be none in this forest.”

Turning her back on him, Belle tried once more to lift the wheel, but to her astonishment she felt the brushing of hands as the man was standing next to her.

“Allow me to be of assistance. It wouldn’t be Christian-like for me to ignore a lady, then again... it’s been awhile since I last seen one and I had not realized that the fashion is for one to be like a savage now.”

She found herself laughing despite herself. It was then she took notice of his countenance as the traces of humor gave way to ones of focused concentration as he slammed his shoulder against the wagon and pushed hard. He wasn’t young by any means rather middle-aged, probably in his late forties or early fifties, Belle surmised. He wasn’t particularly an attractive man with his sharp and...
angular features and a nose that stuck out quite prominently from his face. However, there was a
handsome quality about him—specifically his eyes that softened his looks. They were a deep dark
shade of brown almost like the color of her favorite book’s cover. Even his hair was striking and
gave him distinction with its long length and streaks of gray in the dark mane. She couldn’t help but
marvel at the sleekness and youthful shine of the hair despite its mature coloring that she wondered if
it was soft to the touch as it appeared…

Mortified by her turn of thought, Belle snapped her face away from him so he couldn’t see her blush.
She was a married woman for God’s sake and she should not be admiring another man, even if her
husband was not present.

Her companion grunted once more before letting go of the wheel. He removed his hat and wiped his
forehead with the back of his hand. “I’m afraid you’re quite stuck,” he told her with regret. “I’m
going to have to have a few abled hands to push it loose. Until then, you’re better off riding to your
destination.”

“As it was, I’m late for mass and did not think to bring a saddle,” Belle responded sardonically.

“Ah.” His eyes crinkled in that similar jollity that made him look years younger. “Not to worry. I’m
late as well and I’m certain God will forgive your tardiness. If you permit me, you can ride my horse
with me… or you can take my horse and I yours. That is… if you know how to ride.”

“Indeed I do, sir,” she replied archly, placing her hands on her hips. “I guess there is a bit of a
gentleman in you after all. Of course, your manners are still rough around the edges.”

His smile only grew wider as he led her to his horse.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: They try to take her son away from her and Gold intervenes. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The Scarlet Letter

Annabelle knew this new life wouldn't be easy, but she hadn't anticipated how difficult it would be with her ostracism from the ones she once called friends.

If she were to cross paths with Mistress Nolan or Miss Lucas, then they were quick to move in the opposite direction, their eyes downcast to avoid looking in her direction. It grieved her that Mary Margaret and Ruby wouldn't acknowledge her, but she understood their position. To associate with her would be accepting her sin and excusing her for what she had done. They had their own lives to attend to and she could not fault them for ignoring her as painful as it was to admit.

Of course, her pain would abate momentarily when her son nestled his soft curls against her chest, reminding her that were it not for this sin then she would not be blessed with this precious angel. He was still a week old and already he was proving to be a strong one, becoming his mother's anchor as she moved about the village in procuring her groceries. He seemed to sense her distress and with a simple touch or a gurgle… Belle was able to distract herself from her new reality.

She could tell he will have her hair and his eyes were so much like his father's…

Fighting back the next bout of sadness, Belle knew there was no way she could reveal the father, not when his reputation would be at stake—more so than hers. She wasn't a prominent figure in the town and she refused to ruin him or his credibility. He was a good man and she wanted the people to see that, to believe in him. If not, his punishment would be far harsher than hers.

Her decision to keep away from him was decided that day when she left the prison to climb upon the platform to reveal her shame. She knew he was close to jumping up and admitting guilt, but she refused to let that happen… their unspoken language sending him the message loud and clear. This was her burden to bear, her cross she must carry. She would not drag him down to her level.

Unfortunately, the separation proved to be more acute than she expected. Seeing him walking around, looking upon her with despondency and longing… she felt the same but she vowed to withhold her tongue and she must honor her promise to herself. It was for the greater good, she had to remind herself. No matter how we feel about each other, I cannot risk him.

However, there were times when she wished for his protective presence when the residents stared upon her child with such pity. They hated the mother but the child they could forgive… though it worried her when the Mayor’s wife would gaze upon her baby with this look of hunger in her eyes. It was no secret that Mistress Mills had a hard time conceiving and it only filled Belle with unwavering strength to keep her son away from her scrupulous tendencies.
One evening her nightmares came to fruition.

Belle awoke to the unrelenting and cruel banging upon her door. Her first instinct was to go to her son and she did in the nick of time, scooping up her baby as the door kicked in and she was soon surrounded by a dozen women and men—their intent quite evident upon their countenances as her son chosen that moment to start to wail.

“See?” exclaimed Mistress Regina Mills, turning to her husband. “I told you that the baby does not wish to be with his mother. And how could he with that foul and false woman? He wants to be saved and is it not our God given duty to make sure His children are protected from the sinners?”

Mayor Mills nodded in consent to his wife’s rationale as did the agreed murmurs of the witnesses.

Belle’s eyes widened as she clung to her child tightly. They were going to take him away! They couldn’t! They mustn’t!

“No! You cannot have him!” she yelled, her pleas and cries falling on deaf ears as Mistress Mills made the attempt to claim her son. “Get your hands off him!” With that, Belle slapped the woman’s hands as she backed herself into a corner as a couple of men—Mr. Archibald Hopper and Mr. Edmund Graham—moved towards her, their faces filled with remorse and compassion. In another life, she would have considered the two soft-spoken men as friends since they did not tolerate the cruel behavior against anyone, never passing judgment without hearing the other side’s story. It was why they were held in high esteem as their duties as confidante and lawman, respectively.

Now… they were trying to remove her son from her home and she would be damned if she would not back down without a fight.

Yet it was the resounding shout of an uninvited usurper whom arrived at that very moment to prevent the tragedy from occurring. Belle didn’t realize it until he somehow materialized right in front of her as Reverend Gold stood his ground and ordered the rest of the villagers to back down and move away from the mother and terrified child.

He was truly magnificent with his brown eyes alit with fire, his jaw clenched firmly, his tone hardly masking his disgust and perturbation at the situation. Normally he was reserved in his posture, but now… he was quaking with intensity as he gazed upon each person in the room, daring… threatening them to follow through with their task.

“This is intolerable!” he growled, his accent thickening. “How dare you forcefully attempt to remove this babe from his mother? Have you all gone daft?”

“Reverend Gold,” Mistress Mills said her voice placating though it barely concealed her disdain at this interruption. “You of all people must understand that we are doing this for the sake of the child’s soul. He cannot be raised by this blasphemed woman. It is not natural nor is it Christian-like to neglect such an innocent being.”

“And you, Mistress Mills,” he replied. “You believe you’re fully capable of raising this child in the goodness of our Lord and ensuring the safety of his heavenly soul?”

“Of course!” she responded happily, pleased to hear that the Reverend was certainly going to side with her now.

Glancing over his shoulder to gaze upon Belle’s apprehensive visage, he repeated his question to her.

“With all my heart,” Belle vowed passionately. “Please… he is my son. He needs to be raised by his birth mother.”
Reverend Gold gave a punctual nod. “My verdict seems to be aligned with yours Mistress French. The baby deserves to have his natural mother be the one to raise him justly.”

The resounding gasps and the indignant cry of Mistress Mills echoed sharply in the small cottage. Could it be? Was the good Reverend granting this sinner the permission to raise this child to be a Christian, despite her actions?

Belle released her sigh of relief, tears swimming in her eyes at this merciful conclusion. She doubted she would be able to survive if Reverend Gold conceded to Mistress Mills’ whims. As it was, the said woman was not to be defeated as she charged her husband to make the Reverend consider since Mistress French had not conducted a proper baptism yet. So how could she follow her word if she failed to do the most basic of Christian responsibilities?

“Indeed Reverend Gold,” Mayor Mills said. “My wife is right in that the babe has not been properly baptized. As his birth mother, Mistress French should have made sure that he was cleansed for God, but she seems to keep him tainted with her sordid bosom.”

“That is certainly a grievance that must be corrected,” Gold consented and turned to Miss Lucas who was newly arrived. “Miss Lucas, if you please… fetch me a bowl of water. I have a child that needs to be baptized.”

“Yes Reverend.” Miss Lucas bowed and hurried to Belle’s kitchen to gather the supplies he needed. In no time, she returned with a bowl filled with water and placed it on a nearby table.

He nodded to the room of witnesses, announcing, “You are all here to witness this baptism of young —“ At this, he paused and looked to Belle questioningly. “What is it that you wish to name your son?”

Gratefully, Belle smiled timidly at him as she answered loud and clear: “Beathan French. For ‘life.’”

Nodding, Gold returned her smile. “A strong name. May I?”

“Yes.” She passed her son over to his opened arms that Belle had to suppress her tears of joy at seeing Gold cradling their son for the first time. Even the amazed shock creased his brow as he stole a quick glimpse at her at this significance. He ran his fingers delicately over the child’s face and chin, as if committing this to memory as the child’s opened fist reached and curled around his father’s finger. Even that innocent touch seemed to have shaken the charismatic Reverend until he recalled that he was not alone and they had an audience.

Finding his voice, Gold continued. “I baptize thee Beathan French in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.” He dipped his fingers into the bowl of water and marked the sign of the cross over the child’s forehead. Then with a heavy heart, he returned Beathan to his mother’s embrace.

“Thank you,” she mouthed to him.

There was a brief tilt of his lips before he rounded on the others. “Now, I ask that you leave this woman and her child alone. Good evening to you all.”

The dismissal was curt and since nothing could be done… the people took their leave. Mistress Mills was beside herself as she took to exchanging words with her husband in hushed tones, but not before she threw one last reproachful look towards Belle and her newly baptized son.

At last Belle and Gold were alone although there was nothing else that could be said. He saved their family and she would be forever appreciative for that. Yet, Gold wanted to speak freely now but he
could not find his voice to say what was on his mind, in his heart. His courage was fading from him and his treacherous thoughts were whispering that he should not stay here for long lest it sparks fodder amongst the people. Of course, he could never say aloud how relieved he was that he came in time due to the warning that was sent to him about Belle’s son.

So with one last parting look, Gold took his leave. He did, however, managed to allow himself one more caress to his son’s head before the darkness of the night swallowed him.

Chapter End Notes

The name Beathan is Scottish Gaelic for “life,” which I thought was perfect for this story.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Beathan asks his mother about his father. (Rated K)

**The Scarlet Letter**

“Mama, is my father the Devil?”

Belle was sitting at her rocking chair sewing a brand new ‘A’ when her son posed the question. The absurdity of such a thing startled her and she stabbed her finger with the needle. Luckily, she didn’t draw blood and Belle looked down at her four-year-old son’s upturned face.

“No Beathan. Where did you hear this?”

“The other children told me,” he replied with a sullen expression. “They told me that you had favors with the Devil and I was born as a result.”

“That is ridiculous,” she said. “Come here.” Setting her sewing at her table, she lowered her arms to lift her boy into her lap. “Now, what do we know about the Devil?”

“He lies,” Beathan responded.

Belle nodded. “Yes. And what does he look like?”

“He has horns and hooves for legs.”

“Very good. Do you have horns or hooves?”

Beathan giggled. “Of course not!”

“Well, there you have it,” Belle said, grinning. “How could you be the Devil’s son if you do not look like him?”

“I guess,” he said slowly, looking down. “But Mama… all the children have mothers and fathers. Why don’t I?”

She sighed deeply. She always knew there would come a day when he would want to know and she was not ready to share that intimate detail. Today was not that day. “You do have a father Beathan. And He loves you very much as well as the rest of His children.”

“I know that,” he exclaimed. “But what about my earthly father? Does he not love me too? Is that why he is not with us?”

“Don’t think that!” Belle gasped. “Beathan, I know this may be hard to understand right now, but there will come a day when this will make sense. Your earthly father loves you very much and it grieves him so that he cannot be with us. For now, we must keep our distance until it is safe for him to join us. And when he does… he will hold you in his arms and call you his son so the rest of the world can witness his love. You must keep your faith my dear heart. As for the other children, do not
fret as they speak their cruel words. They are simply jealous that you have two parents who love you so much that they are willing to put their happiness aside to keep you safe. Understand?”

With wide-opened eyes, Beathan nodded in wordless wonder. “He really loves me?”

“With all his heart,” she assured him and kissed his forehead.

That eased his little mind and he was back to his usual jovial self. Belle leaned in her seat as he ran to the window. Quietly, she murmured, “And sometimes… he will walk past this house and watch our window just to get a glimpse of you.”

Meanwhile, Beathan spotted Reverend Gold standing by the gate. His small hand pressed against the glass as he waved to the older man. To his delight, the Reverend waved back before turning around and returning to the path back to Storybrooke.

Out of all the people in the village, the Reverend Gold was Beathan’s favorite person. He was always courteous to the young boy, always inquiring after his mother, and always had a story or joke to share. He wasn’t afraid to speak to Beathan and he didn’t treat him like a pariah as most were wont to do. And whenever they would have to part, Reverend Gold would always stroke his hair as he said his goodbyes.

Of course, Beathan would not tell his mother this, but he would often pretend that Reverend Gold was his real father.
Chapter Summary

Tinuviel Undomiel prompted: Reverend Gold and Belle’s first time together. (Rated M for obvious reasons)

The Scarlet Letter

He was there with good intentions. Or so he told himself.

Part of him was full of relief and elation, while another part of him recoiled in disgust that he took great pleasure in having to share the tragic news.

He had to remember. He was coming as her spiritual counselor to the Lord, not as a man. A man, whose heart skipped a beat with each step, bringing him closer to the siren that invaded his mind and dreams ever since he came upon her carriage stuck in the mud.

Pausing outside her front door, Reverend Rumford Gold took a moment to go over what he had to say to her. It wasn’t easy… this task of burden… but he had to go through with it for her sake.

And perhaps his own.

Exhaling, Gold lifted his fist and rapped on the door. He could hear the scraping of chair against the wooden floor and the soft footsteps that carried the woman that was his damnation and salvation.

Mistress Belle French opened the door, surprise flitting over her features as she widened the entrance so she could admit him.

“Reverend Gold,” she greeted warmly. “This is…”

“Unexpected, I know,” he interjected quickly, anxious and impatient to get this over and done with. “Mistress French, I have come as your reverend with ill tidings and counsel.”

Her thin brows rose at his statement. “Do come in.”

He was hoping to do it where he stood but the evening air was starting to cool and he could practically feel the heat of her fire within her humble home.

A strong, resilient man would have remained where he was and told her straightforward why he had come.

But he wasn’t strong… not with Belle.

Entering the cottage was a departure away from the Garden of Eden, the serpent lurking in every nook and cranny of the hospitable home, the flames… a beacon to his weak heart and soul. He couldn’t help but stare in awe at how the shadows casted over her hair, illuminating the golden glow in her chestnut tresses. He followed her as Adam did with Eve when she tempted him with the Forbidden Fruit and he realized he must be careful with what he said and did next.
Belle motioned for him to sit, which he did, and she took the rocking chair on the other side. The fireplace stood in the center, the crackling of the timber making the only sounds, as Gold kept his gaze away from her.

When a minute passed in silence, Belle pursed her lips. “You mentioned ill tidings, sir. What has happened?”

“There… has been news in Storybrooke,” he said, licking his lips now suddenly dry. “Some pieces of a wreck have come ashore and it is believed to have belonged to the Intrepid. An English ship.”

Her expression had not changed and it was evident she didn’t understand the implication. Interlacing his fingers together, Gold finally lifted his brown eyes to her. “This ship was bringing more colonists over. There were a couple of survivors—a father and son—and they provided a list of names to those lost to the sea… among them was Maurus French.”

Belle’s sharp intake of breath had him lowering his focus elsewhere. He could only imagine the shock and anguish that must be on her countenance, her blue eyes in tears… He was being a coward, behaving this way. The woman lost her husband and he could hardly make eye contact with her. This was not what she needed. She needed her minister to provide her with the strength she needed to get by this time of mourning. He had to perform his godly duty.

However, what he saw was not what he expected. Yes… there were tears in her eyes but they had not fallen. Instead, her façade was calm and resolute. Not at all like a grieving widow should behave in a time like this.

“Mistress—“

“Belle,” she whispered. “Say my name like you did in the clearing.”

“Belle…” he corrected, relishing the way her name sounded on his tongue. It was so right but so wrong. “Belle, I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Thank you,” she said earnestly. “I know it cannot be easy for you to come to me after what you promised me. Please… understand I’m not heartless or soulless to not be raging over my husband’s death. He was a good man. I was fortunate to have a husband to be as caring as he, but I never loved him.”

“Of course—“

“Tell me,” she said. “Tell me what you said that day is true. Do you have feelings for me?”

“I cannot Belle. You know I can’t…” She shook her head from allowing himself to finish. Her countenance bore into his, pleading for him to speak the truth, and he found himself faltering in his resolve. “Yes. It’s still true.”

She nodded. “It is the same for me.”

Now it was his turn to breathe in sharply. He never dared himself to hope that her words were sincere, but now as they sat across from each other… it was getting difficult to deny that she did have tender feelings for him. He longed to hold her hand… to feel the warm, solidness of flesh and know this was real and not some dream. But he was afraid. He was afraid where this might lead.

Nevertheless, there was no denying who truly had the strength in this cottage as Belle rose from her seat and stepped towards him. She stood before him, towering over him, her soft azure orbs reflecting the nervous wreck in front of her. Her fingertips grazed his folded hands, and then placed
her palm on top.

“Rumford,” she spoke, causing a shiver to go down his spine at his Christian name. “I am not wicked. I am a good Christian but I cannot grieve for a man that I never loved. I only have respite in my breast knowing I’m finally free at last to fully love the man that I’m meant to be with. But I fear that I might lose your favor for this unnatural emotion.”

“Never!” he vowed.

“Would our heavenly Father forgive me?” she asked, searching his face. “Would He understand?”

“God can see into our souls Belle. He knows the truth in all of us and as long as you do feel some sadness for your husband… He will forgive.”

“I do. Not as a wife should but for a friend… I’m saddened I lost a good one.”

“It is enough.”

“How long?” she inquired. “How long must I wait?”

“Six years.”

She choked. “S-six years? That’s too long.”

He agreed. Six years was too long for him to finally announce to the world that he was in love with Belle French… to take her as his wife. “I know but that is the law of our people. Do not fret, my love. It will pass and then we can be together.”

Her lip quivered as she gave him a small smile. “What did you call me?”

“Rumford…”

Then she was moving closer to him, her breath a tickle on his face, and they were kissing. He did not know who initiated it first but as soon as he touched her… the barriers came crashing down—all of his insecurities and doubts fled when he tasted heaven that was his beloved Belle. Far too long he had fantasized and dreamed what this would be like… and now… and now Gold could not find it in himself to resist any longer. If this was a sin, then let God strike him now and spare her from his infernal ardor.

But God remained silent… a sign of acceptance that this was right. That this was his earthly wife he deserved as long as she would have him as her husband.

Although, he feared he would die if she refused him.

She pulled away for a moment to breathe and he was pulling her back towards him as he got to his feet to hold her even closer to his beating heart. His proposal was at the tip of his tongue and before he could voice his intentions, Belle wrapped her arms around him for another soul-tingling kiss.

The words were lost within him as her nails ran through his hair, massaging the nape of his neck. He shuddered in her embrace as he worshipped her petal lips with kisses of love and adoration.
This could be enough. He could be satisfied with her precious kisses until the appropriate time passed before they go public. The memory will sustain him when the moment came to make her his in the eyes of the Lord and the law.

Yet, Belle would not let him go. Even when he tried to put some distance between them so as to protect her virtue (and his instant reaction to her affections) Belle blocked him.

He must be strong. He must resist his bodily urges, as natural as it might be, because this was not the time. Despite his attempts of mentally reciting scripture and the stern reminder that the act of intercourse was strictly adhered for procreation only (a picture of Belle swollen with his child flashed through his mind)… he could not cave into his desires.

He couldn’t.

He mustn’t.

But one look from the fire’s light revealing her parted lips, swollen and cherry red by his attention, and the darkening hues of her eyes as she stared at him with love and lust. Even her hair was spoiled with its pristine style now unkempt. She was a vision all right and it was him that made her so.

He shouldn’t… yet…

“This Rumford… yes…” The unspoken question weighed heavily in the air and her consent had him come undone. Threading his fingers into her hair, he plucked out the rest of her hairpins and dropped them onto the ground so he could spread out and bury his face into her curls. Breathing in her scent, he finally allowed himself to savor this moment. There weren’t any more impediments to their relationship. Belle was her own woman and right now… she was running her hands over his shoulders and down his chest.

Even with his clothes on, the gesture was intimate as if it was bare skin and he couldn’t help but shiver as he moaned her name. This was territory he was strictly unfamiliar with and his inexperience never seemed like a humiliation until now. Just a simple touch already had him hardening and he feared he would lose himself in the sensations before he could even please her.

As if sensing his concerns, Belle removed her hands from his body. Then she took hold of his hand and began to lead him to her bedroom. He followed with little hesitation. Whereas he was worried about his lack of physical intimacies, he knew Belle would guide him to do what was right and he could only trust that he would not make a fool of himself. She was the angel, and he was the lowly disciple.

The room was dark and she let go long enough to light a candle by her bedside. The small flame was able to cast enough light for him to see her as she sat upon the bed and patted the spot next to her. Like the moth, Gold obeyed her silent request and cupped her cheek as he lowered his mouth to kiss her once again.

She pulled on his lower lip, nipping the flesh gently, eliciting a whimper from him. She grinned at his response and began to gradually push back his coat. Once it fell down to his elbows, he removed the article of clothing and let it drop to the ground. He timidly lowered his gaze to the ties of her dress, the unspoken need written all over his visage. Belle once more took his hands and placed them where the knot was by her throat. Nodding her head encouragingly, Gold began to undo the strings.

His fingers shaking at the knowledge that with every loose pull he made… he was revealing more of her lovely pale white skin.

When the ties loosened to expose the swell of her breasts, Gold stopped as his breathing grew
harsher and loud to his ears, but Belle, dear sweet loving Belle, was patient. She took his wrist and guided his hand to brush against her chest, her eyes closing as her lips parted from the light caress. He realized what she wanted him to do and biting his tongue… he began to softly explore by pressing the pads of his fingers over her breast, feeling and palming the warm flesh. When his thumb accidently brushed against her nipple, Belle cried out and he quickly withdrew away from her.

He did something wrong. He was afraid this would happen and now he hurt her.

But before he could launch into a mental harangue about his inadequacy, Belle was reaching for his hand again. “It’s all right Rumford. That… that felt wonderful.”

“It did? B-but you—“ he started, then blushed at his inability to even say what it was. Yet, Belle decided she was better off with action than words as she laid his hand back where it was. “It feels good,” she told him. “Don’t be afraid.”

He didn’t understand what she meant but as she rested her hand over his, she demonstrated by having him add pressure to her breast, and then he felt her nipple pebble underneath his touch as he watched in amazement as her body reacted to the attentions of his hands. Once he realized she felt no pain and that her short intake of breath was good, he grew confident as he repeated the same gesture with its twin. Then when touching did not seem enough… his natural instinct had him leaning over to see what she tasted like… and his answer was gratifying as Belle grabbed his hair as he licked the dusty pink nub and sucked it into his mouth. She was divine and he relished that he was making her tremble and say his name in that breathy, raspy voice.

The top of her dress was undone, and together, they pushed the rest of it away, leaving her in her bloomers and stockings. Then she was rolling him on his back as she rose over him, her hair forming a veil as she peered into his eyes as she began to pull at the strays of his shirt.

Gold held his breath as she moved her hands down to the waist of his pants as she pulled the shirt out. She slid her hands underneath the fabric, his stomach suddenly burning with the contact, as she dragged them up his chest, separating the ties and shirt to expose his torso for her ministrations.

With the same tenderness as earlier, Belle placed short kisses along his collarbone, which grew into open-mouth kisses as she dragged her lips down his chest to his bellybutton. The moment she started her exquisite caresses, Gold’s eyes rolled to the back of his head, her name drenched in his voice as his lower back arched for more. She giggled, the vibration teasing his already scorching flesh, as she moved upwards to seize his mouth in a bruising kiss. She swallowed his groans as her hand began to trace down his side to his trousers as she dipped her fingers below.

Immediately, Gold bucked in response, his eyes flying wide open, as she lightly scratched his lower belly.

“Belle! I—“ he panted, not sure what he was trying to tell her but only that he wished she wouldn’t stop touching him.

He did, briefly, mourn the loss of her warmth as she undid the buckle of his belt. The piece of leather removed was a relief, but he didn’t want her to think he was incapable of undressing himself and her. Of course, his whole body was humming with pleasure he had never known before and there was still more to it that he had yet to uncover.

Belle was of the same mind as she rolled onto her back and pulled him over her, her legs opening to cushion him against her. With her help, his trousers were pushed past his hips and down to his ankles. He reached behind him and quickly ripped them off as she began doing the same with her undergarments.
At last the last vestige of their clothing was gone and the realization that there were no more barriers of any kind between them sent the lovers reeling. After all these months of yearning and wishing and dreaming were finally coming to an end.

They were going to become one.

Tilting her chin upwards, he continued dropping languid kisses on her mouth, his trembling yet to subside. Reaching up to cradle his face, Belle smiled lovingly at him, her eyes telling him not to fear. Yet, he could not help it.

Taking his hand, she trailed it down their bodies towards her center. She lightly brushed his fingertips against her core, letting him feel her arousal, as she bit her lip at the tentative touch.

He stared at her in amazement as he continued stroking her, feeling her wetness coat his fingers in this baptism of love and passion.

She wanted him.

Then Belle was holding him, guiding him to her entrance. “I love you Rumford,” she whispered reverently.

“I love you Belle,” he ardently murmured.

With a steady push, he entered Paradise.
There was no denying the astonishment, horror, disgust, and panic that filled the entire town square. No one could have predicted this grave shame or the person responsible for destroying Storybrooke’s virtue.

On the platform for the world to see was Reverend Rumford Gold, his collar ripped open and chest exposed to reveal the blistering red flesh that bore the letter ‘A’. Indeed… the good reverend was the father of Beathan French, the lover to Mistress Annabelle French.

Amongst the crowd was the woman scorned by her constituents, her hand tightly holding her son’s as she gazed upon the man she loved—now free of this terrible burden of silence. For so long he wanted to come forward, and she refused him to do so, for the sake of the Church and his followers. But as the years gone by… the price for keeping this secret was too much and he had missed so much of his son’s early years that he didn’t want to miss anymore.

“People of Storybrooke! Yes I am guilty of that carnal sin that tests the strength of all married couples, but know this—I love this woman deeply! For in my heart, she is my chosen wife by God and He has looked upon us with favor by granting us a beautiful son. What other joy can there be with the presence of a child created by love? As miraculous as it is—you! All of you have judged her with your self-righteous words and disdain and mockery. You punished her without question, and by doing so, your alienation of her has been a knife in my side. The attempts to take our son away from his mother was plunging your hands into my heart and ripping it out. Everything you’ve done to her was done to me.

“I was wrong to hold my tongue those six years ago, and despite my entire being to speak up, this brave and wonderful woman protected me. Against your persecution she wanted to keep me safe and I don’t deserve it. I am now where I belong, where I should have stood beside her and the babe. There are no more regrets. Only truth and the wish to make it all right… just as God commanded it.”

Seeking out his beloved, Gold smiled down at his beautiful Belle and quickly moved off the platform. The moment his feet touched the ground… the people parted so he could reach his family —his!—and scooped Belle up in his arms so he could kiss her properly. Six years was long enough to be without happiness, and now, now he can claim what was his and make an honest woman out of Belle.

If… she would still have him.

Laughter mixed with tears as she embraced him, her welcoming touch was all the answer he needed.
When air was demanded, Gold broke apart from her, his forehead resting against hers, as their tears mingled and fell to the ground.

“I love you Rumford,” she whispered. “I love you.”

“I love you too,” he said, the declaration never getting old to his ears. Looking at Beathan, Gold bent down so he could look at the boy levelly. “My son,” he breathed. “Beathan—Bae—my boy.”

The young boy didn’t move to hug his father right away—his faltering had Gold cringing in remorse. Of course the child will have his misgivings. Gold could not blame him for not acknowledging him all these years.

Yet, Beathan’s timid voice spoke up, loud enough for Gold to hear. “Are you really my father? Do you really love me?”

“Yes,” Gold choked, nodding. “I love you so much. I’m so proud of you.”

Beathan could not hold back the cry of “Papa!” as his small arms threw themselves around his neck. “I always wanted you to be my Papa and now you are!”

“Yes and I’m never leaving you two ever again,” Gold vowed. “Come what may… I will stand by your sides now and forever.”

And he did until death parted him.

Chapter End Notes

Next... Edward Scissorhands.
1 Edward Scissorhands Rated K+

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle befriends Rum Scissorhands. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own Edward Scissorhands or Once Upon a Time. Just taking the ideas and blending them together to give you this pure story of entertainment.

Edward Scissorhands

Today was the grand opening of the public library with its new librarian taking the lead and Belle French was ecstatic. She made a very nice display area with the recommended books of the month as well as spent most of the night making refreshments—cookies, brownies, mini cupcakes with vanilla and chocolate frosting, lemonade, and fruit punch. The banners and balloons were placed sporadically around the library, making each section festive and eye-catching.

Everything was all set to go and now she was waiting for the moment when the newly eager readers would arrive so they can dive into the books and find all sorts of adventures.

The clock almost read ten o’clock and Belle took her place by the doors. She wiped off some imaginary dust from her navy blue dress, patting down the skirt, and ran her fingers through her curls before taking a deep breath and opened the doors.

Her beaming façade fell when she was met with empty air.

Frowning, she stepped out and looked around and there wasn’t a single soul in sight. Well… maybe they forgot the library opened at ten. She went back inside.

That’s right… they’ll be lining up in no time.

xxXXxx

It was nearing six o’clock and so far Belle had a couple of families who visited with children under the age of ten where one little girl had an incident with the fruit punch. The mayor’s son also came—a sweet boy about ten-years-old and certainly had the penchant for fairy tales. Surprising really, considering who his mother was but she did hear he was adopted so maybe his kind disposition wasn’t hard to believe.

Her current neighbors—the Lucas’s—Granny and Ruby stopped by to show support. They were running a bed and breakfast as well as a diner, and Belle was staying with them until she found an apartment. Ruby even brought Mary Margaret Blanchard, an elementary teacher, and the former made plans to bring a class with her on a field trip.

A few others also came to see the new librarian and there was a particular male visitor that got on her
nerves. Belle wondered if he even knew what a book was after spending his time flexing his muscles and hovering over her. She made a point to let him know “thanks but no thanks” and kept herself busy with some card cataloguing until he left. She hoped that it would be the last she would see of Gaston Bouchard.

There was still plenty of food and drinks left over. Belle wrapped them up in Tupperware containers and poured the drinks back into their pitchers so she could put them in the refrigerator at the B&B. She counted her lucky stars that she thought ahead of bringing paper bags to carry the leftovers and stuffed the containers in them while she carried the rest to Granny’s.

Ruby and Granny weren’t at home so Belle put the extras away. She was still disappointed that the opening wasn’t as grand as she would have liked it to be and decided to take a walk.

As she roamed down Main Street, Belle looked up to see the mountain that was a few miles away from Storybrooke. On top of it was a large mansion—dark and gloomy in appearance—but also very sad since everything was boarded up. Belle was informed that it was haunted and that strange things happen up there, but no one would speak exactly what it was that bothered them.

Belle’s curiosity was instantly sparked by this location and while she had been preparing the library… she took the time to do some research to find out more about the mansion on the mountain. All she could discover was that it had belonged to an old inventor who lived alone and had died several years ago. She speculated if it was the ghost of the inventor since he was known to be a prankster, and at times, a bit mad. Perhaps he was scaring off any unwanted brownnosers.

Ruby told her that the place gave her the creeps and wished that the Council would demolish it, but Belle thought it was strangely beautiful.

She didn’t know what possessed her next, but Belle’s walk took her up the long, winding path until she reached the main gate. The bars were wide enough for her to slip through since it was currently locked and after walking further past it Belle found herself in a garden.

Immediately, her blue eyes widened in astonishment, her mouth parted, as she took in the sight in front of her.

It was… beautiful.

Various green topiaries of animals were spread throughout the grounds. Some were exotic creatures while some were mythological. Yet, they were talentedly crafted and well-taken care of. Besides the topiaries, there were flowers of all colors and shrubs that outlined the walls of the gate and the front of the mansion. It was a stark contrast compared to the mansion and Belle wondered if this was the strange occurrences that people reported. Of course, there was nothing threatening about this innocent and gorgeous landscape that it didn’t escape her that someone had to be living here.

Haunted… yeah right.

As she explored the garden, she couldn’t help but look up at mansion with its stone gray cobblestones and broken glass windows. It certainly appeared abandoned but there was no way accounting for the intricate care of the garden. A living person had to maintain it, nurture it. A ghost would be unable to commit such feats.

Then she saw it.

It had been a quick flash but she was positive she saw someone looking out the top window and Belle had no other thought but to pursue.
The door permitted her entrance and she stepped in. Like the outdoors, the interior was startling. Except where there was life bursting to its seams outside… the inside was drab and cold with its wide open space and the blanketed covered furniture and objects. Even the air smelled musty and very little light filtered through the windows.

As she moved deeper, Belle noticed what had to be the inventor’s inventions on one side of the room. Gears, tables, and all kinds of tools and equipment were thrown all over haphazardly and chaotically in addition to being shrouded with cobwebs and dust. Not knowing much about mechanics, Belle didn’t know what functions the machines might have performed, but there was no denying that the inventor had been brilliant.

Then out of the corner of her eye, Belle saw someone dash up the stairs.

“Wait!” she called and she was chasing after it. The staircase led her to a small hallway with three corridors and another set of stairs. Whatever, whoever it was, was trying to flee from her and if she had to venture a guess as to where one might try to hide… she figured up was the best option.

Taking each step carefully, Belle called out once more. “Hello? Hello! I’m sorry if I frightened you, I didn’t mean to… Hello?”

The stairs took her to the attic and it was a vast open space like below. It was completely bare that her previous assessment of someone living here was going out the door. There was no way a person could live in such conditions. Maybe the ghost thing wasn’t as crazy after all.

The roof had a gaping hole in it as sunlight covered half the attic, and as Belle circled, she saw a figure huddled in the shadows. Tilting her head to the side, she squinted so she could get a better look, but it was hard for her to discern what she was looking at.

“Hello there. My name is Belle French. I’m the librarian in town and I’m sorry to intrude, but I was on a walk and your garden is nothing I’ve ever seen before. It’s simply lovely and—“

Her voice trailed off as the figure rose from its spot and began to move towards her. It was then she caught a glint of silver and the sound of metal sharpening against each other. A smart person would have run away, but Belle stood her ground as she watched what seemed to be a man coming into the light.

He was a tall and lanky fellow with long, curly hair that was dark and skin… well, if it could be called skin, was greenish-gold… reptilian like with the way the sun captured it. His clothing was all leather, black, and tight that it could have been all one entity and eyes that were luminous and large in its amber gaze. However, it was his hands that had her full attention. The silver glint and metal sounds… those were his hands! Scissors!

Once her eyes met his directly, there was a slight ghost of a smile on his lips as he whispered, “Hey.”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: He waits for her. (Rated K)

Edward Scissorhands

From the moment she entered his life things have seemed to be a lot brighter.

He was smiling more, which the last time had been when his Papa Jeff would tell him stories and read poetry.

With Belle, she exuberate everything that was light and pure in his dark existence. The only beauty he was aware of was his plant animal friends and flowers, yet she had wormed her way into his life and brought him a little more out of his shell with each visit. She always had a smile painted on her lips, her cobalt eyes twinkling with amusement, and she greeted him like he was a long lost friend each time.

Of course, the early days of their friendship were tentative and awkward, which was mainly his fault. He didn’t know what to make of this strange creature that waltzed into his home and carried the sunlight wherever she stepped. She did most of the talking back then and there was a lot he didn’t understand, but he liked the sound of her voice. It had a soothing quality to it and it was nice to listen to another voice than his. She would ask him questions and he wasn’t sure how to answer them so he would often remain in silence. Eventually, he worked up the nerve to share something about himself and he asked her to call him Rum.

He won’t forget the first time she spoke his name. The way her mouth molded the word and her tongue tickled the ‘m’… it sent shivers down his spine and he wanted to hear her say it again and again.

Unfortunately, his wish didn’t come true but he was okay with it. She had other things to speak of instead of repeating his name. He could live with it as long as she continued to see him.

And she did.

She came almost every day and would bring snacks with her. Now, she came every other day and he knew she was busy with the library she worked at, but he hated the days when there was no Belle. It was like the flicker of light that he found would snuff out until she arrived and could relight it again.

She still brought food with her and lately she had been bringing books too. Reading was difficult for him since he never learned how to and turning a page took concentration. She was teaching him but he would rather listen to her read a story aloud. Like his Papa, Belle could make the characters come to life. She would change her voice in various octaves, giving each individual character his or her own personality. When he tried… it didn’t have the same impact and it left him in a bitter mood until Belle returned.

Only she could restore the balance and fill his head with warm memories to recall when he was once more alone.
That was the worst thing about their friendship. He hated it when she had to leave, but he couldn’t ask her to stay with him. He had nothing to offer, and frankly, he was ashamed of his home. It was dirty and bare but there was little he could do to change it. Cleaning was not an easy task for him to perform and he risked the danger of rusting his fingers with water. Yet, he wanted to try and make it good somewhat presentable for Belle.

He got into the habit of bringing fresh flowers into the mansion and arranging them in any type of container he could find as a makeshift vase. This delighted her. And since she liked flowers, Rum gave her a red rose from the garden as they walked the grounds together one glorious afternoon. She dipped into a curtsey as the ladies did in one of the classical books she read and he couldn’t stop smiling from cheek to cheek.

Another change that Belle brought in him was his sudden curiosity about the rest of the world. Before, he didn’t gave it much of thought to the world outside the mansion gates, but Belle made it seem like a mystery now and he wanted to see it for himself. He wanted to meet the people she told him about: Ruby, Granny, young Henry… Of course, there were some that he didn’t want to meet and Mayor Mills was one of them. She wasn’t very nice and she would cause Belle grief in some way or another. Belle insisted she could handle it and he had no doubt that she could, but he didn’t like that sometimes Mayor Mills would make her cry.

Yes… the world was unknown to him and he wanted to make its acquaintance with Belle at his side, but he wasn’t sure how to bring it up. He knew he wasn’t like most people and his hands might frighten someone, although Belle hadn’t been afraid when she met him. As for the others, it was hard to tell what he might find down there.

One day, he told himself. One day he will ask Belle to take him with her and show him the sights of Storybrooke and maybe even try a hamburger that she told him about.

For now, he was satisfied with waiting for her.

As he looked through the window his heart skipped a beat as he saw Belle approaching the gate. She had a basket with her and a book in her other hand.

She was here and the sky was blue just like her eyes. Everything was as it should be and Rum sprinted down the stairs to greet her.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Scissors! Rum has a nightmare and Belle gets hurt. Cue the adorable hurt/comfort feels! (Rated K+ for a little blood spill and character death)

Edward Scissorhands

It was almost Christmas and Papa Jeff was as giddy as a schoolboy… well, a schoolboy in his eighties.

For the last couple of weeks, Papa told Rum that he was putting together a wonderful present for him and then one day Rum spotted a box all wrapped nice and neatly near his Papa’s workstation. He couldn’t tear his eyes away from it, though try as he did because he was a good boy and a good boy receives presents. Yet, all morning long and well into the afternoon… Rum would stare longingly at the green paper and the red bow on top.

Why couldn’t Christmas come sooner?

It was sunset that Papa Jeff decided that he couldn’t wait either. Motioning Rum to come closer, Papa Jeff in his outdated suit and the lopsided top hat perched to one side, he carefully removed the lid of the box.

“I know it’s early but I couldn’t wait to give this to you my boy,” he told the eager man with scissors for hands.

The inventor’s excitement was rubbing off on him and Rum was happily shifting his weight with his feet, his scissor fingers tapping and rubbing with anticipation. He watched as Papa dipped his hands inside the box and pulled out two perfectly formed hands.

“You like them, don’t you?” Papa asked as he showed them off proudly. Rum couldn’t believe his eyes… hands! Actual hands just like Papa’s! And they were his…

Already his mind was whirling with the possibilities. No more will he accidentally cut himself with his sharp fingers and he will be allowed to feel and touch other people without hurting them… he could hug his Papa properly, pick simple objects up, and actually clean his room! This was quickly turning into the best day of Rum’s life.

He wanted to touch them for himself… to feel the smooth, silky contours of those deft fingers and the full roundness of the palms. To know at long last he will be finally completed and appear like any other ordinary man.

Sensing his wish, Papa moved closer with the hands towards him. “Go on. Touch them. They’re yours Rum.”

His face lit up like the Christmas lights on the staircase as Rum delicately traced the limb with one of his shorter and less sharp finger. He longed to rub his nose against it, to feel the warmness of flesh, but for now… this was a start. He would have his whole life ahead of him to become accustomed to these new hands.
His Papa was smiling broadly at him, pleased with his son’s reaction. Then… slowly, his smile began to subside as shock overcame his bloodshot eyes. His lips parted as a hoarse gasp came out, but Rum was too caught up in the moment and he couldn’t stop his awe over the wonderful hands that will soon be attached to him. At last, he flicked his gaze towards his father and started at the older man’s look of astonishment.

Confused, Rum watched as Papa began to fall forward, the hands that were beautifully crafted… slid right through his scissors. He stared in abject bewilderment at the skewered hands and then at the old man who was now lying on the floor.

His Christmas present… it was ruined! He destroyed them! What would Papa think?

Gently and hoping his Papa could repair the damage, Rum slid the plaster off his fingers and left them on the floor before going over to the fallen inventor. With the leather casing of his palm, Rum rolled his Papa over and noticed that the silly, eccentric man was asleep. Now, why would he be asleep now and not wait to go to bed?

Rum chuckled to himself and knew once he woke up he would tease his Papa about his old age catching up to him.

“Wake up Papa,” Rum said, being mindful to use the lower part of his hand to shake the inventor.

“You fell asleep. Come now. Wake up. I’m sorry but my new hands are broken. I didn’t mean to but I love them. I really do. They should be still good… I think.”

The old man did not stir.

Cocking his head to the side, Rum inspected his father and he looked all right… But it was the serene expression that didn’t sit well with him. Papa was anything but calm—always coming up with some brand new invention. Perhaps this was a new kind of game for Christmas he was playing? If so… Rum couldn’t figure out the rules and he hoped that once Papa woke he could explain it better to him.

“Papa?” He shook him once more but he didn’t move.

Biting the tip of his lower lip, Rum knew there was one sure way to wake him and he hoped he wouldn’t be too upset with him. Taking one of his fingers, he dragged the tip along Papa’s cheek as a line of red followed in its path.

There was no reaction.

Rum sat there, blinking dumbly, as he stared at his Papa. It wasn’t until dawn broke that Rum realized that Papa wasn’t going to wake up anymore.

Papa was gone.

Rum started from his bed, his breathing heavy and ragged. He heard a loud thud and looked down to find Belle on the floor, her big blue eyes appearing in almost comical proportions as she looked at the palm of her hand. It was then he noticed a slight, wet feeling and he saw dark red covering his silver finger.

Gasping, he looked back down at Belle and sure enough… she cradled her right hand where the milky white palm was bleeding.

“No!” Rum frantically looked around for something to help her bind the wound so he grabbed the first thing he could get his hands on… his bed sheet. With a snap, he cut off a strip and leaving it
draped over his finger so he wouldn’t accidentally cut it in half, he moved to kneel on the floor. It was then he realized he wouldn’t be able to help her wrap it up and tears sprung to his eyes.

He was utterly helpless, and worst of all, he hurt his only friend.

She would never forgive him. She would stop coming to see him and he will be lonely again with no one to talk to but his topiaries and his shadow. He will--

“Shh, it’s all right,” Belle cooed, her voice a gentle breeze as she carefully cupped his cheek with her uninjured hand. She rubbed her thumb in circles on his cheek, smearing the tears that were beginning to fall. “I’m okay. Really.”

She took the strip of cloth and started to dab at her wound. “See? Good as new!”

The blood was gone and it seemed to stop bleeding. Amazed, he gazed at her with wonderment and she giggled with a light pink stain across her face. “I’m a fast bleeder and it was just a scratch. No harm done.”

Her palm looked all right and there was a small indent at where he cut her, but for the most part… Belle wasn’t in danger of bleeding to death so it was a small victory he had to suppose.

Sighing in relief, Rum was able calm his racing heart that his friend was all right. Belle will still come to see him. He won’t be lonely again. She will continue to be his sun in the darkness of the mansion.

Speaking of sun… Rum looked out the window and noticed it was dark out. Belle always came during the day. She never came at night.

“Belle?” he questioned, not sure what to make of this late night visit.

“I’m sorry Rum. I didn’t mean to wake you but you were having a nightmare… I’m fine, though. Honestly. I just forgot that’s all,” she said, thinking he was questioning her about how she was in his room.

He shook his head. “It’s not that. It’s night and—“ His voice trailed off and her blush deepened as she realized what he was trying to get at.

“Oh! Sorry… I just had a hard time sleeping,” she replied. “I had an upsetting phone call and, well, sleep is the last thing on my mind.” Pushing a loose strand of hair behind her ear, Belle continued. “In fact, it’s why I wanted to come here. I needed to talk to you beforehand and I didn’t want you to worry when I didn’t come tomorrow. You see, my father got into a car accident. A drunk driver hit him and he’s going to be all right, but he’s still in the hospital and I have to leave for Sydney for a week just so I can be there when he’s discharged and help him around the house.”

She nibbled her lower lip as she finished, quietly waiting for Rum’s reaction to her news. There were a few things he didn’t understand—such as drunk driver, car accident, Sydney—but it didn’t sound good and Belle’s concern for her father also worried him so he knew this was important to her that she should go. He also couldn’t help the selfish feeling that she came to tell him so he wouldn’t be worried when she left. Was he happy she had to go? No. But did he understand? Of course. Because what if her Papa didn’t wake up like his did? She had to go to make sure he will wake up.

“Oh, Okay,” he responded. “When will you go?”

“In the morning,” she told him. “I brought you some goodies. They’re downstairs and I left a couple of books I think you might like. I know you said you wanted to read Frankenstein so I brought the children’s version first and then we can read the actual novel when I return. How does that sound?”
“I would like that,” he said, smiling. “Belle?”

“Yes?”

He paused. Would she think him silly if he asked her this? Breathing deeply, he asked, “C-could you do me a favor? When you come back, can you tell me that your Papa woke up?”

It was an odd request and one that Belle couldn’t fathom what would make him ask her such a thing, but the look on his face told her that this was important to him. So who was she to refuse such an innocent question?

“I will,” she promised and that relieved him. Nodding his head, he murmured, “Good. Because I know what it’s like when your Papa doesn’t wake up. I want him to wake up so you will be happy.”

This new detail rattled her and she wondered if he was referring to the old inventor who lived here. She wanted to ask him, to find out more, but she knew that right now was not the time to pry.

Silently, she bobbed her head in agreement. Once he was satisfied that she would do that for him, Rum helped her as best as he could to her feet. His body jolted when she slipped her arms around his waist, her face nestled into his chest as her curls tickled his nose.

It was… pleasant this feeling. This gesture. And he longed to put his arms around her too, but he didn’t want to hurt her any more than he did and kept his hands at an arm’s length away from her.

She pulled back and there was a slight look of disappointment, but understanding filled her eyes.

“I’ll miss you Rum,” she whispered. “Take care, all right? I’ll see you when I come back.”

And then she was gone.

Going back to bed, Rum didn’t have any more nightmares. Instead… his dreams were filled with a certain petite brunette and the scent of roses in his head.
Edward Scissorhands

It was another slow day at the diner. Although, they were the only diner in Storybrooke, it shouldn’t have been this slow, but alas, it was.

Gritting her teeth, Ruby began wiping down the counter for the third time. The last thing she wanted was for Granny to jump on her case for not being productive. Then again… how could she when there weren’t any customers?

Snorting softly to herself, she finished her last circular rotation and stepped back to admire the pristine white counter winking back at her. Now what to do next? She wondered and frowned at the floor. That should be next on her cleaning list, but Ruby really didn’t feel like grabbing the mop and bucket in the back. She’ll hold off on that for tomorrow.

The bell chimed as the door opened and Ruby sent up a silent prayer of thanks before turning to see who it was.

“Hiya Ruby!” greeted Ariel, a bubbly natural redhead (the color that Ruby would kill to have), as she plopped herself down at the counter seat. Looking around, she whistled low. “Slow, huh?”

“You have no idea. I was thinking about stabbing myself in the eye with either the fork or the knife. Thanks to you… now I don’t have to make that decision.”

“Happy to oblige!” Ariel chirped. “But for later… I would go with the spoon. It’s the least likely chosen object and will make for a grand surprise.”

Ruby laughed. “I’ll keep that in mind. So what’ll it be? Your usual?”

Ariel nodded. “What can I say? Love me some fish n’ chips!”

“Coming up,” Ruby said and handed her, her glass of water with lemon. As Ariel sipped her water she noticed Ruby looking off to the side with her hip jutted out as she leaned against the counter. “There she goes again.”

“Hmm?” Ariel replied, facing the direction Ruby was looking at. “Belle? What do you mean?”

“Haven’t you noticed lately that Belle has been disappearing for a couple of hours almost every day?” Ruby whispered conspiratorially.

“You have no idea. I was thinking about stabbing myself in the eye with either the fork or the knife. Thanks to you… now I don’t have to make that decision.”

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“Haven’t you noticed lately that Belle has been disappearing for a couple of hours almost every day?” Ruby whispered conspiratorially.

“Not off-handedly, no,” Ariel said, shaking her head.

“Well, I have. Once she closes up the library or today since it’s already closed… she goes to the grocery store and will come out with one bag, always one bag, and then she either walks or takes her
car and goes towards the mountain. But the thing is… that grocery bag is never with her when she returns.”

“Ohhh,” Ariel sighed. “The Case of the Missing Grocery Bag is afoot Watson!”

“I’m serious,” Ruby told her, her brow arching.

“Well, I think it’s obvious,” the redhead replied as a matter of fact. “She gets herself a snack and eats it when she gets hungry. C’mon Ruby. Everybody does that. Belle isn’t any different.”

“You’re not getting it Ariel,” the waitress scoffed. “She goes up to that mountain. The only one with the haunted mansion. No one ever goes up there unless it’s a dare, but even then… that place gives me the creeps, yet there she goes all the time. I warned her about it, but you know how her damn curiosity gets.”

Ariel shrugged. “I’m still missing the point, but I don’t see anything wrong with it. Maybe she likes the solitude. Let’s face it… here nothing happens without the whole town knowing your business. She’s not used to the small-town life like us so she probably wants some privacy. That’s actually a good idea, come to think of it. No one will ever think twice about going up there for anything so it’s the perfect place to get away from spying eyes and ears.”

“Or… the perfect rendezvous with a lover,” Ruby smirked as she waggled her eyebrows.

“Somehow I think if Belle was seeing someone… we would know.”

“Not unless it’s someone she doesn’t want us to know.” Ruby pressed her tongue against her teeth as her smirk widened. “Think about it. An illicit love affair. That’s the juiciest bit of gossip that most people would want to sink their teeth into. Of course, I wouldn’t do that to Belle. She’s one of my best friends, but I wonder who it might be.”

Both women contemplated this and Ariel’s smile blossomed. “I kind of like the idea of a secret romance. It sounds so magical and something you would expect from a movie.”

“Naah. Too fairy tale like. It’s probably something darker, edgier. You know what they say about the quiet ones and it’s quite possible our sweet, innocent Belle has a dark side lurking within her.”

Ariel rolled her eyes. “Uh-huh. And what would this supposed ‘dark’ Belle do?”

“Well…” Ruby dragged out.

*Her name is not Belle. No… Belle sounds too childish, too goody-goody. She needed another name… something exotic, something mysterious… Lacey. That’s it—the allure of something provocative, a whisper in the air that promises all kinds of naughty things.*

*She drives up to the mansion and before she gets out… she changes into Lacey. Gone are the conservative librarian blouse and modest skirt. She wears a short, black dress that exposes a lot of back and accentuates her hips with a pair of killer stilettos that really brings attention to the legs. Her eye shadow is smokier, her lips are redder, and her curly tresses are pulled to the side to expose her neck.*

*She is dress to kill and she is prepared to leave behind a trail of broken hearts.*

*She steps out of the car and struts inside the mansion where a party is underway. It’s basically The Rabbit Hole, but there is a whole lotta stuff happening that won’t be found in the quiet town of Storybrooke. Smoke fills the air as the jukebox plays something heavy to set the mood just right for*
someone looking for trouble.

And Lacey is looking all right.

She sashays to the bartender and orders a hard drink—nothing dainty for our girl—a Black Russian and knocks it down like water. This impresses a couple guys standing there and she orders another one and kicks it back just like the first one. While that should knock some people on their asses, not our Lacey, she’s used to it and blows a kiss as she takes her next drink over to the pool table where a high stakes game is underway.

Not one to sit and be part of the crowd, Lacey bumps one of the players out of the way and takes his cue stick and lines up the ball for her first punch. She gets it in the hole on the first try and wins the game. But are they mad? No… she’s looking fine and they want some that so they will be nice and suck up to her in hopes she will grant one of them her favors.

She plays a couple another rounds and pretty much every male is standing at attention from the way she would bend over to give her shot. She gives them a little wiggle for the hell of it and earns a collective moan from her admirers. Once the game is over, the show is over and they are all disappointed that Lacey tells them she’s done for now. It was fun but now she has something else in mind and she’s looking at him.

He’s new. But she’s noticing he’s been coming around the last several times and every time he sits off to the side, in the corner, and watches. She can’t make out his face, but she can see he’s wearing a very expensive suit—Armani or Dolce and Gabbana—it’s hard to discern from the dim lights, though it’s clear he has money. He has a glass of whiskey sitting on his table and she gets an idea.

She orders a whiskey and nonchalantly walks in his direction. She makes it seem like she isn’t heading his way and avoids looking directly at him, but she watches from the corner of her eye and she can tell he is watching her right back. She sucks in her lower lip and he grabs his glass tight.

She saunters closer to his table and just as she is about to turn away at the last second… his arm reaches out to take hold of her wrist. She’s not startled… she’s the opposite. She lowers her lashes and bats them at him as he gruffly orders her to sit next to him.

She obeys but this is the only time she will listen. He will be taking orders from her soon enough and she only have to abide her time for the right moment.

They drink their respective whiskies and she notices that he has eyes like a wolf and a grin like one too from the way he smiles confidently at her. He’s good-looking and has this aura about him that is reeking of power and danger and she knew this was the one she has been searching for in this dump.

It doesn’t take much but the tables are turned and she’s pulling on his tie like a leash as she leads him to one of the rooms upstairs for some playtime…

“Okay, I think that’s enough Ruby.” Ariel interrupted as Ruby shook herself out of her reverie.

“That’s the kind of scenario I can see you doing. Not Belle. Not even her ‘dark’ self if you will.”

The tall waitress glared at her friend. “Well, I think it would be totally unexpected from her. There could be a she-wolf hiding under those prim clothes of hers and that’s the only time she lets her wild side out.”

“See? You think every person has to be primal in some way. Belle’s classy. It wouldn’t be something sordid like what you described.”
“Okay Miss-Know-It-All, what do you think Belle does when she goes up to that mountain?” Ruby asked archly.

“Let’s see now…”

She pulls up in front of the mansion and her stomach gets this nervous but excited feeling. She has been waiting all day for this and it’s not much that they have only a couple of stolen hours, but it will do until they are ready to become public.

As soon as she steps out of the car he is already there to greet her. He pulls her into a hug, lifting her feet off the ground, as he twirls her around. Giggling, she holds him tight and once her feet touch the earth… they’re kissing as if their lives depended upon it. It’s the kind of kiss that could cause earthquakes and fireworks exploding. Yet that annoying thing called breathing gets in the way and they have to pull apart, but they are panting and smiling at one another. It’s a feeling that never gets old and never seems to subside.

She reaches into the car and pulls out the single grocery bag. “I have snacks!” she tells him, and together, they go inside the mansion. Already he has candles lit everywhere and there’s a trail of rose petals that leads to a romantic table setting and a bottle of wine.

“You keep spoiling me, you know,” she warns him and he laughs.

“I like spoiling you,” he says. “You deserve it.”

She blushes because she is still unused to the flattery compliments he gives her and he grins wider because he finds it endearing. They share a simple meal with her snack foods and they sip on the wine as they hold hands and talk about their days and their dreams for the future.

They have a reason to keep their relationship hidden. He’s not someone that people will understand why she loves him and he often wonders what does she see in him? He’s older and probably ugly according to some standards. Yet, she looks into his face and sees something more than the rest of the world cannot see.

He fears he will ruin her life and he wants to break it off, but he can’t seem to pull himself away from her. They are drawn to each other ever since that accidental meeting when she stumbled upon him at the mansion. They both were looking for an escape and they found it here where everyone else fears it. And now they meet for these little dates until it is time for them to return to their separate worlds until the next time they meet again.

“And that’s how you do it,” Ariel said with gusto. “I didn’t miss the grocery bag unlike you.”

“Whatever. At least mine doesn’t sound like some cliché romance novel.”

“What is?”

The third voice chimed in causing the other two women to sputter and gaped at the girl in question for the entire conversation.

Belle looked at her friends’ faces bemusedly. “Come on. What were you two talking about just now?”

“Oh, nothing,” both lied at the same time. Giving each other worried glances, Ruby and Ariel forced a smile as their friend looked at them unconvincingly.

Sighing, Belle said, “Probably something I wouldn’t want to know, right?”
“Oh yes.” “Definitely.”

“Okay…” Belle said. “Enjoy whatever it is you two were talking about. I’ll have an iced tea to go please Ruby. And make it a large one.”

“No problem. Large? Not your small one?” Ruby asked.

Belle bit her lip. “No. I want a large today. Just thirsty for an iced tea.”

“Coming up.”

The drink order was filled and Belle paid for it. As she picked it up, she casually added, “Do you think I could get an extra straw?”

“Yeah. You sharing with someone?” the waitress teased as Belle’s face turned into an interesting shade of pink.

“Um, no, no. Just that I think I should start carrying extra in the library when I have a group of students coming on a field trip.”

“I see,” Ruby said sending Ariel a pointed look.

“Thanks. I’ll talk to you two later!” Belle snatched the extra straw and was gone before they could blink.

Ariel gave Ruby a knowing look and the waitress grumbled, “All right. You win.”
Edward Scissorhands

“Look at you! You’re nothing but a freak of nature!”

For the last several minutes, this man had been following him as he walked on Main Street to meet Belle at Granny’s Diner. There was a Christmas party and Belle forgot a plate of cookies she baked at her apartment by the library. He offered to get them—always willing to help his beloved Belle. He was fortunate that the door was unlocked so he could easily slip in and grab them. Of course, grabbing wasn’t the right word for him. He had to balance the plate within the crook of his arms so the plate wouldn’t shatter.

That was the problem about having scissors for hands… it made certain tasks difficult to do, but as long as he concentrated… he could do the simple and mundane tasks.

Though, it was proving to be challenging with this man following him and spitting horrible things at his back.

Both Belle and Papa Jeff told him that if anyone said mean things to him he should ignore it. There was no point in arguing over something as petty as words. It just meant that the person didn’t understand him. And after living alone for some odd years… Rum didn’t have much experience with bullies. Belle had been so kind, so nurturing that when she asked if he wanted to come down to her world, he had been eager to jump at the opportunity.

He assumed everyone would be like her.

In the beginning, there was some panic about him but that all ended when Belle took it upon herself to introduce him to the people she knew. Afterwards, the fears subsided and everyone gave him smiles and was quite friendly to him. Except for Regina Mills but she was like that to everyone and Belle told him not to take it personally. So he didn’t.

However, this person was not like Belle’s friends and he wasn’t Mayor Mills. Rum didn’t know this person, but he certainly knew Rum.

A past lesson about not talking to strangers from Papa Jeff entered his mind so he kept his mouth locked firmly together and continued his careful shuffling with the plate nestled to his chest. Belle was counting on him to return with the cookies and he wouldn’t let her down.

“Hey! I’m talking to you!”

Rum continued his silent treatment, and then froze when the man suddenly appeared in front of him, his body swaying with an empty bottle in his hand. His breath was rancid and Rum stood there, petrified, not sure what to do. Papa Jeff and Belle never told him what to do in a situation like this.
Instinctively, his body went rigid; his scale-like face went pale as the snow on the sidewalk, as he warily watched the other man.

“You’re mute now? No… I’ve heard you speak. You’re being rude man. All’s I wants to do is have a little chat.” His tone sounded sincere but there was something in his eyes… this glasslike glaze that sent chills down Rum’s spine.

“E-Excuse me,” Rum stammered, his voice cracking.

Placing his hand by his ear, the man lurched forward and Rum took a step back. “What was that? What did you say?”

“Excuse me,” Rum said a little bit louder and now his teeth were chattering from the cold. All he wanted was to be by Belle’s side again. He wished he was at the diner.

“Oops!” The man moved his arm and slapped the plate of cookies from Rum’s grasp. Rum watched in horror as the plate collided with the concrete, breaking into a million tiny pieces, and the cookies landing all over the snowy ground. When his eyes shifted back to the man, he was grinning lopsidedly. “My mistake,” he told Rum. “Oh well. It wouldn’t have happened if you were holding it with your hands. But you can’t.”

Rum bit his quivering lip to keep from crying. Why was this person being so mean to him? Did he not realize how long it took Belle to bake those cookies? Now, no one can enjoy her delicious treat! Just imagining the look of disappointment on her face only made the back of his eyes burn.

“How pathetic!” he sneered. “They’re just cookies. No need to cry over them like a baby. Unless you thought you could impress her or something, huh? Belle right?”

At the sound of her name, Rum let out a whimper as he wordlessly nodded. Belle was going to be upset.

“Unbelievable. You’re a freak. Nothing more than a perverted looking man. Do you honestly think Belle could like someone like you when she could like someone like me?”

Rum didn’t reply but the look on his face must have given him away as the other man barked in laughter. “You can’t even touch her! So why would you even bother her?”

His words were slurring and Rum took another step back. But it didn’t stop from hitting its target with those cruel words. And he was right… He couldn’t touch Belle not without drawing blood. Memories of hurting Belle in his home when he had that nightmare came back and Rum felt a tear slid down his cheek. He never wanted to bring harm to her and he had taken great strides to ensure he wouldn’t whenever his hands were too close to her, but sometimes… he wished he could hold her like a normal man can.

Like this man could.

“She doesn’t need you. So why don’t you go back to that mountain of yours. That’s where you belong… away from all of us. Belle’s better off without some monster breathing down her neck.”

Monster?

He never saw himself as one, not that he ever had reason to. If anything, he saw himself as incomplete, which was how Papa Jeff described him. He wondered if he should correct the other man, but he was stumbling now and Rum feared he could cause himself harm. So he tried to do the right thing.
“You might need to lie down sir,” Rum said and the man burst out laughing.

“You’re kidding me, right?” Then without warning, he shoved Rum. Rum stumbled back but caught his balance as he stared at him in confusion. “Come now. Come on. Fight me. You want Belle so much then prove it!”

“I don’t want to fight. I don’t—“

Rum was cut off with another forceful push and this time… he did fall to the ground. Holding his hands out in front of him, Rum knew the other man was unstable but he didn’t want to hurt him… not unless he had to. He hoped that the sight of his scissor fingers would deter him from trying to push him again. Instead, it had the opposite affect and the man grinned manically at him.

“That’s right. Use those scissors of yours. Show me what you got!”

When Rum didn’t react right away, the man grabbed the neck of his shirt and raised his fist in the air. A scream broke out and stopped the man from punching him. Before Rum knew it, Belle magically appeared at his side and she was pulling the man off of him.

“What are you doing Gaston?!” she shouted, jabbing him in the chest again. “My God! You’re drunk…”

“Hey Belle… I was telling this freak to back off…”

“What—?” She turned to see Rum still sitting on the ground and the broken plate and cookies next to him. Then something clicked and she jerked back to look at Gaston. “You drunken fool. Why did you hurt him? He did nothing to you!”

“Hurt him? Belle! He hurt me!” Gaston lifted part of his sleeve to show a line of blood blossoming from his arm. “I was only defending myself!”

Rum’s eyes widened in fear. He didn’t hurt him! He didn’t mean to! The man must have cut himself on one of his fingers when he knocked the plate from his hands.

“I’m sorry,” Rum said and Gaston pointed at him triumphantly.

“You hear that Belle? He admits it!”

“You know what? How about I call Graham to escort you home?” Belle said instead, planting herself between the two men. “You need to cool off Gaston.”

“Wha—?” Gaston stared at her incredulously. “Did you not hear what I said? Graham needs to arrest this son of a—“

“Don’t you go there!” Belle snapped. “He did nothing! You, on the other hand, need to sober up. Go or else I will call the police.”

“You’re taking his side Belle?” Gaston continued hysterically. “Look at him! He’s—“

“If you finish that statement, then I will knock you flat on your ass,” Belle warned him, her blue eyes stone cold. “I don’t know what you planned on gaining here Gaston by picking on Rum, but let me tell you this… you leave him alone or else.”

“Belle—“

“No! Don’t you dare say my name! Just leave Gaston.”
If Rum had to describe how this Gaston looked right now, then he looked like one of those cartoon fishes in Papa Jeff’s books. Stealing another look at him, Gaston narrowed his gaze. “This isn’t over.”

“Go Gaston!” Belle shouted and he slowly turned on his heel as he began to walk away. Letting out the air she was holding, Belle turned and helped Rum on his feet. “Are you okay Rum?” she asked tentatively, searching his face for any injuries.

“I’m fine Belle,” he assured her. “But your cookies…”

She glanced down at the mess and sighed. “Well, at least it’s a casualty I rather have instead of something happening to you.” Tenderly, she cupped his left cheek and smiled. “I’m glad you’re all right Rum. Now… how about we go back to that party?”

It had been strenuous the last couple of days… ever since the accident involving Gaston but Belle was confident that the town would see that it had been in self-defense and welcome Rum back. Even Graham had agreed, although he had to keep quiet about it until the matter was investigated. At least Belle had him as one of her champions.

Rum was back safely inside his mansion on the mountain and the last thing he said to her was to go and be happy. How could she when he wasn’t there beside her? Believe it or not, Rum had changed her life in so many ways.

He was her best friend.

He was…

She didn’t know how it happened or when but it was something she felt all along and never realized it until now. She cared for him, yes… but this went beyond caring. This was something deeper and it wasn’t until the moment that she feared she would never see him again that she discovered how far her feelings truly went.

She never told him…

Well, that had to be corrected.

Belle snuck out of Storybrooke and ran all the way up to the mountain. She had to see him! She had to tell him!

The gate was closed but Belle was able to push it open with the adrenaline running through her as she headed to the massive front door. It wasn’t before long that she was racing up the stairs to the attic where she first found him… where she was hoping he would be there.

Sure enough, he was there… Standing in the center of the room, staring out at the gaping hole in the roof at the moonlight and stars, was Rum. His hair was still matted and unruly and his clothes had seen better days… and his hands… those beautiful scissor hands were catching the silver light and reflecting it back.

Belle let out a tiny sob, startling him. Yet, when those big, amber eyes widened in recognition… she knew she was where she belonged.

Smiling through tears, Belle approached him, her hand reaching to run through his hair. As soon as
her fingers grazed his face, Rum shuddered and let out a soft sigh. Taking it as an invitation, Belle moved closer to him until she could wrap her arms around his neck. His scissor hands were away from her but as soon as she tucked her head underneath his chin, she whispered, “Hold me Rum. It’s okay… please hold me.”

Slowly and gently, his hands clasped behind her and she almost let out another sob at how he was finally touching her.

“I love you Rum.”
7 Edward Scissorhands Rated T

Chapter Summary

The Daughter of santan Prompted: Scissors!Rum and Gaston meet again. This time… things get messy. (Rated T for violence, sexual innuendos, and character death)

Edward Scissorhands

Stumbling on the sidewalk, Gaston swallowed the last swig of his beer and crushed the can before dropping it on the street. Once again he was turned down by the infuriatingly beauty Belle French. Why in the world couldn’t she see that they belonged together? He was gorgeous and she was a looker… they were simply simpatico and she continuously refused to accept it.

What the Hell was her problem, anyway?

He paused as he looked up from Main Street and saw the large, spiraling mansion up on the mountain that overlooked Storybrooke. Of course… that scissor-handed freak that followed her around like some deluded pup. Once again, Gaston’s ire was sparked anew at the last time he crossed paths with the freak of nature. He had knocked a plate of cookies from those daggers and just before Gaston could really show him a lesson about messing what was his… Belle came to that thing’s rescue.

Never in his life had he been utterly humiliated to have the woman of his dreams berate him like he was some child. And all the while he was the victim since the monstrosity saw it fit to cut him! Grant it, it was only a scratch but Gaston knew an assault when he saw one and once he sobered up… he paid Graham a visit at the Sheriff’s station. After he thoroughly explained the situation and showed the injured hand as evidence, Gaston fought to maintain a composed countenance while he smugly grinned inwardly as Graham rose from his seat. This was it! The Sheriff was going to arrest that non-man and he would have Belle all to himself.

He hadn’t expected the Sheriff to look him square in the eye and say, “Seems to me you provoked him Gaston. And seriously… it’s a tiny scratch. I had paper-cuts that size and you don’t see me pressing charges with the paper company. Besides, an accident is an accident. I’ve seen Rum cut his face and he doesn’t whine about it. Let it go Gaston. The only thing wounded is your pride.”

Even the Sheriff was fooled by that inhuman thing!

It seemed everyone was charmed by this scissor-handed man and it only angered him more that only he could see past all that and see what that thing truly was: a perverted version of a man. How could Storybrooke be so blind? Even the mayor! While she hadn’t been welcoming at first… it seemed that Rum Scissorhands grew on her and she allowed her son, Henry, to take him as show and tell to school.

What was this world coming to?!

Well, Gaston saw only one possible solution to this problem:

He had to show the world what this thing really was.
Glancing down at his empty hands, he scowled. More beer was needed if he was going to do this right.

As he changed directions to head back to Tom Clark’s pharmacy, Gaston happened to notice his intended target stealing across the main road and walking in the direction to the mountain.

Slowly, his lips curved into a smile. It would seem fate was on his side tonight.

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Rum wanted to give something nice to Belle. After all, she had so graciously opened her home to him and while it had been many months since he stepped down from the mansion on the mountain… he wanted to express his gratitude to Belle for opening his life to new opportunities.

He thought about buying her something as he had seen people do on television, but shopping was difficult for him to do with no wallet or money. Anything he earned from cutting people’s edges and topiaries were basically sweets and sugary goods, and the little money he did receive he donated to Belle’s library. She insisted he didn’t have to but he knew how much the library meant to her, and Rum did love spending his time there, pouring over some grand adventurous book about the world. He was also looking at some medical journals too about his condition to see if anyone else had his unusual pair of hands. So far, he had been unable to find one, but he kept looking regardless. Rum figured if he did find someone with a similar infliction, then he would look to see what they did to correct it and do the same for himself.

He wanted to do this in secret as a sort of surprise. Plus, he didn’t want Belle to think he had to rely on her all the time. He wanted to prove to her he was quite capable of doing things on his own so perhaps… one day… he could take care of her like she had for him.

A smile flitted across his lips. The first thing he would do with hands, actual hands, was to cook Belle a delicious dinner. He had seen many cooking programs to learn the basics and he believed he could replicate a romantic meal.

Until then, Rum decided on getting her some flowers. He knew how much she loved the ones by his mansion. And while he did look (in passing) at the florist shop, Rum didn’t see his flowers there. Truthfully, he didn’t like what they in the windows. So here he was walking back to his mansion during the moon-lit sky to surprise Belle with a fresh bouquet when she woke up.

He made remarkable good timing in arriving at the top and immediately began strolling through the gardens to find the perfect blossoms. This process, of course, had to be meticulous and Rum was as gentle as he could be in cutting the stems at the right length and nestle them so he can drop them in a basket he procured from Ruby. He borrowed it while he trimmed topiaries because sometimes his customers wanted him to cut their flowers and it was the only place he could put them in for safe keeping. He assumed Ruby wouldn’t mind during this errand and it wasn’t like she used it anyways.

He collected some yellow acacias, almond blossoms (white with a splash of rosy pink), and white gardenias. It was a start and as he ventured deeper into one of the mazes, Rum to his delight, found a hidden bud attached to a bush at the end. Peering closely at it, he recognized it as a red rose.

Papa Jeff liked roses and he would often wear one on his lapel. Rum always liked the vibrant color of the petals and he would ask his Papa where it came from. And Papa Jeff would respond in kind, “It’s one of my secret stashes.” But he would never tell Rum where they could be found or if they even grew by the mansion. Rum knew he had walked these paths millions of times and he never once came across a rose bush. Perhaps, this was a sign from his beloved Papa Jeff that he approved of Belle.
Oh! Rum knew his father would have liked her!

Being mindful, Rum snipped the branch the rose was on and carried it safely to his basket. Satisfied with his present, Rum wormed his hand and arm through the loops of the basket and raised it.

Grinning broadly now, Rum waltzed out of the maze with a light skip to his step. Belle would be so pleased when she finds these beauties! He was already envisioning her reaction—a slight intake of breath as she gasped happily, her hands clapped together over her heart, as her blue eyes twinkled with such happiness. So preoccupied with his image of Belle, Rum didn’t notice he had company until a figure darted out in front of him, blocking him from the gate.

Blinking with rapid surprise, Rum froze in his tracks as he saw Gaston and another man standing before him. Gaston seemed to sway on his feet as he did the last time Rum encountered him and the other man also looked a bit dazed as well.

“Hello,” Rum said, swallowing thickly. “Nice night, huh?”

He was anxiously looking over their shoulders to the sleeping town below. Never had he realized how small Storybrooke looked until now or how isolated. Belle was down there, alone and asleep, and Rum wished he was at her house already.

The other man seemed to pull something from behind him and Rum saw it was a cell phone. Why did they have it trained on him?

“Get it ready!” barked Gaston, ignoring Rum’s question. His companion nodded and aimed it towards Rum. “I’m set,” he had said to Gaston as the drunken man began to take a step towards Rum.

“What do you have there?” Gaston asked, trying to sneak a peek at the basket. Rum quickly shielded it as best as he could with his free scissor hand.

“It’s n-n-nothing,” Rum stammered. “I have to go Gaston. It’s getting late—“

Gaston interrupted with laughter. “This is rich. Do you have a curfew or something?”

“No,” Rum answered slowly. “But I am tired and you look like you need some sleep too.”

The cameraman chortled as Gaston tossed him a nasty look, shutting him up at once. Then he fixated his stare onto Rum. “You think you’re so witty, dontcha?”

“I didn’t mean to—“ But Rum couldn’t finish his sentence as Gaston continued to advance towards him.

“I was foolish to not do this properly,” Gaston went on. “I’m going to give you a chance. You see… in this world there are certain rules and certain ways to go about doing things. We’re men, you and I, and it seems only fair we settle it as men do.”

Rum looked at him with confusion. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Belle you idiot!” Gaston retorted. “You like Belle, I like Belle. So the only decent thing we can do is let the best one take the prize. I challenge you to a fight.”

“A fight?” Rum repeated in disbelief, dropping the basket at his feet. “I don’t think so—“

“Backing out?” Gaston taunted. “Only cowards back out. I thought Belle meant something to you.”
“She does,” Rum argued. “But not like—“

“So what’s the problem? We duke it out and whoever wins gets the girl. Seems fair to me.”

It did except for one thing.

Rum looked at his hands and back at the unarmed Gaston. Not that it would mean Rum would automatically win, but he knew the last time they crossed paths Gaston got hurt and the last thing Rum wanted to do was hurt anyone (even Gaston) and earn Belle’s disapproval.

“I see,” Gaston said. “You’re afraid you have the one up on me. Well, I can change that.”

Gaston reached into his back pocket and pulled out a slim handle. He flicked it as a long silver knife came out. Twirling it in front of his face, Gaston looked back at Rum with a smirk. “It looks equal now.”

This was madness!

Rum could smell it on his breath that Gaston was deep in his cups and Belle had a word for it… drunk! He was drunk and uneasy with his balance and Rum didn’t like it one bit. And that man with the cell phone also made him nervous. What was he going to do?

“Don’t worry about him,” Gaston insisted, waving his hand nonchalantly. “Just look at me. There you go. Now, what do you say? We fight for Belle?”

As much as Rum would like prove himself worthy of Belle’s hand, he knew this wasn’t the right way about it. Belle wouldn’t like to have them fight over her. It was hearing her soft and gentle voice in his head that Rum made up his mind and he stood his guard as he shook his head.

“No. I will not fight you Gaston.”

Gaston’s jaw dropped. Clearly, it wasn’t the answer he expected. “Too bad Scissor-Freak. We are doing this.”

“No. Belle wouldn’t like it,” Rum said.

“Belle wouldn’t like it,” Gaston mimicked in a high-pitch tone. “This is not about what Belle likes. This is about what she deserves. And she doesn’t deserve you!”

He lunged at Rum, swinging the knife close to Rum’s face, almost missing his nose as the scissor-handed man ducked out of the way. Rum held both his hands up, not offensively, but hopefully as a deterrent in case Gaston forgot what his hands were made up of.

“I don’t want to fight you,” Rum repeated again. This time a bit more forceful as Gaston circled around him.

Gaston wiped his brow with the sleeve of his shirt, and then tossed the blade back and forth with his hands. “You make me sick,” he spat. “You’re not even a real man yet you tricked everyone into liking you, especially Belle. I don’t get it. I don’t see it.”

Rum glanced warily at him and the other man. He still didn’t understand what was going on and it only made him all the more frightened. He got that Gaston was angry at him, but why he didn’t know. He never spoke to him or trimmed his landscaping. He didn’t do anything that Rum deemed that would be considered offensive or rude. Perhaps it was because he didn’t befriend Gaston before? Could that be the reason for his animosity? But Gaston seemed to insist it was about Belle.
Did he think that Belle couldn’t be friends with both men?

Believing he unlocked the real reason for Gaston’s behavior, Rum forced himself to give him a friendly smile. “I think I got it. Gaston, I’m sorry if you think my friendship with Belle interferes with yours. I’m sure if we talked about it, then we could spend the same amount of time together. I’ve seen Ruby and Ariel do it all the time. They call it Girls’ Night but I’m sure they won’t mind including you too.”

Gaston’s friend guffawed, which Gaston shot him a nasty glare. “That’s not what I’m talking about you moron,” he sneered. “Belle’s mine. I saw her first and I’m best looking guy in this whole freaking town. You’re an ugly freak with a bunch of kitchen utensils as fingers. I can show her a real good time. What can you do? Be an appliance?”

Without warning, Gaston lunged again and this time… Rum was too late to duck. His knife ran across his cheek, igniting his face on fire. For a minute, Rum stood there in shock as he felt wet drops trailing down his neck. In all his years he had his fair share of nicks and cuts, but never had he felt this kind of excruciating pain. It was like his flesh was seared from the bone and he was too scared to even check to see if he even had a face.

Seeing his opponent’s distraction, Gaston used it as another opportunity to get another jab. Rum cried out as he favored his side, collapsing to his knees as it hurt so badly. Tearfully, he gazed up at his attacker who now wore this wild look about him.

Breathing heavily, Gaston couldn’t help the satisfaction at seeing this godforsaken abnormality on his knees. He was so pathetic. Crying and whimpering like a little baby, not even fighting back like a real man would do. This is what Belle was attracted to?

“Coward,” he jeered, swinging his foot out and swiftly kicking Rum in the gut, knocking him to the ground. “Come on! Get up! It was only a scratch! Get up!”

Rum struggled to stand but Gaston losing his patience delivered another kick… this time to his uninjured side. Rum couldn’t help it as he yelped in pain, trembling all over. Why was Gaston hurting him? Didn’t he see he needed help?

Yet, Gaston wasn’t done as he continued to harangue him with insulting words and slurs mixed in with spit and a couple more kicks. Rum doubled-over, trying to curl into himself to prevent the pain from spreading, but it wouldn’t stop. Over and over the fire continued its fiery blaze as he was instantly aware of every inch of his body. When was this going to end?

“Hey man…”

Gaston whirled around to the onlooker who was now looking green. “What!?”

“Don’t you think that’s enough? I mean… he’s not fighting back. I think he gets the point not to mess with your girl.”

Gaston turned on him, his finger pointing threateningly. “I’m not leaving until I get proof about this troll. Keep that phone on him. When he gets up start filming. It’s not that difficult.”

Shaking his head, the younger man turned back to face his prey and couldn’t help but laugh as he watched Rum crawl on his elbows and knees to get away. Like he could at that rate...

Gaston stepped over him so he was standing in front, blocking Rum from his home. “Get up,” he commanded. “Do you hear me? I said, get up!” He kicked the loose dirt in Rum’s face, grinning as he coughed and choked. When Rum didn’t move, Gaston bent down and seized a handful of his hair
and yanked hard to lift his face towards him. Disgust filled Gaston’s features. “Look at you. You can’t fight me. How in the world do you think Belle will like you now? Real men fight for what they want. Right now… you’re nothing.”

Dropping Rum’s head, Gaston slowly walked around him. “You know what… I’ll do you a favor. I’ll tell Belle that you tried to do the ‘manly’ thing and prove you weren’t a freak. But you couldn’t compare to the real deal as I brought you down from that high pedestal of yours. She’ll be disappointed at first but I know how to change a girl’s tune. Ah yes… the things I could do with Belle. I bet she likes it rough. Or…” Looking down at his knife, his grin turned into a wide smirk. “She does seem to have a scissor fetish. I always knew she could be a little slut but to have such a kink as knives… that’s pretty hot.”

Rum didn’t know what a lot of those words meant, but he did know they sounded wrong and directing it to sweet and kind Belle… That didn’t sit well with him.

Biting his lip to prevent any more pained sounds from escaping, Rum began to rise.

Gaston was oblivious to this—going on and on about Belle and what he wanted to do to her. Each word that he uttered was disgusting than the last and anger unlike Rum ever known swept over him, boiling his blood.

He looked back at Gaston and Gaston had his back to Rum.

The other man saw Rum and tried to get Gaston’s attention, but the blabbering fool waved him off as he got really worked up in revealing his fantasies about Belle.

“And once I have my fill of her… And, I mean, a lot since she has been such a tease—I’ll have little choice but to break her heart. Unless I knock her up. Oh man! I never thought about kids. They’ll be good-looking that’s for sure. And normal. They wouldn’t be like—“

Gaston’s voice trailed off as he turned around and came face-to-face with Rum.

“Me,” Rum finished as he raised his hand and plunged his shear-like fingers into Gaston’s belly.

It was only a second but a second was all it took for Rum to register what he had done.

Horrified, he pulled out immediately and his blades were covered in dark red. He shakily looked at the other man who watched the whole thing.

“I didn’t mean—“

But it was too late.

Gaston fell on the grass at the same time the man took off running into town, screaming for help.

Rum took a couple steps backward and stared as the blood continued to seep through Gaston’s fingers and shirt.

The only thing Rum could do was flee into the sanctuary of his home. Faster and faster he ran to his attic and hid in the corner, rocking back and forth on his haunches as he knew he couldn’t go back to Storybrooke.

Not now and not ever.

And that also meant he wouldn’t be able to see Belle anymore.
8 Edward Scissorhands Rated K+

Chapter Summary

Belle (Guest) Prompted: Scissors! Rum gets his new pair of hands. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Edward Scissorhands

It was relatively easy once the proper research was done, but Belle French was quite pleased with herself as she called ahead to make sure the appointment was still a go.

For a while, Belle struggled to come up with the right gift for Rum. She knew his birthday was coming up and she wanted to give him something that would mean the world to him considering how awful the year before had been. At least half of Storybrooke had forgiven him for what he had done to Gaston since it was self-defense, but there were still plenty of people who didn’t take kindly to him anymore. It killed her that people that Rum once called friends had turned their backs on him, and even more so, was the fact that Rum purposely exiled himself as contrition.

Well, that had to change. But how?

Then like lightning—the idea came to her and the obvious detail of it all was staring at her all this time.

It did take some extra careful planning and sneaky espionage on her part, but Belle was able to make the necessary arrangements to fly both her and Rum to Australia. Explaining to the TSA agents and the airport management the sensitive predicament Rum was in had been long and tedious and a lot of back and forth confirmation to ensure it would be all right for them to fly without trouble. The last thing Belle wanted was someone to panic at the sight of Rum and his poor scissorhands and then explain to Homeland Security about it was something she wanted to avoid.

In addition, there was the special research that had to be conducted. Thankfully, Belle found Rum’s father’s notebooks and records he wrote when building and creating Rum. She had to take one by one, photocopy them, and return them without Rum ever being the wiser. That was also a lengthy process too but eventually Belle had all of Jefferson’s research notes to email them to her contact.

When Belle received the green-light that this could be done, she had whooped. Of course, it was a very loud and sudden whoop in the library, which startled a few patrons but she didn’t care. Rum was going to have the birthday gift of a lifetime and she couldn’t wait to surprise him.

The hard part was convincing Rum to leave his mansion on the mountain.

It was like when they first met so long ago. Belle had to do a lot of coaxing to persuade him to come to Storybrooke with her. And now… it wasn’t about going down to Storybrooke. It was about seeing the world.

To her relief, Rum did agree to go with her after some cajoling and chaste kisses.
Going through the checkpoints at the airport was interesting, but thanks to Belle’s arduous communication with them… she and Rum were able to get by with minimal interruption. At least the smoothness of the experience did wonders for Rum’s self-confidence.

As for the flight itself, Rum did remarkably well. The ascent took him by surprise, but it wasn’t long before he settled down and soaked it all in.

When they landed, Belle had anxiously squirmed in her seat while they waited for the other passengers to disembark before she and Rum could. This concluded the first part of her surprise now the second.

Waiting for them at the gate was Belle’s father—Maurice French. As father and daughter reunited with hugs and kisses, Rum stood back and politely waited for Belle’s introductions. He knew from the books he read from Belle that meeting one’s parents was a big deal and he never expected that this would happen to him. Belle had told him she wanted to do something special for his birthday, and already she had done enough with the flight to her homeland. Yet, to meet her father was a daunting task and Rum wanted to make a good first impression.

Belle was pleased that her father handled it well when she finally introduced Rum. Of course, it did help that she forewarned him ahead of time. Anyways, she knew he was eager to meet the man that stole his daughter’s heart and she could tell he liked Rum very much.

Maurice drove them to his house where he fulfilled the obligatory embarrassing stories and pictures of Belle as a young girl. Belle was mortified but Rum really enjoyed them. Then her Papa made them a huge dinner and after the dishes was cleaned up and put away… next came the third and final part of her surprise.

“Rum,” Belle started as she sat on the couch next to him. “There’s something else I wanted to tell you.” Resting her hand on his leg, she gestured to her father as Maurice sat across from them. “You see, Rum,” she began. “My father happens to be an inventor.”

“Really?!” Rum perked up at hearing that Belle’s Papa was like his Papa too.

She nodded. “Really. And since your birthday is tomorrow…this is a present from me and my father.”

“I told you Belle that this trip was enough. And forgive me, sir, but you don’t have to get me anything,” Rum said to her father, which earned him a gruff chuckle from the older man.

“Modest and humble too. You sure picked a winner my girl,” Maurice said affectionately.

“Papa,” she said, blushing. “Rum, what I’m trying to say is that—well, Papa show him.”

On cue, Maurice pulled out a large box he had hidden and lifted the lid for Rum to peer inside. To his shock, there was a pair of smooth ivory hands resting comfortably.

“You mean—” he trailed off.

Maurice nodded. “These are yours my boy. And I have a hand surgeon friend who is going to help with your surgery.”

“That is—if you want them,” Belle supplied. “I don’t want you to think that you have to have them, but I know you had mentioned them before.”
“Belle,” Rum breathed. “Thank you. This is all I ever wanted. Of course I want them!”

She broke out into a beautiful breathtaking smile as she tenderly kissed the top of his head. “And they’re yours.”

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The next day after ten long hours, Belle was allowed to go into the recovery room to check on Rum. He was still asleep from the anesthetics but both his arms were bandaged and she could make out the shape of his brand new hands.

Her father and the doctor explained the rest of the process in that Rum will see a physical therapist to aid him with the use of his new limbs and that he would have to take it easy until they knew for sure the surgery was a success.

Belle sat at his bedside and pulled out the book she was reading from her purse. As she read aloud, the bandaged hand closer to her began to twitch.

Chapter End Notes

Next... Women of the Otherworld by Kelley Armstrong. These books are seriously the best!
1 Otherworld Rated M

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Half-demon Belle wants to live a normal life and she has moved to Storybrooke for peace and quiet. During a fundraising event for the public library, she meets the reclusive Mr. Gold and her world is about to change. (Rated M for adult themes)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own the rights to the Otherworld series… it belongs to the amazingly talented Kelley Armstrong.

Otherworld

Small town life was proving to be a dream come true for Belle French.

In Storybrooke, Maine, there was very little crime. With the occasional speeding car and shoplifting, the sleepy town was virtually crime free and less chaotic than life in the Big Apple. Of course, New York’s crime rate wasn’t so much a major factor for Belle’s decision to move. Crime cannot be stopped one-hundred percent. It was very much the fact of life and to be expected to happen, but it was more or less about Belle being able to maintain her wits about her when such events do occur.

While she was happy with her new life as the head librarian and enjoyed the solitude it brought… a part of her longed for the seductive pull of the city and the sweet smell of mayhem that perfumed the air. In Storybrooke, there was the scent of pinewood and the homemade pies coming from Granny’s Diner that lingered on the streets. It was a stark contrast to what Belle was used to, although it was far pleasant and homier than some of the odors from New York City.

The truth was… her sanity demanded the change in scenery after one particular incident that left her almost incapacitated during a mugging. She couldn’t help it—the chaos that rolled off the mugger was intoxicating, especially since he already robbed some other poor defenseless soul. The memory of the first victim’s fear clouded her head as well as the memories of other past crimes committed (including a violent rape episode), Belle felt the tugs of arousal that nearly shut her body down. It wasn’t until the mugger’s thoughts turned towards her and how he envisioned her sprawled out as he took her against the dirty ground, and again in her ass, before choking the life out of her… Well, Belle woke up and snapped.

He was the one who was left helpless in the alley: blood spurting from his nose, a broken wrist dangling off his arm, and a couple of teeth floating in a puddle of blood. He might have suffered a black eye on top of it, but he was left there unconscious once Belle blocked enough air from his throat with the strap of her purse.

After that, Belle knew she could no longer live in New York if something like this happens again. Not when she lost control and almost ended up another notch as one of those mugger’s victims. It was time for her to accept that the city wasn’t the best fit for her, despite her longing to be normal.
and her determination that she could handle her ability.

Unfortunately, the demon within her wouldn’t allow it and that one time proved she wasn’t as controlled as she thought she was.

That’s right… demon… as in Belle French was a half-demon.

At first glance it would be difficult to believe that was true. She didn’t look like the typical portrayed demon in books or in oral traditions with horns, hooves, and a tail. Her skin wasn’t red and her eyes certainly didn’t glow in the dark and she didn’t speak in tongues or performed satanic rituals to appease her Dark Lord. Rather, Belle was the complete opposite of what a demon should look like. With her petite stature, long luscious brown curls, wide-eyed pools of clear blue skies, smooth (bumpy less) ivory complexion, and a sunny disposition didn’t scream “demon” at all. She was very much human in appearances and her personality was compassionate, kind, and caring to those who knew her as well as strangers. Her smile could turn any one’s frown upside-down and combined with her Aussie accent… she was the epitome of all that was goodness, light, and quirkiness, instead of a mischievous and deadly minion one might expect.

The only thing that separated her from normal human beings was her ability to sense and attract chaos. This… gift was given to her by her father, a full blooded-demon. Now, her mother wasn’t a Devil lover nor did she practice the Black Arts that allowed herself to be impregnated by an evil entity. Her mother, Rose French, was a first grade teacher and an animal rights’ activist in Melbourne. Rose met a man by the name of Moe at a bar and after a couple more encounters… they slept with each other for one night and he disappeared not long afterwards. It wasn’t long that Rose found out she was pregnant and she had no way of tracking this mysterious “Moe” down to tell him what happened.

For as long as Belle could remember, her mother told her that was a surreal moment in her life. She believed she was in love with him and he came along at the right time and flattered her when she needed it the most. Too bad he was never seen again or heard from and when Rose tried asking about him from the other patrons… no one knew who she was talking about or remembered ever seeing him in the bar period. Yet, Rose French was a strong, independent woman and she was upset that Moe walked out on her… but it made her stronger and resilient as she took on the task as a single mother and raised her daughter by herself.

Belle always admired her mother’s tenacity and it angered her that her father abandoned her mother like that. Perhaps he wasn’t a gentleman as her mother thought, but Belle felt that he owed her mother and her explanation… and for a chance to know him. Belle always felt different as a child and there were things that she couldn’t share with her mother, but perhaps she could confide in her birth father to learn more about herself.

Since a child, Belle couldn’t understand her drive for chaos or how it satisfied her when she experienced it. She wasn’t a troublemaker by nature, but there were times when Belle would orchestrate the possibility of chaos and then sit back and allow the waves of it to ripple through her. It was never nothing serious with severe consequences but it would be little things such as verbal arguments, spreading rumors, staging the right circumstances for a break-up. They were behaviors that all teenage girls do with each other; however, it was Belle’s incessant urge for these chaotic yearnings that had her wondering if there was something wrong with her.

Her worries were brought up to the school counselor when she was in high school. The woman provided little help and guidance in Belle’s situation, only joking how Belle should listen to the angel on her shoulder rather than the devil and that should put an end to these concerns of hers. A harmless pun but one that had Belle’s mind whirring with questions and possible explanations that she spent
hours at the local library researching about demonology and anything that related to the subject. She was mum about the whole thing to her mother, not wanting to freak her out, but Belle felt she was on the right path and eventually she was able to put all the facts together about her life. Then everything made sense.

There were a variety level of demons in the different types that they were and what their talents happened to be, yet they all seemed to have one thing in common: they were all males. Demons couldn’t breed with other demons, they were created, but for one who wanted to spread its seed and wreak havoc on earth… there was only one solution. The demon would blend in with the world of mortals, taking on the appearance as one, often bringing to life the characteristics that might cause a female human to feel attracted to him. According to the texts, the demons had this allure about them… an aura that would pull an unsuspecting woman (one that was ripe for breeding and ovulating) towards the demon. Each demon had its own way of seduction and for some… they took great delight in romancing its victim to make her compliant so it could have sex with her. Once the act was done, there was no need for the demon to stay since the woman was guaranteed to be with child and would leave until the next cycle of fifty years to do it all over again. Apparently, the journey from the pits of Hell to earth was a strenuous journey, but it ensured the demon’s safety since the mother of his child would be dead or close to it.

It all added up to what Belle’s mother went through—a man coming from nowhere and wooing her of all women… Belle couldn’t blame her mother and there was no way she would ever share this information with her. She was a victim too and it brought tears to Belle’s eyes knowing she was only a pawn created out of her demonic father’s will. Somehow the days when Belle would pretend that her father was a secret agent and he left for their safety was something she longed to be the reality and not this. This was way worse and she wished she could forget the matter entirely, but her mind was put at ease knowing the origins of her cravings. And it gave her the opportunity and strength to try and control it.

And learn more.

With a directed course in action, Belle was able to narrow her research strictly to those of chaos demons and tried to figure out which one was her father and if there was anything else she needed to know about her ability. She would rather have the knowledge instead of continuing to live in ignorance in case something irreversible should happen. Her two likely candidates were Horus or Lucifer, but further study led her to believe that the former was possible. There wasn’t a record of how many children Lucifer might have fathered to know for sure, but after the heartache her mother had to suffer… Belle was positive that was his real name.

Lucifer… the fallen angel. Belle wasn’t sure what to think about that revelation. Part of her was terrified at the notion that it was him, while a part of her was resigned. There wasn’t anything she could do to confront him and she wasn’t exactly looking for a way to communicate with him. She feared an attempt might unleash something she will regret doing and it was better to leave it be. She found him and that would have to suffice.

Over the years, Belle learned her ability of sensing chaos not only filled the dark part of her soul, but also the more chaos she fed upon… the stronger she could become in that moment. Otherwise, when there was a lack of chaos or if she fled from it… her human strength would return but it depended upon her exposure. The longest was several hours for Belle to be able to turn a doorknob properly without crushing it in her fist. That time she stayed away from everyone, including her mother.

This was a burden forced upon her, her cross she was forced to bear. She refused to tell her mother because the last thing she wanted was for her mother to fear her, but she knew living with her would only make it that much more difficult to keep it a secret. So when Belle was able to move to
America, she took the opportunity and never looked back. She still remained close to her mother despite the distance and focused on her studies in Library Science and Literature. After graduation, Belle took a job at New York’s public library and rented an apartment near the epicenter to practice her control of her ability.

Since she had no choice in what she inherited (half-demons take on the ability of their fathers), Belle could control other parts of her fate. For one, she wasn’t going to use her ability for evil and she wasn’t going to unleash chaos onto the world. Instead Belle vowed not to give in to her demonic needs and lead a normal life. Unfortunately, it was easier said than done since chaos existed regardless and there was little she could do to shed the influence. Not to say she didn’t control herself. There were times when Belle was successful in keeping a cap on the urges, and then there were times she relapsed and savored the rich chaos to her disgust.

Then there was that mugger and Belle knew this arrangement couldn’t go on. She had to leave New York and she settled for Storybrooke. She loved the name of the town and it was a bit cut off than most towns being surrounded by forests that she knew this was her new home. Luckily, the only battle Belle had to face was Mayor Mills, which wasn’t so chaotic that it exposed her to any scrutiny.

She loved Storybrooke and its people and she could easily spend the rest of her life here without qualms. However, Belle had a thorn at her side and it was the mayor and her constant excuses to cut her funding. It felt that Belle was only hired for the library to fall apart and she absolutely refused to allow that to happen. All towns need a library, people need a library… and Belle was going to do her damndest to make sure it doesn’t happen on her watch.

After six months of living there, Belle was determined more than ever to fight Regina after she got the Council to agree to cut another two percent of her funding. If she was going to cut costs, well, Belle knew how to add money to her account.

The fundraiser gala was an idea born from her time in the city. It drew in patrons and raised thousands of dollars to maintain the building and support various programs for the public to partake. While Storybrooke’s library wasn’t glamorous it had character and Belle didn’t want it to be limited to those with deep cash pockets (not like there were many). So she promoted the fundraiser as a fun event for families, singles, and couples all alike with the support of literature on the mind.

The dressy-casual event was about to start in a few minutes and Belle was putting the final touches together with the help of her friends—Ruby, Mary Margaret, and Ariel along with their respected dates.

Belle couldn’t hide the smirk as Ruby teased Archie with a tray of hors d’oeuvres, offering to feed him one of the cheese cubes. If his blush was an indicator of how the evening would go… Belle wouldn’t be surprised if he went into cardiac arrest with Ruby’s insinuations as the cause.

David, Mary Margaret’s boyfriend, was a nice guy and while her friend hadn’t told her… Belle knew they had an affair first before he broke things off with his wife. Ruby informed her but she found out beforehand partially due to the leftover chaos of guilt that radiated from Mary Margaret mostly. Yet, the two were very happy together now and the scandal of it died away. That was the thing about small-towns—there was always a new juicy scandal right around the corner and eventually the novelty of an old one fades into nothing.

As for Ariel and Eric there was nothing secretive about them or how they came together. The fact there wasn’t any chaos between them was unusual, but Belle didn’t care and it was all the better she could have these friendships without drawing attention to herself.

She didn’t mind that she was the only one in their group who didn’t have a date. As hostess her time
would be spent conversing and convincing people to donate. Focusing on a date was the last thing on her mind not when her library was at stake. She was grateful that her friends honored that there would be no setting ups or matchmaking going on. At least... she hoped they would once the gala started.

“So how many do you think will come?” Ariel asked.

“Hopefully the whole town,” Belle confessed. “Any cent will count to keep this place running. I just hope that I’m not the only one who wants to see the library succeed.”

“You’re not,” said Ruby, squeezing her friend’s shoulder encouragingly. “I donated my tips for the last couple weeks.”

“Ruby you didn’t—" Belle started but the tall, slim brunette shook her head. “I don’t mind. It’s for a good cause. Besides, Granny will be proud that I used my tips on something worthwhile.”

The others echoed they were donating part of their salaries too and it was more than what she expected from her friends, though she was grateful that they were supporting her passionate cause. Now, if the rest of Storybrooke proved to be just as generous... Belle would certainly have a chance in prolonging the library’s existence.

A couple hours later and the event went underway. So far, so good was the turnout and Belle prayed all were willing to show their generosity rather than feed their stomachs with free food and drinks.

She flitted from person to person, engaging in conversations about their lives, families, and books they have read. If she would get them reminiscing fondly of a book they loved, then they would be likely to dig into their wallets and purses. This strategy was proving to be effective as several people made their way over to the donation table where Ariel and Eric stood by to collect.

Yes! Belle thought happily, doing a mental arm pump. *Take that Regina!*

While the evening was definitely looking up for the petite beauty, Belle noticed another guest in attendance. He wasn’t someone she recognized instantly but she was certain she met nearly everyone in Storybrooke. This person was a stranger yet the other attendees seemed to know who he was, judging by the looks on their faces and from the way they would part like the sea for him to pass through. Belle kept to the side to watch this man without blatantly staring.

He walked around as if he owned the place, his cool whiskey brown eyes surveying the scope of the library and those around him. It was difficult to tell what he thought about the gala as he remained tight-lipped and his eyes unexpressive. He was dressed meticulously in a charcoal gray suit, burgundy dress shirt and tie, which Belle noted the quality was certainly high end so it was either a rental or he was loaded. Since the outfit was specifically tailored from the way the suit clung to him it was clear that he had the money. His hair was straight with a slight wave to it, sweeping past his chin, with subtle streaks of gray in the dark brown mane, and a graze of stubble covering his jaw and chin. The very least he could have come clean shaven with his dressy apparel, but people stayed away from him as he came to stop to look at one of the paintings on the wall.

Belle realized he walked with a limp, the cane in his hand aiding him, although she thought it was a decorative piece to match his ensemble. He exuded power and from her vantage point she felt her knees began to wobble. There was a change in the air as the first pulse of chaos flickered in her belly, and as quickly as it came, the feeling was gone.

She straightened up, not realizing she was bending at the waist and a quick dart around proved no one else noticed her behavior. Sighing, Belle set her hand against her stomach and breathed deeply.
as she glanced up to lock gazes with the strange man with the golden cane.

He was staring at her directly, his expression still unreadable, but she swore his nostrils flared for a second. A smirk slowly spread across his lips, his teeth bared to show a gold filling. Fearing and knowing she was caught, Belle tried to make herself appear busy as she made her rounds among the others, being careful to avoid him completely.

She couldn’t shake the odd feeling she was being watched and refused to acknowledge her prickling senses, half-fearing she was right and it was him that eyed her so studiously now.

So when Ruby was close by, Belle looped her arm around her friend’s and guided her to the refreshments table.


“I’m fine. Hey, Ruby, did you noticed that man that came in? He has a cane.” If anyone should know this guy, then Ruby might being the Queen of Gossip herself.

“What?” she gasped, whipping her head around, but Belle pinched her arm to make her stop. “Ow!” She glared at the petite beauty.

“Don’t look!” Belle hissed. “I don’t want him to see us staring.”

“All right. Jeez,” Ruby said, rubbing her arm. “I’m just surprised. It’s not every day the reclusive Mr. Gold steps out of Dark Haven to grant us with his presence.”

“That’s Mr. Gold?” Belle said full of astonishment. She knew the name, but not the man; although, she wondered if in fact Mr. Gold was a real person since she never laid eyes on him until now. He practically owned Storybrooke, collecting rent from nearly all the residents, including Belle. Even when she first moved to town and signed the contracts for her apartment and library, she found the documents on her counter with precise directions explaining the terms and conditions as well as her instructions to make a copy and return the originals at the following address. It was also there she had to drop her rent off on the first of every month.

It had been surreal that at first Belle thought someone was playing a joke on her. But she followed the directions to the tee and dropped the signed forms at Dark Haven, including her rent every month.

Dark Haven was a beautiful mansion secluded in the woods with an iron-wrought gate at the front to keep unwanted guests out. There was a box separate from the mail where the rent was to be deposited and that was where she faithfully dropped it. Sometimes Belle would gaze through the iron bars to stare at the house and wondered what secrets were kept hidden. She assumed there had to be secrets given the extraordinary and unorthodox methods this mysterious landlord conducted. Then there were the stories of course. As a newcomer, many of the townspeople leapt at the chance to share the tales of Mr. Gold, and what Belle had heard was outlandish and downright laughable.

Stories of how he sold his soul to Satan to stay rich were one and part of the deal was he had to keep away from everyone and live alone forever. Some said he was a spy, an assassin, others said he was a monster. Some wondered if he wasn’t exactly human since wolves could be heard howling on his lands, which wolves weren’t a natural predator in Storybrooke’s woods. However, wolves did live in Maine and Belle reasoned it wouldn’t be improbable if they found their way to town, but it was the speculation that fueled the residents’ imaginations and their fear towards this man.

However, there were some (and it was a rare number) that vouched there was nothing supernatural
about Mr. Gold and that he was far better than his father who used to run the town. These people were adamant that if anyone was the Devil incarnate it would have been Malcolm Gold. His passing led to no mourners and neither did his son attend his funeral. He was a man that was despised greatly and one that no one missed after death. Yet, his son, the current Mr. Gold, kept to himself behind those stone walls and only came down on rare public occasions that required his presence.

Like tonight.

“I didn’t think he would actually come, but I suppose if money’s involved he would be there front and centered,” Ruby said. “Unlike his son. He’s the only sociable of the two who comes into town more often. But even he can be reserved when he wants to be so I guess the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree.”

“There’s another Gold?” Belle frowned knowing only about her landlord. The subject he had a son was left unsaid from the residents.

“Yes. Neal Gold,” Ruby affirmed. “You wouldn’t have seen him recently because he’s doing this lecture tour on the east coast and in Toronto too. He’s the professor of Sociology and Anthropology at Boston University. He’s quite the expert in the field and a hottie if I say so myself, although his personality can be dry at times.”

“I see,” Belle said, nodding to herself. “I had no idea.”

“Well the truth’s not as exciting as the rumor mill. Really this Mr. Gold is a fair man. He never raises the rent unless he has good reason to, which doesn’t happen often, and he fixes whatever problem immediately for his tenants. I think people like the idea of being afraid of him, but he does nothing to change it. He might like it too and I hear it does keep people from being late on their payments.”

“It makes sense,” Belle agreed.

“Yeah. There’s Archie! Wish me luck,” Ruby said, grinning wolfishly.

“What for?”

“C’mon Belle. I’m hoping I might see what he keeps hiding under that stiff tie and shirt of his. If books don’t put him in the mood, then I forfeit my reigning crown as the Queen of Sex.”

“Okay, TMI,” Belle chuckled. “Go get him tiger.”

Ruby made a scratching gesture with her hand, growling, before scampering off to find her date. She was a crazy one all right, but Belle loved her all the same. Although, Belle could have done without the sexual chaos that comes after one of Ruby’s “dates” but it was the men she refused to go near knowing they would be the worst.

Grabbing a cup of punch, Belle returned to her mingling. She felt secured that there were at least a dozen people who were willing to support the library and a few more who inquired about the activities she had planned for both adults and children. She felt confident that there will be more people willing to contribute when they hear what she has to offer and so far it was swinging in her favor. After Belle secured a decent donation, she found herself face to face with the mayor.

Regina grinned slowly, her red lips a contrast to her white teeth. Her smile was predatory while her dark eyes were piercing, never one to miss a detail. “Ms. French,” she purred. “It would seem your little party is a success. Another one of these and you won’t need any more funding from the town.”

“I will still need support from the council,” Belle replied. “This will take care of the future programs I
have planned as well as adding new shelves for more books.”

The mayor pursed her lips as she sipped her drink. For some reason Belle couldn’t fathom, the mayor didn’t like her or she had some vendetta against the library. Either way Belle would not allow her to get to her or make her fail in her endeavors.

“Of course,” the older woman sneered. Then she lifted her head as something captured her attention. “Mr. Gold,” Regina said tersely. “Nice to see you out and about.”

Belle sensed the presence behind her, a ghostly trickle of heat at the back of her neck. Her lashes fluttered as she turned around and found Mr. Gold standing there, his gaze searing intensely into her. Her breath stuck in her throat and in that brief moment Belle had to remind herself where she was and fought back the urge to give into the chaos that radiated off him. All she saw in her mind’s eye was a forest, running at full speed, and the scent of prey in the distance.

Stemming the desire, Belle swallowed hard and forced herself to meet his stare. The corner of his mouth twitched in quiet amusement as he tilted his head. “You must be Ms. French I take it,” he said in a rough Scottish brogue. “I’ve been hearing you’re doing a decent job as the librarian.”

“Thank you,” she responded, crossing her arm with the punch over the other as she pressed her nail into her flesh to keep from quivering. The pull of the chaos was so alluring and it didn’t help he had a toe-curling accent to boot. Get it together girl! She scolded herself. Now is not the time!

Somehow, she managed to quell the feeling as Mr. Gold continued to speak, “Of course I can’t understand why you’re putting all this effort into a fundraiser when you should be receiving the necessary funding to do as you wish.” He broke his gaze from Belle to level a glare at the mayor.

“You see Mr. Gold, had you attended our bi-monthly council meetings, you would have known that we had to make some cuts. Unfortunately, the library was among the decided areas to reduce funds for our budget. Yet Ms. French has proven to be quite resourceful as you can tell.” There was an edge in Regina’s tone, which only served to deepen his frown.

“If the town is suffering that much of a hindrance, then it should have been your duty to inform me Mayor Mills,” he said, her name practically a snarl. “You know I’m a big supporter when it comes to education and reading. This falls under that category or did you forget?”

So that explained the mayor’s attitude to the library! It was nothing personal to Belle, but a dig at Mr. Gold for whatever reason. Of course, any sensible person would excuse themselves since the conversation was veering off into something heated and private rather than stay in the middle of it. However, Belle couldn’t help it now when both were flooding her with hate and anger that kept her in place. Their animosity and thoughts were so delicious, especially when they were both mentally picturing strangling the other.

No! Belle mentally yelled. You just got control of yourself and you have to keep it! But, oh, it had been too long since she felt the promise of violence. And for some reason Belle knew Gold was capable of delivering it. Her mind drifted back to the earlier image of running through the forest and the primal instinct to lunge and bite was too much. She needed to leave quickly.

“Excuse me,” she said and darted away before Regina or Mr. Gold could say another word. The strings of chaos coiled and tightened around her, almost immobilizing her, yet Belle needed distance and the room with the familiar bookshelves seemed too confining and small. Her only chance of escape would be outside and she didn’t want to make a scene with her departure. She needed to regain her control and there was only one possible solution.
Belle ducked behind a shelf that was near the back of the library where none of the guests ventured. She stepped into the shielding embrace of the shadows and pressed her back against the cool metal, closing her eyes. Her only chance was to let the chaos run through her and then she could have some semblance of control again.

Sending a silent prayer that no one will catch her, Belle allowed the waves of chaos to caress her body, making her tremble. With each ripple a little burst of heat began to build in her belly and shoot down to her core. Nails biting the shelf behind her, she tilted her head back as the chaos continued to move throughout her, boiling the blood in her veins, her heart racing, her breathing coming in short pants.

She was so close.

Belle needed something else that would push her over the edge and end this madness.

Extending her senses and searching frantically, Belle couldn’t feel anything nearby and had to rely on memory to help her out. Her mind immediately returned to Gold with him running through the woods, her vision warped and sense of smell sharp and keen. There was a rabbit out there and her stomach roared at the promise of meat filling her up. There it was and she felt herself hunch and preparing to pounce and—

“I wondered where you ran off too.”

Belle’s eyes flew opened as she stared in alarm at Mr. Gold. His hands were curled around his cane as he held it in front of him, his nostrils flaring. Even the dark pupils of his eyes seemed close to dilating as if he knew what was going through her head and body.

Yet not even being caught could cause her feelings to subside. If anything, the chaos only intensified with his close proximity and his damned strange memories.

He stepped closer as he inhaled deeply, his right hand falling to rest next to her. His jaw clenched as he shakily met her look and a wolfish smirk appeared.

“You seem rather flushed, dearie.” His voice… a wispy whisper against her ear and Belle squeezed her legs together as another rush of chaos overwhelmed her. “What could it be that created this I wonder?”

Her mouth parted but no words could come out. She wanted him to leave, she wanted him to stay—the conflicted turmoil screwing her head and Belle bit her lip and shook her head as the final stretch of chaos released from her.

Panting heavily, Belle dipped her chin to her chest in order to control her erratic heartbeat and breathing. Eventually she began to calm down and return to a normal pace.

That was the most powerful taste of chaos she ever had and Belle was upset that it got the best of her. This was almost as bad as that mugger in New York; however, the level of chaos she experienced was nothing she ever felt before. She was disgusted and furious and why the Hell was Gold chasing a rabbit when he could hardly run with that limp?

It didn’t make any sense.

“My, my,” he said getting her attention. “I never imagined in my lifetime that a half-demon would enter my town. Especially a pretty and lively one.” He raised his brow as his smirk widened at Belle’s startled reaction.
“Welcome to Storybrooke.”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle confronts Gold and discovers there is more to him than meets the eye.
(Rated T)

Otherworld

Never in Belle’s twenty-eight years would she expect someone to find out her true nature. Or at least pinpoint to it precisely on the spot and that’s exactly what Mr. Gold did less than twenty minutes of meeting him.

He left her there and fear unlike any other coiled around her heart. She didn’t know what he planned to do with this information or what possible motive he had to expose her. All she knew was that she built this new life slowly, made actual friends, and now the threat that Mr. Gold imposed put all of Belle’s efforts into jeopardy.

Her inner chaos only strengthened her, the adrenaline pumping rapidly, and heard the groan and crunch of metal. She looked down to see the imprint of her fingers left on the shelf and muttered a curse. Now, she would have to pay to fix the damage too. Just great. Really great. It was imperative that she didn’t touch a single thing until she calmed herself down so Belle resolved to keep her hands to her sides for the meantime. Even picking up a drink or a snack would not be a good idea, not when the urge to snap something in half was strong.

But she couldn’t stay hidden for long. Eventually people will wonder where she was and she had to make sure that Gold didn’t tell anyone else about her. If he did…

Belle did not enjoy violence despite her demon blood yearning for it. She wasn’t violent by nature, yet if Gold proved to be a liability to her survival… she knew she would do anything to keep herself safe. She knew she will regret it later, but moving was not an option. She planted roots here. So if anyone had to leave it would have to be him.

Taking several deep breaths, Belle stepped out back into the party. Her guard was on high alert as she sent out her senses in search for panic or fear. To her surprise, no one paid much attention to her reappearance. They were all indifferent—not the frenzy terror she expected when news of a half-demon being present among them. She couldn’t help the sigh of relief escaping as her chaos dissipated.

Or was this part of Gold’s plan? Wait to expose her when she least expected it?

The man in question was brandishing a checkbook and Belle hurried over to his direction—to do what she hadn’t figured out, but she had to know his game. She peered over his shoulder, her eyes widening over the number of zeroes he wrote as he signed off on it and handed the check to Ariel. Even her friend couldn’t believe his generosity.

“T-t-thank you Mr. Gold,” Ariel stammered, her green eyes bulging from their sockets. “The library thanks you. Belle—Belle?”
It was the confused mention of her name that had him turning around to face her. If he was surprised to see her he didn’t show it. “Ms. French,” he drawled. “I hope you forgive my early departure, but I wanted to make my donation before I left.”

“Oh.” It was the only word that came to mind. And it pretty much summed up Belle’s current feelings when she could not get a read on him. He didn’t seem to be in a hurry to leave so reporting to someone right away wasn’t on the menu. If anything, he seemed to be quite in his leisure and the number of zeroes he was handing off to her didn’t match the notion of ruining her. Unless this was his way to establish an alibi or something to show he had no hard feelings towards her.

Ariel motioned her to say more, pointing to the check to help her along, yet Belle was at a loss for words. The fact he donated to her library when he knew what she was only served to confuse her even more… and annoy her.

Seriously, what was his intention?

Understanding dawned in his eyes and his next words floored her. “I always loved the library. It was my sanctuary as a boy and even my son found this place to be comforting. There’s so much more in the world that the library can transport you, even help you forget the hard reality of one’s life. You’re doing a marvelous job Ms. French. Hiring you was the smartest thing Regina has ever done and I’m looking forward in seeing your future endeavors. I know Storybrooke’s library is in good hands.”

Belle knew her mouth was hanging wide opened in stunned disbelief, and to respond after that… what could she say? Ariel snapped her fingers in front of her face, waking her up from her reverie. It was then she noticed that Gold was already gone and a fuming redhead was standing in his place.

“Earth to Belle! He donated like a boss and you stood there with your mouth opened like a codfish!” The vivacious beauty placed her hands on her hips as she glared at her friend. “He’s someone to have on your side in this town with Regina in charge and you ignored him?! Do something about it!”

“I’ll be right back.” Belle said, still in a daze, as she walked out the doors to see where Gold went.

He was already a few blocks down from the library and offhandedly thought he moved fast for someone with a limp. She took chase and was grateful he heard her heels flapping as she ran and stopped so she could catch up.

Breathlessly, Belle fixed him with a cold stare as he smirked at her smugly. Screw the manners and pleasantries. This was war. “What the Hell was that?! Do you think you could buy me off like that after you threatened me?”

“Threaten?” he repeated, his tone blasé. “I don’t recall doing such a thing.”

“Don’t play dumb with me!” Belle scowled. “You know what I am. And if you think I’m going to stand by and watch my life go up in flames, then you have another thing coming you son of a bitch!”

He laughed. The smarmy bastard had the audacity to laugh at her face! Her fingers were itching to rip into that peachy flesh and dig out his eyes. Let’s see if he finds that humorous after he lies in a puddle of blood at her feet.

“Forgive me,” he said, wiping tears from the corner of his eye. “But that was most enlightening Ms. French. What gave you that impression I would do such a thing?”

She gaped at him as if he grew a second head. “Do I have to give you a play by play?”

Gold tapped his chin as he pondered her, as if trying to place what it was that happened earlier,
before his expression lit up. “Ah, that’s right! I said you were a half-demon. Well, my intention wasn’t a threat per say but a friendly reminder that I own this town and don’t take kindly to troublemakers. Yet, I don’t see that happening with you Ms. French. You’re quite hell-bent on your anonymity, despite your species, and it’s evident you’re here for the long run.”

“Of course I am!” she shouted, huffing indignantly. “Wait, what do you mean ‘despite your species’?”

He shrugged. “I was merely commenting on what you are. Most of your kind thrives on the insane mayhem that can be spawned. I see that is not your character for I’m certain you would have been stirring problems the moment you arrived.”

“Most of my—” Her voice trailed off and she clenched her fists hard to prevent herself from really causing damage. “Look. I don’t know what your deal is but I’m simply me. I have no desire to wreak havoc or start some kind of disaster or enact the next apocalypse. Okay? Secondly, I don’t know how you could have known unless it’s true what they say that you made a deal with the devil and you sensed it.”

Now it was his turn to scoff with indignation. “Like that has any validity. I just noticed your scent if you must know. All half-demons have this faint whiff of sulfur and brimstone being the children from Hell and all. Although, the only thing I can’t place is what your special talent might be as one. Certainly not an offensive one since I’m still standing here in my shoes.”

“Well, I’m not telling,” Belle spat. “You intruded on a private moment of mine and threatened—yes threatened—me and you have the gall to be insulted about it?” Her voice went up an octave at the nerve of him. Then added insult to injury, she retorted, “And I do not smell like sulfur and brimstone!”

He pressed his lips firmly together as the corner of his mouth twitched. “It is what it is. It’s not your fault dearie that I have a good olfactory sensor.”

“Oh yeah?” she replied snarky. “What are you… a werewolf?”

He shifted his weight as he arched his brow. “Fear not Ms. French. Your secret is safe with me. You have my word.”

“I’m gonna need a lot more than that,” Belle grumbled.

“For now it’s all I can offer. Good night. I’m certain I will see you around more.” Gold bowed at his waist. “You should go back to your party. No doubt your friends are missing you.”

As on cue, Belle heard her name echoing the empty street as she turned to see Ariel standing outside the library.

Knowing she had little choice to return, Belle was ready for the last word when Gold had already vanished.

Frowning, she looked around and there wasn’t a single trace of him or the faint tapping of his cane. 

Yeah… he moves a little too fast, she thought, knowing he was right in that they will be seeing more of each other. She counted on it in fact.

xxXXxx

Belle didn’t see him again until a week later. And it was the type of meeting that neither of them
expected either.

It was a little known fact with her friends that Belle liked to jog at night. It was a habit she picked up while living in New York City. True, it would be considered the best and worst time to do so, but the darkness and stillness provided the solitude she needed to regroup. She would normally run a few nights a week and David, the Sheriff, warned her to be careful when she did. Storybrooke may not have a lot of crime but it can still be dangerous if one wasn’t careful.

Of course, Belle could protect herself (not that he knew that) but his concern was touching and she took it into consideration, making sure to text one of her friends where she was jogging and which trail she was taking. The forest offered a few different routes for the outdoors enthusiastic that went to the beach, the town, or right around the forest. There were also some hidden trails too and some that were steep, which were meant for the experienced hikers.

Her goal was to try all of them, but for now, she was working on her endurance so she could handle a difficult trail later on.

However, tonight was not one of her scheduled nights to run and she didn’t bother with the text message to let one of her friends know. Belle was having trouble sleeping and knew a brisk run would do the trick to soothe her insomnia.

The evening proved to be a nice one with a warm breeze passing her, the stars and moon being the source of light she needed to see where she was going. That was what made Storybrooke great in that regard. Belle could see the Heavens lit up with the silver lights while in the city she had the artificial lights to aid her.

Dressed in yoga capris, white camisole, and a blue zipped up hoodie, Belle twisted her curls into a ponytail. She stretched near her car for a couple of minutes before she took off on one of the readied made paths.

She decided to forgo the music in favor of nature’s soundtrack and moved in a steady pace before she upped her speed when she reached the half-mile mark. She ran until she reached the four-way stop that had the trail splitting, and instead of taking one of those paths, Belle decided to go off and went further into the woods.

The ground was uneven in parts and there were far more fallen branches for her to jump over, but Belle viewed it as another part of her workout as she ducked and leaped past branches and sharp twigs. When it was time for a break, she leaned against a tree and tilted her chin to the sky, smiling as the wind tickled her skin.

No chaos lurked in the shadows, which was a nice respite, since earlier that day she had another dispute with Regina.

The mayor was infuriating with her demands and this time it was over a book display. The recommended books of the month featured titles that Regina felt was inappropriate to young readers. “It gives them the wrong impression about authority,” she claimed, citing an incident that involved Ava Tillman running away from home for a couple of hours.

The truth was her father refused to let her go on a date, and Ava went anyways. And as far as Belle knew… Ava wasn’t a regular visitor of the library so the odds that she was influenced by one of her books were nonexistent. Yet, Regina felt The Chocolate War, The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, and The Catcher in the Rye were bad examples of children disobeying adults. She wanted them taken down so it wouldn’t put any other ideas of rebellion into their minds. Belle wouldn’t back down in her refusal. These were good books—classics—and they did not breed rebellious teens.
Eventually Regina left but it did leave a sour taste in Belle’s mouth. Although it didn’t end there. Oh no…

Sydney Glass, the Chief and Editor of *The Mirror*, wrote an editorial about the influence of books on impressionable minds in the afternoon edition. It was no doubt Regina had a hand in this article since it was no secret that Glass was practically in love with the mayor.

Suffice to say, Belle had “concerned” parents show up and ask if she could remove the books. Belle tried to be reasonable and assured them that the books taught valuable lessons such as being true to yourself and standing up for what’s right, but the parents were adamant and wouldn’t listen to what she had to say. It got to the point that Belle reluctantly took the books off the display table to appease them.

Regina may have had won but Belle was positive next time she won’t.

*Snap!*

Belle started and looked around to see what it was. First glimpse she didn’t see or hear anything and wondered if it was in her head. Then she heard another twig break as a blast of chaos ran through her.

The flooding tremors encased her as she experienced excitement, hunger, and a thrilling high fresh from a recent kill.

A menacing growl came from behind her.

She scrambled away just to come face to face with a rather large wolf.

Frozen, she stared at the beast as it stared right back at her. All she could see was thick, massive black fur with streaks of silver, and a pair of big brown eyes that practically glowed in the night. Its ears were pressed flatly against its head as the wolf slowly backed up to indicate it wasn’t a threat. Yet, with its immense size and piercing gaze… it was difficult to think it as nonthreatening.

It was then she spotted a nasty looking scar on its hind right leg. It looked extremely painful but the injury was old from what she could tell, especially since there was a lack of chaos that would have followed after a wound like that. The wolf continued its scrutiny of her person and it was then Belle was struck by the familiarity of the eyes. She seen this wolf before but it wasn’t possible. She would have remembered coming across a creature this size.

A crazy idea entered her head and Belle said delicately, “Mr. Gold?”

A keen whine came from the wolf and it turned and ran off.

Falling on her butt, Belle said to herself, “What kind of town did I move into?”

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So it was no complete shock that Mr. Gold turned up at the library the next day. Belle already figured it out that the wolf she encountered was, in fact, Gold.

It made perfect sense now.

The uncontrollable chaos, his perverse sense of smell, the images she seen in… it all added up to him being a werewolf.
She wasn’t the only freak of nature in Storybrooke and she took great delight in finding out his dirty little secret. Now, she had something on *him* and if he dared to speak a word about her… well, she could turn the tables just as quickly.

When he came, she couldn’t hold back the gloating smirk that read that she knew. And he knew that she knew what he was.

“Well, Ms. French, it seems the wolf’s out of the bag,” he told her and she couldn’t help but laugh.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle’s friends warn her about Gold; Gold saves Belle and has something he wants to ask her. (Rated M for adult content)

Otherworld

It soon came to pass that Belle and Gold forged an unlikely friendship. Now that they knew exactly what the other was it meant no more hiding their true selves from each other. It was the kind of friendship Belle hadn’t anticipated in forming, especially when she was convinced Gold had ill intentions concerning her when they first met. But it all changed when she literally ran into him in his wolf form, and afterwards, there was no more pretense or sarcastic jabs. He was every bit a monster as she was, and for the first time in her life, Belle didn’t feel alone.

Never in her wildest imaginations or dreams did she think that she would meet someone like herself. While Gold may not have been a half-demon, he did come pretty close with a lethal beast that lurked within his human body. At least he understood where she was coming from, even if he also happened to be Storybrooke’s eccentric recluse that everyone feared.

Of course, recluse was becoming past tense since Gold had been coming into town a lot more lately. It was a major shocker to all the residents who couldn’t help but wonder why he was surpassing his once a month trip.

Truthfully, there was a handful that had a pretty good idea why.

“I think it’s romantic,” Ariel said as the girls gathered at Granny’s for lunch. “Think about it—the lonely, old, and misunderstood man living in that gloomy mansion comes into town to attend this party and meets the beautiful and intelligent stranger that has captivated him and he continues to visit in hopes she will feel the same for him.”

“It’s not like that Ariel,” Belle said. “Mr. Gold and I are friends. Besides, why are we talking about this?”

“Because it’s Mr. Gold,” Ruby interjected, sliding in the booth next to Mary Margaret. The namesake of the diner looked over at her granddaughter with a look and Ruby didn’t miss a beat. “I’m taking a break Granny! Okay, it’s bad enough we him see him once a month, but this is going on four times this week and three times last week. That’s seven times!”

“But that it’s a bad thing,” Mary Margaret added. “I’m sure he’s nice but you can imagine how unsettling it is.”

“I agree with Ariel. Minus the romantic angle. You really showed Regina you won’t take her crap and I bet that turns him on. It’s no surprise he’s not a big fan of the mayor so having a pretty hot thing such as yourself show her what’s what has him hot under the collar.” Ruby wiggled her eyebrows suggestively as she pressed her tongue against her teeth in a lewd look.

“It’s not like that!” Belle protested. “Why does sex have to be involved? We’re friends with an
interest in books, art, music—“

“Translates to: he wants to bang you,” Ruby said, smirking while Ariel and Mary Margaret sighed at her bluntness. “Don’t get me wrong. He’s not bad looking, just not my type. But for you… I can totally see it.”

“Ruby!” Belle couldn’t believe they were even having this conversation in a public place no less. Yet, the waitress could be crass at times and it shouldn’t have been too shocking since Ruby has said some pretty questionable things in the past. Then again, she also has done some questionable things as well and Belle often would be the first to see her after such things. Ruby’s chaos was the last thing she ever wanted to experience, and sadly, there was no escaping it. Belle had a hard time looking Archie Hopper in the face after the fundraiser night without turning into a tomato.

Apparently, the shy and quiet guy had some kinks that Ruby released and he couldn’t stop thinking about it for days. It was a vision Belle had a difficulty forgetting and she hoped the shock would wear off so she could have a normal conversation with the good psychiatrist when he visited the library.

“I don’t care what you say. It’s romantic,” Ariel insisted, smiling dreamily. “It’s like destiny or something.”

“Just be careful Belle,” Mary Margaret told her, being the level-headed one in the group. “Gold has a reputation and while it might be unfounded in some cases… people will talk so prepare yourself for the rumors.”

The beauty gave her friends a pointed and narrow look. “Guys, we’re friends. We’re not hooking up and I’m not planning on hooking up. I appreciate the concern and all, but believe it or not, Gold and I have some things in common. We talk. There is no hidden agenda in our conversations so can we drop this?” As much as Belle loved her girlfriends, sometimes they drove her nuts. This being one such instance and it was clear they weren’t quite ready to drop the subject.

“Believe me, Belle, guys like Gold (and in his age) go after the younger women to reclaim their youth,” Ruby continued in her wisdom of men. “Take it as a compliment that he is lusting after your ass. You might be able to use that to your advantage when you need to take Regina to task. Better yet… do it when he can watch. You’ll thank me when he can’t keep his hands off you.”

“Really Ruby?” Mary Margaret crossed her arms. “Leave Belle alone. She gets the point.”

Ruby shrugged. “Just saying.”

“If you like him Belle, then you should go for it,” Ariel advised. “But make sure to double check that none of the stories are true first. Especially the one that he might have a harem of sex slaves. I hate to see your heart get broken.”

Belle sighed in resignation. There was no point in arguing with them when they made up their minds that Gold saw Belle as his plaything and she could use him as her Sugar Daddy if needed. None of which was appealing but convincing her friends that everything was platonic was a waste of breath. It would have been much different if there wasn’t such a large gap in their ages, but because there was it had to mean that physical relations were involved with the two.

Then again, if her friends really knew how much the age difference was… they would go ballistic. But Belle wasn’t telling and for good reason too. Gold had the appearance of a man in his late forties, possibly early fifties, but in reality, Gold was actually sixty-years-old. The lycanthrope genes slowed down the aging process and it made any werewolf appear much younger than what they
actually were. Gold would argue he felt far younger than that with all the exercise he had in his wolf form and he was quite fit as a human too.

Belle had asked him how come no one seemed to question it and he told her that it was simple. Being a recluse and staying in Dark Haven, people would forget appearances and won’t bother questioning his aging when he only showed his face once in a blue moon. If they did… well, that was where the rumor mill came in with its spouting of stories that explained every little facet of his life. Belle had to suppose that was where gossip came in handy and work to his advantage. No one suspected a thing about his origins and he could live without some pesky person butting in.

Unfortunately, half-demons didn’t have that kind of luxury. They aged just like any other person does since all half-demons took after their mothers. The only thing that separates them from being completely human was the supernatural talent that was inherited by their fathers. Sadly, Belle never had the fortune or the opportunity to meet another of her kind (that’s how Gold put it), but she knew she wasn’t alone. There were others like her and she would like to one day meet another one. Gold told her that he encountered a few half-demons in his lifetime, though none of them were benevolent as she. When he told her that story, he unconsciously released the chaos from his memories, which Belle absorbed greedily. It was as close as she got to witnessing another of her kind and while God hadn’t been kidding about how nasty they were… she couldn’t help her almost orgasmic reaction. After that… she had little choice but to confess what type of half-demon she was since he wasn’t sure what to make of her impromptu scene. She couldn’t stop blushing as she explained how the chaos affects her and why she had moved to Storybrooke in the first place. Understanding gleamed in his eyes and he felt bad for unintentionally bombarding her at their first meeting. He never apologized for the incident that occurred that day, and she highly doubted he was sorry. Perhaps Ruby had a point there and he got a kick out of watching her writhing out the chaos. Yet, everything else he did proved to be gentlemanly, but that didn’t excuse the fact he was a man. And don’t all men wish women would spontaneously come undone in front of them?

Belle couldn’t fault him if he enjoyed the free show, and he was courteous enough to keep the chaos away from his emotions and thoughts. If he only cared about bedding her, then he wouldn’t take those necessary strides to avoid putting Belle in an uncomfortable position. The last thing she wanted was for Regina to walk in while she was in a middle of a chaotic high, although she could picture Gold smirking smugly as he calmly tells Regina to fuck off and that he was in an important meeting with the librarian about a new shipment of books. Of course, she didn’t fantasize about that because that would mean she was attracted to him sexually. And she so was not!

Okay, maybe she had thought about it once or twice or maybe a few times, but that didn’t mean she wanted to actually have sex with the man. Even if they did, and that was a big if, there was no way of telling how it would turn out or what it would do to their budding friendship. And while there was a good chance that sex with Gold would be explosive with the chaos he could give to her from being a werewolf that didn’t mean it would be a good idea.

*Great! Now I can’t stop thinking about having sex with him. Damn you Ruby!* Belle thought angrily as her friend’s horn dog fetishes would not leave her alone as she walked from the diner back to the library. Hoping to force her mind from thinking about it, Belle returned to restocking the returns back on the bookshelves. That should cool her jets and keep her mind focused on work rather than envisioning Gold with that impish glint in his dark eyes, that devilish curl of his lip, and those slender fingers curling inside her like the way he wraps them around the cane’s head…

Nope. Not going there, she firmly told herself. It would never work and she had good reasons why it wouldn’t.
Thanks to her ability, whenever Belle would engage in the act, her mind would always be opened to her partner’s thoughts and it was the kind of emotional attachment that wasn’t pleasant. It not only affected her but the guy too and he would get this jolt of Belle’s feelings. Though it would be fleeting, often times the guy couldn’t get out of the bedroom as fast as he could. It was a weird melding of minds and it freaked them out, which Belle couldn’t blame them and so she avoided the deed completely. The only pleasure and relieve she could get was from her hand or the vibrator she kept hidden under a pile of junk in her nightstand drawer. It was safer and less complicated (and no broken hearts) and she could enjoy the afterglow, albeit short-lived it might be without no one there to come down too.

It wasn’t ideal and she was certain if Ruby ever found this out about her, the very tall and slim waitress would have a heart attack and a stroke all at once. She needed sex like most people needed water and food to survive. It was no secret that she was jumping at the bit to find someone for Belle, and Belle would go on the dates but she would not invite them to her room and she never accepted invitations to theirs either. So she would tell Ruby a little white lie that she was getting laid and it would put her off the hunt for the meantime.

Plus it didn’t take much for Belle to be disinterested in the dates that her friends set her up on. Most of the guys were boring or clueless and didn’t have much to contribute in an intelligent conversation or debate. Sure, they had a pretty face and a well-shaped body, but there was no substance to them and Belle craved the stimulation she could get in a discourse.

However, Gold was different. He intrigued her and not because he was a werewolf. If he had been all natural human, then Belle would feel the same way. He was educated, well-read, and he kept up on the latest current events to challenge her intellectually. If she were to be honest, she met her match when it came to matching wits and their bantering always left her in a good mood. Even if they passionately disagreed about something… they could talk about it in a civil matter and concede that the other may have a point, but ultimately it was his or her opinion that could not falter. Yet it was the fact she had someone to speak to about these opinions and beliefs that was refreshing. Add on top of that their non-human qualities and they did make an interesting pair—friends.

Furthermore, she was fascinated about the wolf. He wasn’t shy in sharing about his life and was all too happy to debunk the traditional and Hollywood aspects about werewolves. Gold admitted he couldn’t watch those movies without getting personally affronted with the portrayal and Belle supposed he had good reason. A full moon was not required for a Change. In fact, he could Change at will but he did have to do so on a regular basis. If he attempted to withhold the wolf, then the Change would be forced upon him without his control and it would make for a very unfortunate situation if there were witnesses nearby. Also, the famous old wives’ tale about a silver bullet being the weapon of choice to kill a beast… as Gold dryly put it: “Wouldn’t any living thing be killed by a silver bullet?”

In addition, Gold had his faculties about him as a wolf. He didn’t black out or forget the details. He remembered everything he saw, smelled, and tasted as a wolf. None of which bothered him since it was a part of his nature and he had lived his life like this. It was the freedom he enjoyed the most, though he was careful about where and when he Changed so he wouldn’t stumble upon anyone. Belle was an accident and he was grateful that it was her and not someone else.

“There was one time when I was younger that I did get a little too cocky about the Change and did come across a couple of campers with shotguns. I got away but I couldn’t go out for a couple of weeks with people hunting for a wolf. Even though no one got hurt, they were frightened about what I could do rather than what I didn’t do. A lesson learned and one I tried desperately hard not to repeat.”
She admired him for his candor and was impressed by his ability to guard his secret for so many years without arousing suspicion. She gathered it couldn’t be easy and she wanted to ask about his son and the mother, but felt it was none of her business to pry. If he wanted to tell her he would and she would have to wait. In the meantime, she couldn’t help the desire to see him as a wolf again. Now that she knew he wouldn’t hurt her, she wanted to see what the world was like in his eyes and experience that same kind of freedom he talked about. She didn’t want to be a werewolf, no; she wanted to have that same liberation as herself as he did.

Belle didn’t mention it and neither did he, but she would sometimes think back to that chance meeting in the woods and see his powerful legs run through the foliage, the wind ruffling his fur. The wolf possessed such strength and she wondered if the man did too. And if he would be the type to prefer tenderness in slow, short thrusts or did he liked to be rough with a deep, hard pounding—

“Penny for your thoughts Ms. French?”

The voice of Gold—the man she told herself she would not fantasize about and failed epically—combined with the fact she forgot she was perched on top of the ladder, putting books away, that she lost her balance and fell backwards.

It had been so quick Belle didn’t have a chance to let out a scream. Thankfully, her fall had been broken when two strong, solid pair of arms caught her. The wind was knocked out of her lungs and she lay in a boneless heap in his embrace, dazed and flushed from the plummeting drop. Slowly, she regained her senses and immediately was flooded with the spicy scent of his cologne that filled her nostrils with the barest hint of pine tree and dirt, which she wondered if he had Changed before coming to see her. The last thing she noticed was the cane lying at his feet.

Breathing in, Belle met his gaze and was taken aback by the warm almond color of his irises, which appeared to become darker with each passing second. A flicker of chaos ran a thrilling chill down her spine, causing her to tremble, though she did not break away from his direct and intense stare. The corner of his lips curled, his gold filling practically winking at her, and there was no mistaking the flash of lust that blazed in his countenance.

She would be lying if she said that the single look didn’t set her blood on fire. However, it was the dose of reality that hit her and she knew her added weight wasn’t good for his leg. She never noticed if the wolf had a limp, but the man did and she didn’t want to cause any pain or further damage.

“Thank you,” she whispered, her voice raspy from uttering those two words, her heart beating against her ribs.

He blinked once, and like that, his previous gaze was wiped clean as he set her down on her feet. His fingers twitched at the loss of her soft flesh, but he kept his hands to his side.

“You’re welcome,” he said, his finger fiddling with the ring on his pinky. “Not the greeting I was expecting, though you should be much more careful,” he scolded teasingly but the expression on his face was serious.

Running a shaky hand through her loose curls, Belle sheepishly chuckled. “Yeah. Clumsy me.”

“You were really intensely focused on something,” Gold remarked. “I stood here for two minutes and you didn’t notice I was there.” He sounded a little put off and she was positive he could have been close to whining at her neglect. “What were you thinking about just now?”

The blood rushed to her cheeks, staining across her nose as she coughed. What could she say? After a few years of abstinence she can’t stop obsessing over having sex with him thanks to her friends
constant nagging he’s interested in her for that reason alone? Instead, she blurted, “Your leg! Are you okay?”

Nonplussed, he glanced down and stretched his bad leg for her benefit before retrieving his cane and setting it in front of him. “I’m perfectly well as you can see. No harm done.”

“Yeah but—“ she sputtered, frowning not sure if he was saying that to save face or make her feel less guilty for straining it when he caught her. She saw the scars when he was a wolf and knew it had to be painful. Perhaps the wolf could tolerate it but what about the man? “You c-caught me. That had to hurt and I’m so sorry for any added damage I’ve caused—“

“Ms. French, I am well,” he said, his voice insistent and was there a little bit of amusement she detected? “My injuries are quite old and I have regained most of my strength, although bad weather does cause it to ache. Rest assured, I’m fine and catching you didn’t put me out for I am still standing.”

“Yeah but you have a limp,” she finished lamely, wondering why in the world was she arguing over this when he looked perfectly all right.

“All part of the act, dearie,” he grinned with a wink. “People will be less suspicious of me being an actual monster if I don’t move very fast.”

“Oh.” Now she felt stupid for not picking up on it sooner. “I guess it makes sense.”

“It’s all about protecting one’s livelihood Ms. French. I’m sure you understand.”

She nodded. “So… what brings you around?”

“I wanted to see if you would be interested in coming to Dark Haven and having tea with me? I think the privacy granted to us will be a better chance for us to get to know each other better. And we wouldn’t have to worry about saying the wrong thing if a patron walked in on our conversation.”

He was right. A few times they almost were caught and it was certainly dangerous if they revealed too much of their secrets in a public place. Grant it, while Belle wasn’t expecting the town of Storybrooke to be sharpening their pitchforks or lighting torches, she knew it wouldn’t bode well for either her or Gold if the truth was out. He spent many years protecting his identity and she has taking many strides to shield hers so the change in venue was ideal. Yet, that meant he was taking the first step in moving them away from the neutrality the library brought into something personal. It wasn’t a bad thing but this was big step for her; largely because going to his house was pretty intimate even if drinking tea was platonic and not a euphemism for something else. Especially something she should not be thinking about since it will drive him away if they did act upon their desires. Not saying he would jump her first chance he got, although the idea was appealing…

Shaking her head at how one track her mind was becoming all of a sudden in his proximity, Belle didn’t notice how he tightened his jaw or how pale his knuckles became wrapped around his cane.

“I understand if you don’t want to… I’m sure you have other things you wish to do. Forgive me if I overstepped my boundaries. Good day Ms. French.”

Hold the phone, huh!? He was rescinding his offer? What the… Belle’s eyes widened that her shaking her head probably meant that was a no to him. God, she really had to focus on her conversations better and not let her mind take a bend around Dirty Thinking Avenue.

“No wait!” He stopped mid-step as Belle ran in front of him, blocking him from walking out. “I’m sorry you misunderstood me. I didn’t mean to say—for you to think I wouldn’t—“ Exhaling deeply,
she said, “I would like to have tea with you.”

He cocked his head as his brow rose. “It’s no problem if you don’t want to…”

“I do,” she rushed, her expression firm and serious. “I want to see Dark Haven and drink tea. With you. How does Friday sound? I close the library at four and I can stop over.”

The barest hint of a smile flitted across his lips—a real smile not one of his patented wolfish ones. It did wonders in making him look even younger than before. “I look forward to Friday then Ms. French.”
Prompt: Belle goes to Dark Haven to have tea with Gold. He tells her more about his werewolf heritage and an interesting secret about his son. (Rated M for hints of child abuse and violence)

Friday rolled around and Belle was looking forward to having tea with Gold. Not only was she spending time with him but also she was going to get a look inside his home, Dark Haven.

It didn’t go without saying that her friends tried to talk her out of it. It was one thing for him to go to the library to visit her, but for Belle to go to his house secluded in the woods? Well… if wouldn’t be so bad if Belle went in the early morning as opposed to late afternoon when it would get dark sooner. Their fears towards him were ridiculous despite knowing that the stories were all lies. Belle understood their concern for her, and while it was endearing, she was past the Boogeyman feelings. Not that they would know that Gold really was a monster, and that was a can of worms that would remain sealed shut, but she wasn’t afraid of him. Now she was certain that he wouldn’t do anything to expose her secret of being a half-demon, Belle trusted him. And it was a long time that she felt she could trust anyone.

Once four o’clock struck, Belle had the library closed and locked up before she could say Bibbidi bobbidi boo. Hopping into her Ford, Belle checked her makeup and hair in the car mirror—reapplying her lipstick and mascara, and made sure her widow’s peak wasn’t showing—before she started onwards to Dark Haven. She hoped he wouldn’t mind that she was showing up in her work clothes, but she thought her ensemble was actually cute. It wasn’t too dressy or too casual considering she wasn’t sure if this counted as a date or not.

Being a lover of dresses, this was one of Belle’s favorite because it matched the color of her eyes—a bold blue that hit above her knee, sleeveless, with buttons going down the front to her waist where it met with a tied belt in an A-line cut. She made it a point to unclasp the first three buttons just to give a little sneak peek at her cleavage, but not too much to make it seem she was trying too hard to impress him. Jewelry she kept simple with a pair of pearl studs and her cross necklace, and a watch on one wrist and a silver bracelet on the other. The look was completed with a pair of black platform pumps with glistening studs that were to die for (and a splurge) that made her feel stylish and sexy at the same time.

Okay… maybe she might be giving off the wrong impression, but Belle wanted to look her best and if he was interested in her… well, they could see where it would lead. There were other things they could do that wouldn’t be too intimate for her chaos meter to go ballistic. Who knows? Maybe she wouldn’t scare Gold off after all, but to be on the safe side, Belle would rather move slowly if their friendship went elsewhere.

Her stomach did tiny flip-flops as she drove closer to his house; the anticipation was intoxicating. She wondered what they would talk about, what other stories Gold share about his life, and what would she would tell him about herself. She knew he was curious about her since she was nothing like the other half-demons he met and she hadn’t told him who actually sired her. Or her hunch at
least about her father’s identity. Hopefully that wouldn’t turn him away.

Coming around a bend, Belle turned into the long driveway that took her up to the main gate. Normally, the gate would be closed and locked to keep unwanted visitors off his property, but it was already opened… as if it was awaiting her entrance. Pressing her lips firmly together, Belle pulled forward and curved around the circular drive so she could park her car outside the front door.

There wasn’t any other vehicle in sight and Belle hoped he was home. They did agree after four o’clock right? Blowing through her nose, Belle grabbed her purse and stepped out. After shutting the car door she came to stand by the hood as she took the sight of Dark Haven up close. Without the iron bars obstructing her view, she was able to get a good look at the sprawling mansion and be in awe at the structure and beauty of it.

The style was a reflection of the Victorian-era and the size of it was almost like a castle found in the turbulent moors in England, instead of secreted in the forests of Maine. The style was definitely Gothic with its dark stone exterior, pointed windows, and parapets around the cornice below the roof. There was little landscaping done in the front, but what was done was a lot of evergreen shrubs and bushes that lined against the walls with a patch of vines that scaled over the corners of the house, stretching out like long fingers towards the lower roof and below the window.

It was certainly not a warming, welcomingly place but the immensity would definitely intimidate and frighten off those who were nosy. She frowned at seeing that most of the windows were covered with dark, thick curtains that made it appear more like a haunted house.

No wonder people made up such fantastical stories, she mused. I bet he did that purposely, the sly dog. Now she knew he loved those wild rumors and was doing his best to keep up the propensity of spurring new ones.

She had to chuckled at his deviousness as she climbed up the two steps that led her to the door. Before she could use the doorknocker to indicate her arrival, the door instantly opened and there was Mr. Gold standing in the entryway sans cane. She took note that he was dressed in his trademark tailored suits—this one black with black shirt and a paisley red tie. She pondered if he owned anything else besides suits. In fact, she wouldn’t be surprised if he wore one to bed. For a werewolf, he really liked to dress to the nines. Speaking of which, her eyebrows rose as she realized his stubble was gone. He shaved! Belle didn’t know what to make of it, but she knew reading too much wouldn’t be a good idea, though her mind was already heading in that direction that he might be expecting face time later on. Not that she minded.

“Ms. French,” he greeted richly, extending the door wider for her to pass him. “Welcome to Dark Haven.”

Flashing him a dazzling smile, Belle entered and immediately gasped at his foyer. “It’s beautiful!”

The room was covered in dark tones and shades, but the rest of the décor was breathtaking. A chandelier was above them and ahead was a grand staircase against the left wall. The wall leading upstairs was decorated with pictures and the hall had a couple of paintings. She looked down to find an ornate Persian rug below her that swallowed most of the floor.

“Thank you,” he replied with a self-satisfied smirk. “You will see that a lot of the items in this house are family heirlooms as well as objects I’ve collected over the years in my travels. Indeed, in a different lifetime, I was a restless wanderer who was trying to find his place and traveled the world before returning and settling back in Dark Haven. Come. Let me give you the grand tour.”

He showed her one of the parlors as well as the sitting room that was modestly decorated, but still
contained a few antiques. Next he showed her the morning room, which was relatively small, but there was a large pane of glass that looked out the grounds of Dark Haven.

“This has the best setting for when the sun rises,” he told her. “Even though we have the woods surrounding us, this spot is one of the rare open areas of my property.”

They passed his study and across from it was a library. Belle’s eyes lit up at the wooden shelves and musty scent of paper and ink. This was her favorite room so far at seeing the books that reached the ceiling. At Gold’s offhanded laugh, he revealed that this was his business library that held his collection of law, business, financial, and philosophical books. He had a personal library upstairs and his son had his own private library as well.

Belle thought she was going to faint. Three… three libraries? She was in Heaven and almost hit the floor when Gold told her she could borrow a book anytime. Borrow? She was thinking she could live in that room with that big, comfy armchair in front of the fireplace.

The living room, however, was quite modern with the big screen TV, pool table, and leather furniture. Yet, Gold made his mark in the room with another antique off in the corner—a spinning wheel. She approached it and saw a spindle of wool attached to it. Arching her brow, she tilted her face as he came up from behind.

“You spin?”

“I like to watch the wheel turn. It’s very soothing,” he replied.

“Doesn’t quite match the atmosphere in here,” she commented and Gold chuckled.

“This room is mainly my son’s but I keep my wheel in here so I can spend time with him. He likes to play billiards to blow off steam after his classes and listen to me spin. He used to fall asleep as a boy when I spun.”

Ruby had mentioned there was a son and Belle nodded understandingly. “I heard he’s doing a lecture tour.”

Gold nodded. “That’s right. He hates these tours but the University makes him do them. Actually, I told him too. Neal needs to spend more time out there than stay cooped up in here with me. He’s not a real people-person. As a matter of fact neither am I but he has no excuse.”

Belle was surprised by that statement. According to what Ruby said, Gold’s son was the friendlier of the two. Then the other odd thing she noticed was how he said he had to tell his son to leave Dark Haven. All right, maybe it wasn’t so strange, but both were grown men and if Neal didn’t want to, then he didn’t have to. Gold went on to add:

“There was an incident a couple years ago that left Neal depressed. A girl and since she’s gone… Well, he hasn’t gotten over her let’s just say.”

“That bad?”

“Very.” He left it at that and Belle didn’t press for more answers. At least now she could understand his pushiness for his son to leave Dark Haven. Her stomach growled and she placed a hand on her belly, a little embarrassed at the sound, but Gold smiled politely. “Roaming these halls does put up an appetite and I did promise you tea.”

She agreed and followed as he led her through the maze of hallways towards the kitchen. One thing Belle could say for certain that if she was left to her own devices, she would easily get lost in the
enormous size of Dark Haven. She felt like Gold should pass out maps to make navigation easier, especially with all the rooms he had. Belle joked if he had anything in his basement since there was so much on displayed.

“Oh no, downstairs is where I keep my dungeon,” he deadpanned.

Belle laughed at his quip and he looked at her bemusedly. “That wasn’t a joke my dear. I really do have a dungeon.”

“Seriously?” she said. “What do you use it for?”

“Trust me when I say it may not be a good idea for you to see. I’m sure its crawling with all sorts of chaos,” he said. “But if you insist… well, I can’t say no to a lady.”

She rolled her eyes. “I’ll pass.” The last thing she wanted was to wind up in a chaos comatose state.

She didn’t doubt he was lying about the chaos down there.

The kitchen was spacious, which Belle was no longer stunned by it, and equipped with the state of the art appliances. The one thing that did strike her rather odd was the two large refrigerators side by side. Catching her look, Gold told her wryly, “There are three more downstairs. Next to the dungeon, of course.”

“It’s probably none of my business… but why all this when there’s you and your son?” Belle asked. It was a question that she was dying to ask and didn’t want to sound rude, but five refrigerators were excessive. He gestured for her to sit at the island and Belle sat on one of the bar stools and watched as he set the kettle on the stove. The tea settings were already out and Belle was instantly charmed by the white cups with the blue floral design on them. He certainly outdid himself by having the cups and respective saucers placed on a silver tray along with sugar and cream. In addition, there were three plates on the counter with finger sandwiches and cakes. He placed all three plates on the island with two of them near his seat. At her off glance, he shrugged. “High metabolism.”

She mouthed “oh” and waited for him to answer her question.

“Right now, it is Neal and I living in Dark Haven. But when the rest of my Pack is here the extra room is desperately needed.”

“Wait, did you say Pack?” Her jaw dropped as did the sandwich she picked up. Luckily it fell on the island and not her dress or the floor. “There are more of you?”

The kettle released a low whistle and while Gold busied himself with pouring the boiled water into the teapot. “Green tea?” he questioned and Belle nodded. He poured the green tea into the teapot and closed the lid to let it steep. Turning around to lean against the sink, he answered, “Yes. There are more of us. I’m the Alpha of my Pack.”

Somehow that didn’t surprise her either. “How many are you?”

“Including myself there’s eight.”

“Wow.” To think there were seven other werewolves roaming around… it was bizarre to say the least. “Where are they? If you don’t mind me asking.”

“Not at all. You see, it would be suspicious if everyone lived here twenty-four/seven and if rumors spoke about a high quantity of wolves lurking around… well, it wouldn’t take much to put two-and-two together. We are careful, of course, but on occasion there is a slip and we take cover and make it seem as if the wolf is simply passing by. Fortunately, there are not a lot of hunters in Storybrooke,
but one can never be too careful. We only gather when it’s necessary and we do celebrate the 
holidays and birthdays together. Afterwards, the Pack disperses and returns to their other lives until I 
call them once more. We are a family albeit an unconventional one.”

The tea was ready and Gold poured their cups and added a little bit of creamer and three teaspoons 
of sugar in his. Belle had a teaspoon of sugar in hers. She brought it to her lips and sipped the hot 
beverage. It tasted heavenly just as the snacks did too. Gold sat on the other stool and began chewing 
one of the sandwiches. Once he swallowed, he went on.

“The way it is in my world, Ms. French, we have specific rules and guidelines we must ascertain. 
You’ll agree with me that if humans were made aware of our existence, then things will get awfully 
hairy and quick. We don’t want that and we protect ourselves no matter the cost hence the Packs. We 
establish and make sure these laws are being obeyed for our sake and to make sure our territory is 
safe. Of course, there are circumstances where extreme prejudice must be taken, especially in regards 
to Mutts.”

“Mutts?” Belle repeated.

“Non-Pack werewolves,” he explained. “In our world, Pack wolves are born into it while Mutts are 
werewolves who have been bitten or scratched. Pack wolves do not change people—that is explicit. 
We want to protect our species, not draw attention to it or risk our exposure. Yet there are times 
when a rogue Pack member or a disgraced one will try to form their own Packs with Mutts. It never 
works out because surviving the bite is the first obstacle. And without the proper guidance a person 
could go mad with the Change. If they manage it, then they might be lucky to separate the man from 
the wolf. However, Mutts are unruly and don’t often like to abide by Pack law. A big misconception 
is for people to think werewolves are free beings to do whatever they wish without consequence. We 
kill only when necessary, and even then, we don’t kill for sport or people. We don’t eat humans. But 
if a human must be killed… the rule is that the body must be properly disposed so it won’t be trace 
back to the Pack. Mutts don’t often take kindly to these rules, but if they want to live… then it’s in 
their best interest to play nice. Otherwise, our duty is to stop them from doing it ever again.”

Belle gulped as his tone had a slight edge to it and it was quite clear that Gold took this very 
seriously. “That’s intense.”

“Alas,” he said. “It must be. If we let a Mutt go, then the next one will think they’ll get a pass or 
worse… challenge my authority as Alpha.” Gold growled the last sentence. “There’s nothing worse 
than a cocky, arrogant Mutt who thinks he is better than us Pack wolves. I’ve dealt with my fair 
share of them as has my Pack family.”

“Can a Mutt join you? Wouldn’t that prevent them from challenging you?” she inquired.

“It depends,” Gold replied sincerely. “We don’t hand out invitations or open our doors to Mutts. 
They have to prove themselves worthy and the Pack decides if the Mutt’s in. The final decision rests 
with me. Loyalty is important and if I feel I’m not getting it then a Mutt does not get accepted. I’ve 
only accepted two Pack members who were not born as wolves and I can count of them to heed my 
call and obey.”

From the sound of it Belle doubted he would have allowed one at all. But two? They must have 
made quite an impression on Gold for him to welcome them into his Pack and she told him so.

“Aye. I never came across a Mutt like Neal before.”

“Neal? As in your son Neal?”
“That’s correct. Neal’s my adopted son but I love him as if he were my flesh and blood.”

“So how did that happen?”

“Many years ago when I was a lad in my twenties I did what most young people did and traveled. I’ve seen many parts of the world and when I came back to the States I decided to explore this country too. I was in Michigan at the time, hiking in a forest in the northern parts when I stumbled across this small child. It was hard to tell how old he was with his size but I surmised he was four or six-years old. He snarled at me, telling me I was intruding on his territory and to get lost. I smelled he was a werewolf though his scent was not of an inherited one. He had been bitten and was abandoned to fend for himself.

“Now, to bite an adult is one thing, but a child? That was cruel and despicable. I couldn’t believe someone had dared to thrust this fate on him and without remaining at his side was unforgivable. I couldn’t catch the scent of his Sire so I could confront the sadistic bastard myself, but before I knew it… the boy Changed in front of me! We don’t Change until we reach puberty so for a Mutt, especially a young one, to Change so early and so soon? Unheard of! And amazingly, he had handled it like a pro so it was evident he could Change for some time and his control over the wolf was superb. Most newly Changed wolves have difficulties in mastering the beast and often lose themselves in their primal instincts and urges. But not him. He knew exactly what he was doing and I was not frightened… I could tell he had been confused about my scent and didn’t know how to respond.

“So I left him only to return the next day. Tracking him hadn’t been hard and I brought food with me to use to gain his trust. It took me weeks and plenty of one-sided conversations before he spoke to me. Then I was able to learn his life’s story.

“He didn’t remember much about his former life, but he did remember his mother and her boyfriend. They both were abusive and negligent towards him, sometimes locking him out of the house or forcing him to fend for himself when he was hungry. He knew that bad things had happened to him and he wanted it to end but didn’t know how. Then one night the boyfriend got drunk and he took off to avoid being caught and beaten by him. He hid, and in the nick of time too, because a wolf came out of nowhere and ripped the inebriated boyfriend into pieces. The dying man’s screams alerted the mother and when she came out to see what the fuss was about—the wolf got her too. Neal saw all of this and was immediately entranced.

“He waited until the wolf was gone and decided to track it. That was how he discovered that the wolf was a werewolf and demanded that the man Change him too. Neal is a brave one, even at that age, and his bravado caught the man by surprise. He could have killed Neal but for some reason he agreed to do it. He bit Neal and left him alone in the woods to deal with the physical side effects and once the fever broke… Neal found he could Change. He lived on his own after that feeding off the wildlife for a year until I found him. It took more convincing but I persuaded Neal to come back to Dark Haven with me. It wasn’t easy though convincing the Alpha at the time that Neal would be better with the Pack. He hated me, you see, and any time I tried to find any type of happiness… he would soil it somehow.’

Closing his eyes, Gold breathed in deeply as if reliving some of those memories. “He would have killed Neal and I already was starting to love him so I wouldn’t back down, demanding that he’d allow me to adopt Neal and teach him the Pack ways. I was fortunate that my Pack brothers also despised the Alpha and supported my decision in raising Neal. So he backed off and allowed me to keep him. Of course the old son of a bitch would find ways to torture me, even went after Neal too. He wasn’t expecting my son to be a fighter and was too stunned that this pup wouldn’t break. It was certainly one of my proudest highlights of Neal. He wouldn’t allow the Alpha to disrespect or hurt
me. In Neal’s eyes… I was the Alpha and should be treated so.”

Belle was having her second cup of tea and was quickly becoming absorbed in this story. She hadn’t met Neal yet but already she admired him for everything he had gone through. For a child to go through that much trauma and turn out all right considering the facts… that was impressive. And even Gold was seen in a different light. It was so obvious he loved his son and he wanted to do everything he could to help him.

“It was dangerous for him to think like that, let alone say it aloud. I did my best to keep him out of the Alpha’s way and tried to get him obey his orders, but Neal wouldn’t have it. He didn’t understand and even his best friend, Jefferson, couldn’t get through to him. It wasn’t until Neal was in his teens that he finally snapped. The current Alpha wasn’t doing his duty like he should and he wasn’t a leader. Instead of being protective, he was cold and cruel and used fear to intimidate and manipulate the Pack. That wasn’t how a good Alpha should act and Neal proposed a new Alpha be instated.”

“You,” Belle said.

“To become Alpha, you would have to fight the current Alpha to the death. Whoever comes out alive… well, the victor is Alpha. I wasn’t looking for a fight, and while that may sound cowardly, I was being smart. I was just biding my time and Neal, unfortunately, forced the situation to fruition a lot sooner than I would have liked. I knew the Alpha was stronger than I and I wanted to work on my strength before I challenged him. Yet, he accepted Neal’s proposition gleefully and before I knew it… we were Changing for the title. I had not only Neal rooting for me, but the rest of the Pack too. They wanted me to win and I couldn’t let them down. If I had failed… I shudder to think what he would have done to those who didn’t support him.

“It was a grueling and bloody fight. He had years of experience and advantage over me and then… well, this happened.” He pointed to his right leg. “Practically chewed it right off he did. I thought I was dead. I saw it coming and then in a flash of fur… Neal was beside me, tackling the Alpha and pinning him to the ground. I was badly injured and could hardly walk let alone crawl away from the brawl. I blacked out and Changed back to my human self. When I regained consciousness, my brothers did the best they could to save my leg and they did. I have the scars for the rest of my life but we werewolves are fast healers. So it’s why I can walk on it but even then… I have my limits. Yet, I was more concerned about Neal and my boy came in with cuts and bruises, but he was smiling. It was over. The Alpha was gone and I was the winner. Well, Neal was the winner but he did it for me and here I am now. Still Alpha and my son is my right hand man. There is no other person I could trust with my life than Neal. He is truly a blessing in my life. I’m very fortunate Ms. French to have found him.”

“You certainly are. That is… I don’t know what to say. But that’s incredible!” She gushed. “I’m sure that the other Mutt had just as impressive story too.”

This Gold looked away sheepishly. “Well… it’s not like Neal’s. This one is more tragic and it’s not mine to share. I will tell you that it does involve my son and partly why I sent him to do the lecture tour.”

Belle wondered if he was referring to the girl problem Neal had, but kept her mouth closed. She figured when the time was right either Gold will tell her or maybe Neal. She knew that she definitely wanted to meet him.

“Thank you,” she told him. “For telling me this. I’m sure it wasn’t easy for you but from the sound of it… your Pack admires you and you have a son that loves you very much for everything you’ve done for him. I feel like my woes are nothing now compared to what you had to go through.”
“You grew up not knowing who you are, while I did,” Gold argued. “That’s not easy at all. I’m not looking for sympathy or pity by telling you this. Those are the facts about my life and I put it behind me when the former Alpha was killed. I wanted you to know the truth so when my Pack does return it won’t be a shock to your system.”

“Could I meet them?” Belle asked timidly all of a sudden. “Especially Neal?”

“I would like that,” he replied. “I think you will like them and Neal… it takes a while for him to warm up to strangers, but I think he will like you too.”

She beamed at that and went back to munching on a cake. “You know,” Belle said after a couple of minutes. “I just realized that everything you told me… I still don’t know your first name. I mean you told me some personal stuff right there and you’ve seen me in my chaos induced state a couple times so I think we’re beyond formality by now.”

“I suppose you make a valid point Ms. French,” Gold said thoughtfully. “Names do contain a hold of power and I will be willing to reveal mine for a price.”

“Seriously?” She flipped her hair behind her shoulder. “That’s not fair. You know my first name even if you choose not to say it.”

“Life is full of disappointments,” he smirked as his eyes glittered with amusement. “What will it be?”

“What kind of price are we talking about?” Belle asked.

“I haven’t decided. Let’s call it a favor until I make up my mind.”

She narrowed her eyes at him. “I take back what I said. You’re one manipulative, sneaky bastard.”

“Guilty as charge,” Gold laughed and Belle couldn’t hold back her composure. She grinned and said, “How about this… I get to guess. Sort of like the story about Rumplestiltskin.”

He thought about it and gave a slight nod. “Very well. I will give you three guesses and if you don’t get it, then you owe me something.”

“Deal,” Belle agreed. “Do I at least get a hint?”

“I’m feeling affable… it starts with an ‘R.’”

“‘R’…” Belle drew out and tapped her chin. “Renard? Rush?”

“No and no. You wasted two tries dearie.”

She smiled and leaned in closer. Her blue eyes locked with his brown ones as if she was searching for something. For a second, Gold forgot to breathe as the petite beauty’s eyes darkened to a deep blue. Not even her demonic scent seemed to bother him at the close range. Instead, he could overlook the sulfur and brimstone and detect a light, airy scent of her perfume… roses.

Then Belle pulled back without warning and crossed her arms over her chest smugly. “Robert,” she declared and for a moment there Gold wasn’t sure if he heard correctly. “Your name is Robert,” Belle said again and he reacted with a jolt. “I see I’m correct,” she went on and he pointed a finger at her.

“You cheated,” he accused her and Belle bit back her smile. “I guessed that’s all. Not my fault you’re a sore loser.”
“I feel like you should owe me still,” he mumbled.

“A deal’s a deal,” she sing-song and he sighed. “Very well. You won this time Ms. French. Next time… we’ll see if you prove victorious once more.”

“I’m looking forward to it,” she promised him. “And you need to call me Belle.”

“Belle,” he tested out and she shivered at the way his brogue pronounced her name. *Damn. His accent should be illegal,* she thought. “On one stipulation,” he added. “We use our names only in private. I do have a reputation to uphold and being called Robert doesn’t strike fear in the hearts of humans.”

“All right. Robert,” Belle replied and took delight in the way his nostrils flared a little at the sound of his name. “I would hate to be the one to destroy your good name in town.”

They chuckled and when Gold glanced at the stovetop’s clock, his eyes widened. “I didn’t realize how late it was. I’m sure your friends are missing you.”

“Hmm?” Belle looked at the clock and gasped. She had no idea that the hours flew by as if they were nothing. Digging into her purse, she pulled out her cell and groaned at the number of missed calls, voicemail messages, and text messages she received and currently receiving. “Damnit,” she muttered. “Yeah I probably should head back. The next thing I’ll get a message that they will call the police.”

As she said it the phone buzzed again and Ruby texted her that she was going to call the police in a minute if Belle didn’t respond. Quickly, she typed a short message to Ruby that she lost track of time and was enjoying herself and will talk to her later. She did the same with Ariel and Mary Margaret before dropping it back into her purse. “I’m sorry. I guess it was too much to ask for to have tea with you.”

Hopping off the stool, Belle swung her purse’s strap over her shoulder. “Thank you again Robert. I’m really glad you asked me to come over.”

“It was my pleasure Ms… Belle,” he corrected. He got up and went to reach for her cup, but she batted him aside.

“Let me,” she insisted. “It’s the least I can do—“ Her voice dropped sharply as she accidentally brushed the teacup with her hand, knocking it to the ground. Gasping, she dropped to her knees to pick it up and cursed when she saw the rim of it was chipped. “I’m so sorry!”

“It’s only a cup,” Gold told her but that didn’t make it better.

“I’m sure it was an expensive one by the looks of it. Shit…”

“Belle,” Gold said warmly and removed the cup from her hand to stop her from further self-deprecating rants. “It’s fine. It can hold tea still, which is its function. You don’t have to apologize.”

“Yeah but—“

“Not another word,” he said firmly.

She lowered her head. “Well, I take it that we won’t have tea together again.”

“Not unless you want to stop,” he told her. “Of course, I would be quite crossed if you did.”
“No,” she rushed. “I liked it very much and would love to do it again.”

“Then it’s settled. We’ll have tea same time next week?”

Belle smiled. “But it’s my turn.”

Gold smiled widely. “Then next Friday it will be Belle.”
Otherworld

This was a big step in introducing the Pack to Belle. It was an honor that has never been bestowed to anyone; mainly because no one was allowed to know the truth. If they did… then Robert Gold had to kill them. As Alpha, it was his responsibility to ensure the protection and survival of the Pack regardless of how it was done.

However, Belle was different. She was like them—not a werewolf, no. Female werewolves were nonexistent. The gene was passed from father to son unless you were bitten by one. For centuries, the Pack kept its history in the Legacy, passing it from generation to generation, containing all their secrets. Attempts to create female werewolves always ended disastrously. It got to the point that it had to end. Of course, it didn’t stop some from trying…

At least Belle was a half-demon, a supernatural being in the vast world of other species that are non-human, and ones that Gold has been discovering lately. For the longest time, the Pack believed they were the only non-human beings in existence. Over time, they began to realize they weren’t alone. Not every supernatural being was a threat but Gold made it a habit of checking out who was coming into his town. If he felt there might be an issue, then he paid that person a visit and they were gone the next day. Or if they were stupid, they left this plane of existence entirely.

No one messed with the Pack, not with Robert Gold in charge. Then when Belle came… it changed for Gold. He never met anyone as intriguing as Belle or anyone he wanted to introduce his family to.

So when he told his son, Neal, about her—his second-in-command was more speechless than anything. He had to meet this woman that ensnared his father.

“We’re friends,” Gold said.

“Sure Papa,” Neal replied. “I can’t wait to meet your ‘friend’.”

And of course it quickly spread to the rest of the family—all expressing their interest in meeting this so called lady friend of his. Gold called Neal immediately, growling how he was going to kill him. Neal laughed and told him he wouldn’t because no one else could keep the Mutts in line. There was one other but circumstances were complicated and Gold promised not to call unless it was a gathering or an emergency. When it was time to call for a meeting, he left a message indicating it was that time again and expressed his desire for them to be there. He hoped they showed up.

Neal arrived first (not unexpectedly) and rushed through his unpacking to meet Belle once she came. His enthusiasm caused Gold to raise his eyebrow.

“I’m eager so sue me,” Neal said, shrugging nonchalantly. “In all these years, you never showed interest in anyone. Women or men.”
"Forgive me. I was busy taking care of the Pack. And what the Hell do you mean men?"

Neal chuckled. "I’m messing with you Papa. Wait! I hear a car rolling up."

Gold rolled his eyes when his son flew out the hall to the front door. In hindsight, he should have warned Belle, but he couldn’t deny that he looked forward in seeing her reaction to his howl-raising family. He wasn’t disappointed when as soon as Belle knocked, the door yanked open and Neal pulled her into a bear hug, lifting her off the ground.

Gold smirked as Belle’s eyes flew open, her blue eyes wide and full of shock, her jaw dropping as she looked to him for help. Shaking his head, Gold said, “All right Neal. You can set her down. Belle French, my adopted son Neal Gold.”

“Ah, he says that when I embarrass him,” Neal laughed. “Nice to meet you.”

His hand pumped hers as Belle giggled nervously. “Same here. Robert’s told me a lot about you.”

“Oh, Robert hmm?” Neal tossed a look at his father. “Friend my foot.”

Before Neal could say anything else, Gold moved to escort her inside. “Ignore him. He thinks he’s funny.”

“I don’t mind,” Belle insisted, smiling as Neal winked. “Of course I was expecting him to be a lot more reserved.”

"Normally… yes,” Neal said. “I’m making an exception today. It’s not every day I meet my old man’s lady friends.”

“Gee, I wonder why?” Gold grumbled as she laughed at his expense.

“I smell fresh meat!” They were interrupted as a new voice spoke from the porch. Belle turned in time as she was lifted in the air again. “She smells diabolically good Gold! I could just eat her!” A devilishly handsome man with short brown hair and dark eyes flashed a grin at her.

“Put her down Peter. Christ, you’re going to make her think we’re man eaters,” said an older man with wise brown eyes and golden brown hair. Once Belle was back on earth, he gave her an apologetic smile. “Forgive my son. He loses his mind around pretty girls. I’m Antonio Midas and this is obviously Peter.”

“Hello,” she said, finding the father-son dynamics of both quite amusing. Clearly there wasn’t a dull moment as Peter turned to Neal and they threw a couple of punches at each other before hugging like long lost brothers. Even Robert wasn’t uptight as he embraced Peter and then Midas.

“Hello old friend,” Midas said.

“Hello to you too,” Gold replied, smiling widely. “How was the flight?”

“Long but it’s good to be home,” Midas said.

“I’m surprised the others aren’t here yet,” Peter remarked. “Graham and David live close by don’t they?”

“What?” Belle frowned. At that, Gold sheepishly chuckled. “You’re going to find out but a couple of my Pack brothers do live in town. Graham, the Sheriff, and David Nolan—“

“Wait, no,” Belle said. “Mary Margaret’s David Nolan? It can’t be.”
“Actually, yes,” David said, walking in with Graham behind. “Sorry Belle but it’s important you
don’t tell anyone, especially Mary Margaret.”

“But—how did I not know?” she asked a little put out she hadn’t noticed sooner.

David smirked. “Gold said you can sense chaos and honestly… I don’t have much chaos in my life.”

“Yeah but wouldn’t the wolf thing do it? It did with him,” she explained, pointing to Gold.

The other men exchanged looks. “The wolf is a part of us as natural as it can be so there isn’t much
happening unless there’s a recent kill or we’re close to a Change. When we met, I noticed your scent
wasn’t human and told Gold. So we kept tabs on you to make sure you weren’t up to trouble. Then
we realized we have nothing to worry about since you’re straight as an arrow,” David explained.

“You—kept tabs on me?!” She glared at Gold.

“I told you when we met. My Pack, my town… had to be sure you weren’t a threat. Once it was
evident you weren’t we stopped. Think of it as a test. You passed with flying colors,” Gold said.

“Yup. Got the Pack’s stamp of approval,” Graham told her.

Belle whistled. “Well, something tells me Regina would have a cow if she knew this.”

“Thankfully she doesn’t,” Gold said. “But we are watching her just in case she butts her nose in
where it doesn’t belong, isn’t that right Graham?”

The Irish sheriff rolled his eyes. “Bloody woman has a crush on me but believe me when I say… if
she finds out, then that’ll be the end of Madam Mayor Mills.”

The flippant way they had talking about death as if it was a common like the weather was a little
disconcerting, but Belle was beginning to see it was part of their lives and survival. As much as she
was loathe to admit it, she knew she would do anything to keep her identity a secret too… the demon
in her demanded it.

Pleased that the comment did not upset her, Gold grinned. “That’s almost everyone. Leroy isn’t here
yet but let’s go into the kitchen. I have snacks and drinks out.”

“You’ll love this,” Peter whispered, throwing his arm across Belle’s shoulders. “You haven’t seen a
group of grown werewolves eat, have you?”

“Nope.”

“Grown is a relative term,” Neal shot back and slung his arm around her waist. “You better get
something before these brutes eat everything. And I mean everything.”

“Hey! We’ll behave like gentlemen!” David insisted. “Right Graham?”

The sheriff muttered something discernible but Belle laughed and followed her two escorts as all five
headed into the kitchen. Gold let out the breath he was holding as Midas clapped him on the back.

“She’s lovely. Certainly fits in and has the boys charmed all right. Can’t ask for anything more,”
Midas said.

He nodded. “I was more worried about Neal. I’m glad he likes her.”

“Yeah. The kid needs some cheering up. Is--?”
“I don’t know,” Gold sighed. “I left a couple of messages but nothing back. I hope so. I did give a direct order.”

“I’m sure everything’s fine,” Midas assured him. “We better go and supervised. Your Belle might be traumatized if she’s left alone for too long with those pups.”

Gold chuckled. “I highly doubt it. But I put my money on her to traumatize them.”

They went into the kitchen where all five were sitting around the dining room table while Peter regaled his recent adventure in Russia. Belle was captivated by his story as she listened attentively, then burst out laughing along with the others at the end.

“So the moral of the story is this kiddies: Next time you Change back into human—make sure you don’t hide your clothes where a homeless person can get them so you won’t be forced to put on women’s clothing and walk past a tavern full of drunk Russians,” Peter finished.

“Hey, could have been worse,” David pointed out with a mouthful of chicken wings. “You could have been naked.” He said this while looking at Neal.

“What?” Neal asked innocently. “Not my fault your brother couldn’t take a joke.”

“You have a brother David?” Belle questioned with interest.

“Had,” he corrected, swallowing his food. “Twins which is a rarity among werewolves but we parted on unfriendly terms and we don’t stay in touch. He doesn’t exist in my eyes and I rather keep it that way. Mary Margaret doesn’t know either and the last thing I want her to do is try looking for him to make amends. She’s that kind of person who can’t stand when family’s apart but he’s not family. And he wouldn’t hesitate to kill her too.”

“Oh.” She looked at the other men. “That has to be horrible for you guys to keep all of this a secret and hide this from your girlfriends.”

“That’s the life of a werewolf,” Graham supplied. “Sadly, James is a traitor and will be killed on the spot if he enters our territory. He knows it’s in his best interest to stay away.”

“As for girlfriends… well, David’s the only one with that issue. It’s preferred to form attachments when it’s necessary. This isn’t some chick romance with a happy fairy tale ending,” Peter explained.

“Besides,” David interrupted. “That’s a story for another day.”

“I got it. Your secrets are safe with me but you know if she does find out—“

“She won’t,” David continued.

“All right.” She didn’t sound convinced but she kept her lips closed on the matter.

Gold took the empty seat next to Belle and reached for the bowl of chips. “Having fun?” he asked, popping one in his mouth.

“Oh yes,” she smirked. “Peter has some wild tales here.”

“Not surprised,” Gold replied, chewing. “He and Neal were notorious for getting in all sorts of trouble, especially as children.”

“Remember the classroom hamster?” Midas brought up, snagging a chair next to his son.
Neal groaned. “Don’t remind me. Papa—you were so pissed! I thought you would put me on a leash for sure.”

“Yes, well, when you have kids, remember it’s not fun to have to explain to humans why your son decided it was a brilliant idea to dissect the classroom pet.”

“Okay, say what? You have to explain this!” Belle demanded curiously.

“Neal and I are in the sixth grade, ‘kay? There’s this hamster, Fluffy—“

“Cuddles,” Neal corrected.

“Cuddles,” Peter amended. “So its recess and we’re outside but Neal wanted to practice pouncing and can’t do it when everyone’s watching. We sneak into the classroom to wrestle and such when Neal gets the idea to try his stealth in a hunt with Cuddles. We could capture him before anyone else came in and no one would be the wiser that we were messing with him. So Neal goes to get Cuddles and—“

“He’s dead,” Neal said, looking at Belle. “Remember that Belle. He’s dead.”

“Died of natural causes,” Peter went on. “So genius here decides to use the opportunity to study the hamster’s anatomy. Why not right? He takes whatever he can find from the teacher’s desk to use as surgical tools and is in the middle of this impromptu autopsy when the class returns. Mrs. Briar hit the roof!”

“I thought she would combust with all that smoke coming from her ears,” Neal said.

“Then I had to speak on his behalf to assure the school that my son wasn’t troubled or abused or anything psychotic to explain this unimaginable horror,” Gold concluded.

“It was dead!” Neal defended.

“And most children wouldn’t dissect it. They would have gotten a teacher to take care of it,” Gold retorted. “That had been a fun day. It wasn’t long afterwards the school recommended homeschooling instead. He did a number on those poor kids’ heads when they saw the pulverized corpse.”

“That was way better by the way,” Neal said. “I wasn’t being held back so the others can catch up on the lessons.”

“And left me alone,” Peter included.

“You lived without me,” Neal grinned. “And—“

“It’s a party now!” cried a new voice.

“Leroy!” The men were out of their chairs, shaking hands and hugging the new arrival. Belle was the last to greet him, which resulted in another bear-crushing hug. When he let go of her, he jabbed his thumb behind him. “And look who I found outside too!”

No words could describe how happy and relieved Gold was in seeing the last family member come. That meant a lot that she kept her promise to show up. He stole a quick glance at his son who was tensed and anxious and distressed all at once. Gold hoped with Belle here that they wouldn’t engage in too much drama or hair pulling or blood spilling. Lord knows he didn’t want a repeat like the Christmas of two years ago.
He watched as the attractive blonde emerged and her gaze zeroed in on Neal—anger still seething in her eyes, and Gold resisted the eye roll that blood spilling was more than likely to occur by the time this visit was over. However, her expression evolved into smiles and cries of delight at the others.

Gold waited for them to finish greeting their Pack sister before he introduced Belle. Even she was shocked by her Alpha having a female friend.

“Belle this is Emma Swan. Emma, this is Belle French.”

“Hello,” the petite beauty said warmly. “I’m the half-demon.”

“I gathered from the smell,” the blonde said curtly.

“Emma here is one of our best trackers,” Gold explained. “Whenever there’s a Mutt problem, she’s the one to fix it.”

“Was Gold,” she emphasized. “Don’t forget it. I’m not doing that anymore.”

“Of course,” the Alpha replied in a patronizing tone. “But only a temporary break.”

“We’ll see,” Emma responded noncommittally. Looking at Belle, she added, “I guess you met the family then.”

“I have,” Belle answered. “I’m sorry but I thought werewolves were only—“

Emma bitterly chuckled. “Male? Yeah but I wasn’t born like this. I was bitten and became the only lucky female to survive it. Yay me.”


“And a story for much later,” Gold whispered in Belle’s ear. “This is my family Belle. My Pack.” He told her proudly.

She sneakily reached for his hand and squeezed it affectionately. “Thank you Robert. I’m glad you did this.”

The gesture sent this unusual warmth through his chest as his pulse fluttered from the touch. It felt wonderful that she accepted them so readily and with opened arms… and they welcomed her into this unconventional and slightly unorthodox family.

That meant the world to him.
Chapter Summary

Tinuviel Undomiel Prompted: Were!Gold and half-demon!Belle get together in a moment of passion and anger after an intense situation. (Rated M for smut, character death, torture, and child sexual abuse. How does that fit? You have to read.)

Otherworld

It had been forty-eight hours since Belle had seen Robert Gold. The only piece of communication she had from him was an abrupt voicemail that he would be out of town for Pack business. If his cell phone was on, he wasn’t answering it or he kept it off… Either way, Robert was unreachable and during a crisis like this, things didn’t bode well.

And he wasn’t the only one. The other members of his Pack were not returning her calls either so Belle had no clue what the Hell was going on at the moment. All she knew was that there were Mutts zeroing in on Storybrooke and Gold was their target. But if he was gone then that would mean the fight was elsewhere, though even so, Belle was pissed he didn’t inform her sooner or let her join the fight. After all, the Pack wasn’t the only ones grieving.

Those sons of bitches murdered Graham and Leroy. On top of that Neal was kidnapped. God only knew if he was alive…

Robert was a mess when the news reached him about his son’s disappearance. In hindsight, Belle should have known he would do something stupid like go after those Mutts. But as far as she knew, the others were with him so that helped somewhat. Yet Robert would tell her that it was his sworn duty as Alpha to protect his Pack, his family. No matter what the costs were to him. The Pack came first and foremost. Of course, Neal would argue it was the Alpha that should be first, but Neal wasn’t here.

Nevertheless, Belle felt it was her fight too. Even though she wasn’t a Pack wolf or any wolf for that matter, she was still welcomed into the tight-knit family despite her half-demon status. Plus, she had grown close to Graham and Leroy. They were the big brothers she never had, constantly goofing around and harassing her. Their deaths hadn’t been easy, but to the public world, Belle French couldn’t openly mourn their loss as much as she would have liked.

Hard to believe that this started several months ago when the chewed up body of Ashley Boyd was discovered near Dark Haven, Robert’s estate. Naturally, the light of suspicion was tossed on Gold what with the rumors of wolves prowling the property and that he needed fresh blood for his pagan sacrifices. Regardless of whom you spoke to or what they believed in, most of the residents in Storybrooke believed Robert Gold had a hand in Ashley’s death.

Thankfully, Graham was in control of the investigation and he could keep those accusers under wraps while the Pack did their own little investigation. In the meantime, Robert maintained his public façade and gave his full cooperation to the authorities. According to public record, Ashley’s death was ruled as an animal attack. It wasn’t too far from the truth. She had been mauled by a vicious beast but that vicious beast happened to be a werewolf. And it was not any werewolf either, but a Mutt. Belle quickly learned that Mutts were bitten werewolves, not hereditary born like Robert, and
did not belong in the Pack. Of course, they were expected to abide by Pack laws, which was to maintain the secrecy and protection of their species. If a Mutt got too cocky, then it was the Pack’s job to make sure it never happens again. Permanently.

The only problem was that the Mutt’s scent on Ashley’s body was new so they didn’t know who was responsible. Not even Emma, who was the Pack’s best tracker, could figure out which Mutt it was. Belle tried to help by allowing her ability for chaos to hone in on Ashley’s murder so she could get a description of the wolf. Sadly, the chaos had been too much for her to absorb and Belle nearly lost herself to the pleasure of it. The snippets she did get, however, weren’t as useful like she hoped since Ashley saw only the wolf and not the man beforehand.

But the trouble wasn’t over. Hunters in Storybrooke were determined to enact their own branch of justice on the wolf. That meant stalking Dark Haven’s grounds, which led to arrests for trespassing. One such loudmouth who was released was talking his ass off about how Robert Gold knew something and that he bet he sic the wolf on poor Ashley for his perverted pleasure. Maybe even jacked off to her screams while she was being ripped to shreds. Neal and Emma were in The Rabbit Hole canvassing for information or possible scents (Mutts do like a good bar for victims) when they overheard this. Incensed, Neal forgot himself when he confronted the bastard and punched him in the face for slandering his father’s name. Emma was able to stop it from turning into a full-out brawl and dragged her ex-lover out of there.

Then came body number two… the loudmouth hunter Neal attacked.

Now, the focus was on Neal. A wolf might have killed Ashley, but the hunter hadn’t been ravaged. Nevertheless, it had been the same Mutt if the scent was anything to go by. Of course, it was more of a taunt since the body was practically gift-wrapped by leaving the hunter at the gates to Dark Haven. It was a set-up, plain and simple. But in a small town like Storybrooke where the only deaths to occur were due to natural causes… the people were getting antsy. Had Graham not been the Sheriff things would have been tough for the Golds to keep their innocence.

Until tragedy struck.

Graham’s body was found several miles out of the town’s limits near his patrol car. Robert could only assume Graham must have had a lead about the Mutt, but instead of informing the Pack about it he decided to pursue it himself. Not long afterwards Leroy was also found dead in his hotel room with his left hand missing.

Unlike Graham, Leroy didn’t have any connections in Storybrooke so his death was able to be kept quiet. Peter was dispatched to clean up the bloody mess while his father, Midas, left to handle the damage control and tie up any loose ends that Leroy might have had. Emma told her that Midas was going to pose as a government official searching for Leroy about some possible illegal activity he might be involved in. This way it didn’t leave too many questions about Leroy’s disappearance or lack of appearance at his workplace. Any belongings of his was packed and destroyed as well as his banking accounts wiped out. It would be like he never existed.

It was harsh business but that was the facts of life in a Pack werewolf’s world. You had to keep and maintain the Pack’s secret so the whole world wouldn’t see them as a threat. However, this Mutt was putting them at risk by breaking the rules in favor of a dangerous game. It was a challenge no doubt about it. The Mutt wanted to make the Pack sweat and test to see how strong they really were. With two Pack brothers killed… it could be seen by other Mutts that Robert’s Pack was weak and could open Storybrooke to future attacks and deaths.

Eventually, they uncovered the Mutt responsible for this insolence was Killian Jones. It turned out he was biting escaped prisoners and turning them into werewolves. And worse, he was picking
convicted murderers and rapists to do his dirty work. All this because he wanted revenge on Robert Gold. Neal shared how years ago Killian came to Dark Haven to challenge Gold for Alpha. It was a stupid move on his part but the Mutt thought with Gold’s injury he would be no match for him. Instead, Robert bested him and removed his left hand as a warning to all Mutts who flirted with the notion of challenging his rule. Obviously, Killian was still sore about it even though it had been a fair fight. Killing Leroy and taking his hand was Killian’s subtle way of telling Gold he was in charge now whether the Alpha liked it or not. But to make sure to drive the point home (and probably a courtesy in his demented way), Killian sent the hand to Gold all wrapped up for him.

But Killian wasn’t alone in his crusade. There were his two human-now turned-werewolves August Booth and Keith Notting. Booth was in prison for murdering his father to collect his life insurance and Notting was convicted for raping and killing four girls all under the age of ten. Although, the real brains behind this operation were James Spencer and Jefferson Madden.

James was the twin brother to Pack member David Nolan. James and his father, George Spencer, left the Pack once Robert became Alpha after defeating Malcolm—the Alpha at the time and Robert’s father. They didn’t want Robert as their leader, believing he was a disgrace to the Pack for taking on a Mutt as his adopted son. David was friends with Neal and was a supporter for Robert so he was disowned by his family. That had been fine with David and he changed his name so not to be associated with them. Over the years, James and George had been getting too wild as non-Pack wolves and lived by their own set of rules. Gold admitted he should have handled them better, but being former Pack brothers and growing up with George, Robert decided they were not allowed on Pack territory, and if either of them should return, they would be executed. It did keep them away all this time, but James had got it into his head that he should be the Alpha since his father was Malcolm’s Pack Enforcer. As for George, he had to be dead if his son was claiming rights to be Alpha.

As much as David hated his twin, he was fearful what would happen if James found out about Mary Margaret, David’s girlfriend. She didn’t know he had a brother and this wasn’t how he wanted her to find out. So Robert ordered David to take Mary Margaret out of Storybrooke until the matter was resolved. It wasn’t easy since David’s loyalty to the Pack conflicted with his need to keep Mary Margaret safe. As part of the Pack, David’s place was at his Alpha’s side, but Robert assured him that this was an exception. James was dangerous and he wouldn’t hesitate in killing Mary Margaret as a way to get back at David for not following them when they left in the first place. Belle was relieved that Mary Margaret was blissfully unaware of the danger she was in and was enjoying the exotic impromptu getaway that her boyfriend surprised her with.

However, the real shocker for the Pack was Jefferson’s involvement and alliance with Killian and James. From what Belle could glean from, Jefferson was a Mutt who’s been in good graces with the Pack by informing them of suspicious Mutt activity and where to find them so the Pack can dish their justice. Jefferson wanted territory of his own and the only way a werewolf can have territory was if he belonged to a Pack. Currently, Robert wasn’t entertaining any Mutt additions, but Jefferson was on their radar just in case he tried to stake his territory without their permission. In fact, he was the one who alerted the Pack to Killian’s actions and how he was planning on bringing the Pack down. It did seem a little farfetched that Killian would be the mastermind behind this, but his thirst for revenge was believable. It could explain why it had taken this long for Killian to strike.

Yet, Emma and Neal discovered Jefferson’s participation along with James. That was how they learned about Booth and Notting. It was fortunate for the seasoned werewolves that the newborns still had the thought process of a human and didn’t know how to properly cover their tracks. For example, Booth and Notting had a motel room on the second floor rather than the ground floor for easy entrance and exit if a Change happened on them or if they needed to escape. The other was that Notting had bottles of cologne in his room, which could really mess up the olfactory senses of a
werewolf. Luckily, they were able to spot these two along with Jefferson and Killian when they pulled into the motel’s parking lot. With their heightened sense of hearing, they were able to discern what was going on, especially catching James’ name being unhappy with the bitten humans being too reckless.

They were almost caught when Jefferson got a whiff of their scent. Using the cologne to throw them off their trail, Neal and Emma made their escape while leaving the four werewolves coughing and choking. It was enough to put most of the puzzle pieces together, but Robert still had some unanswered questions about why the Mutts were doing this. Revenge was Killian’s motive, glory and power for James, and territory had to be Jefferson’s. Yet add them together and they were the unlikely trio to work together. There was more to the picture than what they could see, but it was Emma who cracked the code.

Keith Notting was actually Nottingham but Emma knew him as Mr. Ham when she was growing up. He was a neighbor to one of her foster families and he molested her at the age of six. He had a rabbit pen that he used to lure her and when she had tried telling her foster parents about what happened… they refused to believe her. It wasn’t long that Emma was transferred to a new home, but she never forgot him. And to see him again now with the wolf in him… it was a deadly combination if he remembered her.

And he did.

The Mutts wanted Emma to be a part of their new Pack. Being the only female werewolf in existence to have survived the bite (females were not born with the gene) Emma was a prize all right. James wanted her as his mate so they could rule together and the Pack would be passed on to their children. Keith wanted to kill her but James promised she would be under his protection and if Keith should look at her in the wrong way… he would personally rip his throat out. Or if his new Queen wanted to do the honors, then James saw no reason why Emma shouldn’t avenge herself.

However, there was another complication to the situation. Emma had another life in Boston and a boyfriend waiting for her to return once she was done with her family business. Neal hadn’t been thrilled with the news when it came out, but he was waiting for her to come to her senses and realize that a normal life was not in the cards for her. Then again, Emma would have been normal if Neal hadn’t bitten her in the first place and she still carried that resentment with her. She felt betrayed by him. He never told her about being a werewolf and she wouldn’t have found out if she hadn’t insisted on meeting his father before they got married. It was at Dark Haven when the fatal bite was committed and Emma’s whole world changed in that split second. Yet, Emma was concerned for Walsh and if anything should happen to him…

Robert saw it necessary that Emma should return to Boston and convince her boyfriend to leave town. Just for a few days so they could put an end to the Mutts’ scheme. He also sent Neal with her so she had protection as well. This order did not sit well for either of them—Neal wanted to stay by his father’s side but torn in wanting to protect Emma too, and Emma didn’t want Neal near Walsh for obvious reasons. Mainly because she didn’t know how to explain Neal’s sudden presence, and saying he was a former fiancé wasn’t ideal either. Yet, it was an Alpha command and they both had to follow it.

It was during their time in Boston when Neal was kidnapped. The Mutts also attacked Emma’s boyfriend, wounding him severely, but at least he was safe in the hospital for the time being. Emma came back to Dark Haven with the bad news and Robert almost lost it. It took her and Peter to restrain Gold from going out after the Mutts at once, but as soon as Robert calmed, he knew he had to act rationally if he wanted his son back.
Belle had been present during this manic episode and the waves of chaos that radiated from Robert were too tantalizing for comfort. It was when he started to Change that Belle was able to snap out of it. He was a wild animal with his dilated pupils, frantic breathing, and his hands turning into claws was terrifying. He did scratch Emma and Peter good, but they held him until he got his breathing under control and his hand reverted back to its human shape. He apologized to Belle for his behavior, but she understood his anger. His son was in the hands of the enemy and there wasn’t much he could do about it until the Mutts revealed their terms.

It was then he told Belle to leave Dark Haven for the time being. Her place wasn’t there at the moment and they were fortunate so far that the Mutts didn’t know about her. Or if they… they hadn’t mentioned it or the very least threatened her. Belle refused to go. Robert and the others needed all the help they can get, and while she may not be a werewolf or a fighter like them, she had other skills. She knew if she fed from the Mutts’ chaos she would be able to channel it and become stronger, even an equal to their superhuman strength. Plus, the Pack was her family now. Graham and Leroy were her brothers and Neal was just as special to her. She couldn’t abandon him, not when there was the chance of bringing him back home.

As she stood there and fought Robert on this, she never noticed Peter behind her and everything went dark. When Belle woke, she was back in her apartment and her phone had the voicemail from Robert saying he would be gone.

Alone. They left her alone and there was nothing Belle could do to go after them. She had no way of tracking the Mutts or Robert or the others. She was stuck in Storybrooke to fret and worry about them and their well-being.

And no one else knew.

Belle knew moping around wasn’t going to bring them back quicker so she put on her game face and went about as if everything was honky-dory. She did check her phone frequently for any updates or news from Robert or anyone about Neal, but her phone remained silent for two days.

It killed her she had no one else to speak to about her concerns. Not even Ariel or Ruby knew what was going on, but she felt they could sense something was up. When they did question her, Belle had lied that it was Regina again in her latest way to undermine her authority at the library. They bought it and chipped in their own Madam Mayor bashing to make Belle feel better. It did for the moment but Belle couldn’t help but wonder where Robert was and what he was doing.

And if he would come back alive.

Then as if the Gods heard her prayers, Belle found Robert standing by the library’s front desk. He was exhausted and haggard, his limp was a little more pronounced than usual, and he had some bruising around his eyes and lip. Other than that, he was in one piece, which was great but Belle had a score to settle with him. And she couldn’t do it in the library where anyone could waltz in on them.

“My apartment,” she said in no uncertain terms or to be argued. She got up and locked the library and strode purposefully to her apartment. Robert followed behind with little resistance on his part and unspoken words.

Good. She didn’t want to hear his excuses right now.

Once they were securely inside her apartment and away from any potential eavesdroppers, Belle whirled on him with fury like no other.

“You have a lot of gall to show up unannounced like that,” she started, her blue eyes glittering
dangerously. “Three days Robert. Three days! Do you have any idea how worried I was? I get that
you had to leave—I knew you would, but at least give me the courtesy to return my calls or answer
the fucking phone! I had no idea what was going on or if you and the others were hurt or killed or
anything. Do you have a clue what it’s like to pretend to the whole world that all’s well when you
have friends that could possibly be dying and you have no power over it?

“But that could have been avoided if you hadn’t pulled the stunt that you did,” Belle accused, her
fists clenched tightly at her side as the vein in her throat throbbed. She was so livid she could blow a
fuse and the demon inside her was cajoling her to do some bodily damage to the Alpha. And it
would be so easy to do with her own chaos pumping through her blood, making the tiny woman a
force to be reckoned with, and it would be oh so rewarding too. “I can’t believe you left me behind
like that. And worse… you got Peter to do your dirty work to keep me from tagging along. I thought
I meant something to you Robert, to the Pack. I know I don’t fall under the club’s criteria, but I’m
otherworldly like you and that should have at least made me qualified to help you guys. But oh no…
you tossed me aside like some weak damsel to go about gallivanting with these killers who want you
dead. I may not be like you and your kind, but I have my own tricks up my sleeves. There’s a reason
why people are frightened by demons and I could have been an asset if you just let me come.”

Belle paused to take a deep breath and pinched the bridge of her nose to calm herself. If she lost
control because of her temper… there was no telling what damage she could do if she didn’t had full
control of her faculties. Then in a softer tone, she continued:

“Robert, you guys are like family to me. For years I always thought I was the only one of my kind
and that I would forever be lonely. Then you barged into my life and now there’s this whole new
world out there with people like us and with other talents and abilities… For the first time, I felt like I
did belong to this world. That I wasn’t an abomination or a mistake. You accepted me. And not just
you but your Pack too. This has been seriously the best year of my life getting to know you, Neal,
Emma, and everyone. And when the shit started hitting the ceiling… it wasn’t you and the Pack
hurting, it was me too. But you purposely kept details from me and you kept me from your plan. I
found out what I could from Emma and Neal and when he went missing… I didn’t want the same
thing to Graham and Leroy to happen to Neal too. I wanted in and you ordered Peter to knock me
out so you could make your escape with your tail between your legs. Don’t give me that look. You
took the cowardly way out and kept me in the dark. Tell me… how does that make you a good
Alpha?”

It was a low blow but Belle was pissed and she wanted answers. She deserved that much since he
abandoned her. But as soon as she called him out on his ability as Alpha, the look on his face went
from solemn to anger in a split second. “If you want me to admit I made a mistake when it came to
Graham’s and Leroy’s safety… then yes I wasn’t a good Alpha. I should have known better. I
should have been more cautious. And I will carry that guilt for the rest of my life. But I am no
coward—“ Robert took a staggered step forward and his leg almost gave out. It was the knuckle
white grip on his cane that kept him from falling over, but Belle realized that the injuries must have
extended more than just his face.

“Oh my God! You are hurt!” Feeling awful for chewing him out while he stood, Belle began to
move towards him, but he waved her off and managed to limp his way over to her sofa.

He hissed in relief as he sank down on the cushion. “Fucking Mutt kicked me in the right spot. At
least I was able to get a few good licks in before I went down.” Robert bitterly chuckled. “For once
James used his brain in a fight.”

“James… David’s brother did this to you?” Belle asked quietly as she perched herself on the armrest
of her chair.
He nodded. “Aye he did.”

“As a wolf or—?”

“No. There was no time to Change. They had Neal and God knows how long it would have been before they decided to kill him. Turned out… I didn’t have to worry about that.”

“What happened? Is Neal…?”

“Alive. He’s alive,” Robert said with a curl of his lip. “We found him—well, I should say Emma did. She got there before Peter and me and already did a number on Nottingham and Booth.” There was pride in his tone at her actions. “They were very sick, and thankfully, not walking around anymore to do more harm.”

“That’s good news.” Belle meant that sincerely. Those two were horrible what they did to their victims that she didn’t feel bad for them. “And the other Mutts?”

“Killian fled. James is dead. As for Jefferson…” Robert rolled his eyes. “He had a change in heart. The plan wasn’t going like he thought it would when James convinced him to join this little rebellion. Apparently, he had been against biting Nottingham and Booth, but James believed he could control them once he helped them through the stages. It’s not too far off that it could happen. The Change is brutal and it can a kill person before it’s done. If you’re helped… then that person becomes a savior to the bitten. Not always but it happens time to time. Anyways, James thought it would work so Jefferson stayed against his better judgment. Although it would be easier if he wasn’t so much of a flip-flopper.”

“Why? He betrayed you and the Pack.”

“Yes but when the time came to it… he fought with us. He even kept Neal in one piece. The others… they would have cut him up, but Jefferson persuaded them that Neal was better alive and altogether than barely alive and missing parts.”

“How come?” she frowned.

“A deal,” Robert replied. “They knew Neal and Emma have history. It’s no secret among our kind. When there’s only one female werewolf in existence and she’s claimed… well, news travels fast. And they also knew she wouldn’t come willingly unless they had some kind of leverage. Neal was their ticket for her to join their Pack.”

“Wow.” Belle could only imagine how Emma must have felt being the target. Despite the blonde werewolf’s complicated relationship with Neal Gold, it was clear she cared for him even though she had another life with someone else. “How’s Emma dealing?”

“As much as it could be expected. She hasn’t left Neal’s side. He didn’t come away completely unscathed so she’s tending to his wounds. I don’t know if she intends to go back to Boston, but I wouldn’t be surprised. She has a life there and with that Walsh fellow. But even that might be in jeopardy.”

“Why?”

He sighed. “We have a strict rule—don’t ever be caught as a wolf. Emma arrived at the apartment and snuck into the bathroom while Booth and Nottingham were fighting Neal. Walsh dragged himself to the bedroom and before Nottingham could finish the job… Emma attacked him.”

“She Changed.”
“Aye. Walsh saw it but he passed out, Emma said. She stayed with him but the Mutts got Neal. She went to the hospital before she came back to Dark Haven. All I know is that when Walsh woke… he refused to speak to her. She’s stressing out about it but she knows how to school her features. Right now, her priority is making sure Neal’s all right. When it’s time, she will do what’s best for all parties. As for Jefferson, it is maddening what he has done. I want to kill him but at the same time he made it possible for my boy to return and I’m grateful for that. Alas, I’m stuck at a crossroads.”

“So… what will you do?”

Robert shrugged. “Right now I have him locked up in Dark Haven. We will have a conference once David and Midas return to decide his fate. Ultimately, the decision’s mine as Alpha, but it needs to be just since Jefferson has helped us before in the past. It’s the least I can do given his cooperation. Then we will launch a search for Killian. I want that bloody hook he uses as a hand to be mounted over my fireplace. It will teach all Mutts not to do something this idiotic ever again.”

There was no denying the hatred and fury in his tone and facial expressions, especially how his eyes had fire leaping within their depths. There was more to his loathing for Killian than what happened, but the fact he was responsible for hurting his family and taking his son… It made the hook more of a prize than anything. Belle shivered glad she wasn’t on the Pack’s wrong side. Then again, she didn’t know what side she stood on with the Pack after all. Robert’s actions made sure she wasn’t part of the team and she couldn’t forget that.

Robert met her eyes and his previous display of passion had dissipated. “Belle, I would like to apologize for my actions but I can’t. Those decisions were justified whether you liked it or not. I told you before when we met for tea the first time—my Pack comes before anything or anyone else. I am the Alpha and I have my loyalties and responsibilities to them. That being said—“

She couldn’t bear to hear anymore. “Don’t tell me. I think I do,” she muttered, fighting back the tears. Of course. She shouldn’t have been surprised but hearing it from Robert did sting a lot. Hoping she was wrong was too much to ask for and now she knew exactly where she stood.

“No you don’t,” he interrupted.

She glared at him. “Don’t presume to tell me what I think Robert! It seems pretty obvious that I’m not part of your Pack. Come to think of it… I don’t know why you even bothered befriending me. Clearly I don’t mean anything to you or the others.” She jumped to her feet and moved to stand behind the chair, her nails digging into the fabric, as she shook her head, her dark tresses falling across her face. Right now, she couldn’t look at him not when she was blinking back the tears that blurred her vision.

“Hold on now…” he started but she beat him to the punch.

“I get it. I’m different. I’m not a werewolf. So, please, don’t take this the wrong way if I’m not as eager to continue our tea get-togethers or visits.”

“God bloody damnit woman!” Robert growled. “You didn’t let me finish!”

Belle held her breath as she stole a glimpse to see him on his feet. You know what you have to do, she told herself. Just do it and get it over and done with.

Pushing her hair out of her face, Belle looked at him long and hard. “I don’t have to. Look, I’m happy Neal’s been found and he’s alive and safe. I really am but I honestly don’t want to deal with your bullshit right now. You can see yourself out.”
Not giving him another look or chance to speak, Belle turned her back and began heading to her room. The tears returned to cling on her lashes but she didn’t dare start to cry. Truthfully, he wasn’t worth crying over since he didn’t seem to care how his behavior affected her.

She hadn’t expected her arm being grabbed, or her back colliding against the bedroom door. And she hadn’t expect Robert Gold to be standing there, seizing her wrists and slamming them next to either side of her head, his body blocking her from an escape. His lips were drawn back into a snarl, his teeth gleaming sharply, while his brown eyes were cold and hard as they bore into her, keeping her in place. Staring back, completely stunned at the sudden force, Belle’s chest heaved as she regained her breath and the touch of chaos caressed her. Waves of anger and frustration were rolling off him and under it all was something deeper, something else that pounded between them.

Something primal.

“Listen to me, sweetheart,” he murmured dangerously and ever so calmly. “If you stopped jumping to conclusions and interrupting me you would have heard that as my duty is to protect my Pack… I need to do it in different ways as I see fit to each person—werewolf or half-bleeding-demons.”

Her heart stopped as all the air vanished from her lungs in that split second. This must be what it feels like to have a coronary, Belle thought idly.

“I made the call for you to stay because I knew you would be safer here. I don’t doubt your skills at all, but Belle, I was more concerned what might have happened if you faced Nottingham or Booth or God forbid James. There is no telling what chaotic vibes you could have gotten or if it would have immobilized you from fighting. Yes, I know there is a chance that the likelihood wouldn’t happen, but I couldn’t risk it or you. You have told me that your ability is unpredictable and after reading Ashley’s body… you were oblivious with her chaos that any Mutt could have approached you and snapped your neck. So you can stand here and preach all you want about me being a bastard, a liar, a betrayer—whatever you deem fit to categorize my actions. I won’t apologize for it. I have nothing to regret. And I honestly don’t have to stand here and explain my reasons, but bloody Hell Belle… How else can I get through to that thick skull of yours? Why can’t you listen and accept my orders like everyone else? You’re so infuriating and a pain and—“

Belle didn’t know what happened. One moment Robert was giving her a scolding of her life, which she should have fought back (she isn’t a child), but the close proximity combined with his masculine scent, deepening brogue, and his ever increasing hot body pressing against hers… Belle’s brain melted. It was the only logical explanation that could explain how during his diatribe she bridged the short distance and captured his lips with hers, cutting all speech off from him.

She could also blame Ruby and Ariel for their insistent lewd comments about her and Gold. They were the ones who continued to bring up that he could have been looking for sex that it had been on Belle’s mind more often than naught. She maintained they were only friends, but lately she had been thinking what it might be like if it wasn’t so platonic… She would be a fool and a liar to say Robert Gold wasn’t attractive (he certainly was very handsome) and Belle had wondered what it would be like to kiss him.

Well, take that and throw in the heated argument and a heighten sense of danger and you have the recipe for Belle’s mental shutdown and her subsequent meeting of lips with one hot-tempered Alpha werewolf.

It clearly caught him off-guard too since he stood there… frozen, his lips unmoving. Her eyes snapped open and Belle realized she crossed a line without even thinking there might be a line. Just as she was about to pull back (and claim it was due to a sudden fainting spell), Robert was pushing her back into the door, tilting his face so he had full control as his jaw moved powerfully in a
demanding kiss. There was no time for further thinking as she broke free from his previous grip of her wrists and tangled her fingers into his thick and soft dark mane, kissing him back with all the force she could muster.

A burst of white light went off like a bomb behind her eyelids, and instead of making her pliant as it might in the past, Belle was consumed with the need for more. With each deepening angle and mastering stroke of his lips—fuck so incredibly soft lips—Belle tasted the pouring of emotions running through Robert, reaching out and touching her down to her core. She felt his anger and anguish when he heard the news Neal was missing, to the sorrow and pain of losing his brothers in arms, to the driving hunger for revenge as he lunged at James… It quickly became a stabbing pain as he collapsed from the blow to his bad leg—the humiliation and brief moment of helplessness that filled his mind before Neal pounced on James and wrestled him to the ground, allowing Robert a chance to escape. Then the argument with her—the insufferable petite woman poking the silent beast, the concern for her welfare and rising ire for her brash conclusions… To finally the liquid hot lust pulsating through his veins and coiling around her.

Robert’s chaos was all over the place, yet Belle strongly picked up the ardor that matched hers (he’s been holding back for a long time) and sent her own frustrations and desires as she took the lead and bit his lower lip, sinking down and sucking it into her mouth to soothe the sting.

That only fueled him on as his hands twisted and curled in her long hair as he devoured her in that same frenzy before he ripped away from her, his breath hissing as he gulped in mouthfuls of air. Belle’s breathing was as ragged as his, her heart pumping ten miles an hour, and she knew that he wanted her as much as she wanted him. This dance had been going on for some time… namely the moment they first met when Belle had an orgasmic episode at her fundraiser event. She got a mere echo of his chaos from a kill he made in his wolf form that she had no time to prepare herself. Of course, she hadn’t known what he was until she did see him as a wolf, but for that year since she known him… There was no denying the mutual attraction or the sudden urge that swept over them.

All Belle had to do was a give a slight nod and a hoarse, “yes,” and that was all it took for Robert’s restraint to be unleashed.

How they managed to enter the bedroom remains a mystery to Belle, but in they were and both fell on top of her bed with mouths fused together and hands groping the other. There was the brief praise to God for her decision to wear a dress as Robert flipped her on her back and yanked the zipper down, exposing the ivory skin and delicate curve of her spine and ass. Belle tossed her head back, arching, as she moaned in pleasure with Robert kissing down her back with the open-mouth dragging of his lips and scratching of his teeth. As he reached the spot where the material still covered her ass, he pulled back just enough so he could flip the skirt of her dress over so he could continue his exploration, fingers rough as he squeezed the flesh and let out a groan.

“You—you don’t have no fucking clue how much this drove me wild,” he panted. “That impertinent little swish when you walk… drives a man and the beast crazy.”

Through her foggy haze of lust, Belle realized what he was talking about and fighting back a smirk, she lifted the object of his maddening thoughts and gave it a little shake. He growled deep in his throat and gave her a slap on the rear for teasing. Then without warning, he rolled her back over so he could gaze on her face.

“I’ll get you later for that,” he warned her.

With an anticipated swipe of her tongue across her lips, Belle lowered her lashes. “I hope so,” she muttered. “But right now… you’re all bark and not enough bite.”
He laughed—a throaty, delicious sound—and he proceeded to show her that he had plenty of bite.

Foreplay was forgotten—there was enough of that already—and their clothes were shed off them and lying in heaps all over the room. Belle straddled Robert, her nails digging into his shoulders, as she rode him hard—taking and giving as she squeezed him with each plunge downwards. It had been too long for her and it all felt so good and it was wonderful that Robert wasn’t bothered by her or freaked out. But then again… they were unique.

She was getting closer, she could feel it, and as she moved a little faster, Belle was instantly surrounded with a rush of unalarmed chaos. Her jaw dropped as she rode it out—feeling Robert all over, his warmth and protection, his admiration and annoyance—but it was the center of it all that swept Belle over and across the pinnacle as she cried his name.

He stiffened underneath her and arched up as he let out his release not long afterwards, following Belle to a state of relaxation and bliss as she curled up at his side.

Catching her breath was a momentous thing for her to do, but Belle tenderly touched his chin as she looked up at him. “Thank you,” she said. “You didn’t have to—“

“I wanted to,” he told her, catching and holding her hand. “I thought you would appreciate that little memory.”

“How could I not?” she teased, her eyes glimmering with the residue of that chaos. “You did save me from that nasty fall.”

“I always will,” he vowed.

Sighing happily, Belle tucked her head beneath him. “You know… this changes everything.”

“Of course. You won’t hear any complaints from me. Or anyone else,” he added.

“My friends might have something else to say, but they think we’ve been going at it for months now.” His chest rumbled with mirth and Belle couldn’t help but giggle too. “But,” she went on. “This doesn’t change the fact I’m still mad at you.”
7 Otherworld Rated T

Chapter Summary

Tinuviel Undomiel Prompted: Were!Gold senses half-demon Belle and is determined to find out what she wants in Storybrooke. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Otherworld

It was the smell that captured his attention first. There was something off. And not human.

Robert Gold looked out the window to see the gate’s entrance to Dark Haven and there below was the source. It certainly was an advantage for a werewolf to get a whiff of his enemy first before the attack, but it was quite another for someone to brazenly enter his territory and so stupidly too.

Yet, he was quite surprised to see that the smell was coming from someone so unassuming. At first glance, there was only a huge mass of chestnut curls on a rather petite form. Completely non-threatening from the look, yet as soon as the figure turned he could see she was strikingly beautiful. Too beautiful if he had to be honest with a pale heart-shape face, full pink petal lips, and two of the most startlingly blue eyes he had ever seen.

Supernatural startlingly.

He took a deep breath and there it was again. This time he could detect a hint of lavender and vanilla—either from her shampoo or body wash—but underneath it all… the pretty smells could not cover up the truth of what she really was. The sulfur lingering about her only meant one thing to the older man:

She was a half-demon.

Robert Gold liked to know about everything there was in his world—the Otherworld, if you will. Humans were easy to figure out, but when it came to the supernatural and those with heightened abilities… Gold saw them as potential threats to his Pack. As Alpha, he had to know what they could be up against if it concerned the Pack’s safety and survival. He had come across his fair share of witches, necromancers, clairvoyants, warlocks, shamans, vampires, and the occasional half-demon. Of course, his experiences with the former were only males and the cockiness with the purpose for troublemaking.

What made this one perplexing was how this she half-demon was going to be the new librarian in Storybrooke. As to her gender, Gold could only surmise that similar to his species, females were not prominent or prevalent. While women tend not to survive the werewolf’s bite, a half-demon was sired by a full-fledged demon with a human woman. It was possible a girl could be conceived from the encounter, but it wasn’t widespread. Most demonic births were male but one couldn’t say that a female couldn’t be a result. It wasn’t impossible, unlike a werewolf whose lycan gene was passed onto the male.
But it was the matter of why this particular half-demon was here in Storybrooke and seeking employment, which was all the more stranger for Gold to comprehend. He recalled a Belle French sending in an application with all the proper credentials and references needed for the position. Being the landlord and basically the owner of Storybrooke, Gold had input in the hiring process. He liked what he saw in Ms. French’s application than the other applicants that Regina Mills was pushing. Of course, he knew that Mayor Mills had an agenda of her own in the matter of the library and wanted an outsider with no prior influence or connection to the good mayor. He hadn’t expected that the candidate he handpicked would be a half-demon.

Yet, seeing her in the flesh as she dropped off her first month’s rent and deposit… Gold was taken aback by the normalcy this seemed. Half-demons thrived on chaos and disorder—preferring a life of crime to get their kicks. While he shouldn’t be the one to judge, Gold didn’t think half-demons could function the way other beings could. Then again, it could potentially be a ploy…

“You smell that don’t you?”

Gold dropped the curtain and turned to find David Nolan and Sheriff Graham standing in the doorway. The looks on their faces were wary and apprehensive as it should be. If his son Neal was here… he would have been out the door and confronting the pretty half-demon on the spot. Right now, he was conducting a lecture tour (at Gold’s insistence) and it was a small miracle too. The last thing Gold wanted was for Neal to jump to conclusions. If this half-demon was going to live here, then he needed to find out some things about her first. Just to see if she meant well.

“Half-demon,” Gold supplied. “Did you get a look at her?”

The other men nodded. “She’s a slip of a thing,” Graham said, his Irish accent rumbling. “But a perfect element of surprise since she doesn’t appear threatening.”

Gold was pleased. There was a reason Graham was endorsed by him to be Sheriff. “Aye. I was thinking the same. You can imagine how I’m feeling since I brought her in.”

“No shit,” David said, crossing his arms. “Who would have thought a half-demon would be that dumb to enter werewolf territory?”

“I don’t know if dumb is the word,” Gold corrected, remembering that Ms. French certainly had a decent education and worked at the New York City Public Library. Dumb people wouldn’t have been in that position. “But it does make me leery.”

“What are the orders, sir?” Graham asked, direct to the point. “Do you want me to check her background?”

“Done.” Graham gave a nod. “I’ll let you know once I find out.”

“Good. But don’t approach her, except for the welcoming greeting as Sheriff.” Gold flashed his teeth. “We want to appear friendly and business like if she knows what we are.”

“Wouldn’t she? I mean, she has to know if she’s in Storybrooke,” David suggested.

“Not necessarily,” Gold went on. “But it wouldn’t hurt for some reconnaissance. David, I want you to befriend her. Don’t be too obvious but point your girlfriend to her. It’s one thing for a man to introduce himself to a woman. If Mary Margaret does, then our little demon friend won’t bat an eye
that there is something amiss.”

“You think that wise?”

“I do. If she’s a librarian, then she would want to make some kind of good impression with her patrons. Why not an elementary teacher? It’ll be perfect and… you can sneak in without suspicion. But be careful. We don’t know what kind of half-demon she is or what level of skill she might have. Report your findings to me at once. From there, I will decide on what needs to be done with Ms. French.”

His two brothers excused themselves as they began their tasks. Gold propped the curtain opened a bit to see Ms. French already at the end of the drive. He smirked.

It won’t be long before I know your secrets, Ms. French. And you will either leave or take a leave of absence. My forest can be perilous if you’re not careful about the monsters that lurk behind the trees.

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Two weeks went by. In that time, Gold learned from Graham that Ms. French had a squeaky clean record in everything. He also learned she came from a single mother household and was a straight-A student. She was never arrested, no tickets (speeding or parking), and no enemies whatsoever. She was well-liked by her friends and coworkers and her mother was a schoolteacher as well.

There were some minor problems when she was in high school—teenage girl drama—which wasn’t suspicious or a cause for alarm. But even that didn’t lead to anything that Graham could discover would be harmful to the Pack. The one thing he did find out was how she had checked out quite a few texts on demons. If anything, the research she done was probably about what she was. After all, most half-demons were born not knowing exactly what they are until something happened to them. But it was that “something” that was hard to uncover.

Graham did his best, which was more than Gold could have asked for, but if Emma were here… he bet she could have had the answer. But since Emma was currently not a part of the Pack’s dealings, he could not ask her to leave Boston for an issue that they could handle. Besides, the Pack outnumbered this half-demon. If she had to be put down, then it wouldn’t be a difficult chore.

As for David, he had persuaded Mary Margaret to go to the library to see if she could arrange field trips for her class. Like Gold predicted, David’s girlfriend was immediately enamored with the new librarian and became fast friends with Ms. French. The subsequent friendships with Ariel Finnegan and Ruby Lucas were not surprising, considering they were friends with Mary Margaret and were young women like Ms. French. Eventually, David was able to meet Belle French thanks to his very nice girlfriend.

However, even his report was shocking. After befriending her for a couple of months, David had this to say:

“I don’t know what kind of half-demon she is. I’ve been in her apartment and the library, even had some drinks and dinner get-togethers, and I haven’t seen Belle do anything. If it wasn’t for the scent, then I would never have known she was a half-demon!”

“She hasn’t instigated anything?” Gold prodded.

“None. Apart from Regina messing with her, Belle is clean,” David claimed. “And I watched her carefully as has Graham. She hasn’t done anything that could indicate she would be a problem for the Pack. And… I don’t think she even knows what I am or Graham.”
And so the verdict had remained about Belle French’s dealings in Storybrooke. She didn’t seem to realize that werewolves lived in the town and she seemed pretty dead-set on staying here with her continuous job of maintaining the library. She took her duty as the librarian very serious with her advertising and sponsoring class trips as well as other programs to get people to come to the establishment.

Perhaps… this Belle French didn’t mean any harm. Maybe she was trying to live a normal life like any other supernatural being and this was, actually, an opportunity for a career move and nothing more.

Yet, Gold wouldn’t be satisfied until he met her so he can see for himself what her intentions could be.

It was quite fortunate that news of a fundraiser reached him. After all, what better way to see Ms. French up close and personal than a business trip into town? Depending on how the meeting would go… Well, Robert Gold didn’t like to jinx himself.

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It was quite fortuitous that a fundraiser for the library was to take place. What perfect timing it was for him to meet Ms. French face-to-face! He couldn’t have planned it better and yet… he had to be careful. Despite the reports given to him by his brothers-in-arms, there still lurked the possibility that Ms. French knew what they were and she was playing the fool by acting like everything was normal. Of course, attacking a werewolf, especially the Alpha, had to take cunning steps. A room full of humans was not ideal unless she was willing to expose him for what he was.

Then again, by doing so would expose her too so unless she had a death wish… this had to be handled delicately.

Stepping into the library, Gold was immediately assaulted by the myriad smells of perfume, cologne, and books. He had to take a moment to breathe slowly so he could filter the scents so it wouldn’t bother his head.

*Damn*, he thought. *I hate these public appearances.*

Not only did he want to keep the illusion of the strange and aloof landlord, but also because he couldn’t stand being surrounded by so many humans and their vain attempts to make them look good. Or in this case… smell pleasantly. He much preferred the crisp, clean air that surrounded the woods of Dark Haven. At least it wasn’t polluted.

Slipping on his trademark smirk, Gold moved with as much grace he could muster with the “limp” he had perfected over the years. People took notice of him right away (like they always do) and made room for him, clearing a pathway, as he perused the room with open scrutiny. No doubt since he owned the property, he wanted to make sure the investment was paying off. He had to admit, begrudgingly, that the library looked well-maintained and it was obvious that Ms. French put in a lot of hard work to make sure this evening would lead into generous donations. Since she was only one person, she did a well enough job and he had to bet it was pissing Regina off.

He spotted the mayor and could see the seething anger just flickering in her eyes. Well that was entirely too predictable. For whatever reason, Regina believed herself to be like a Queen when all she was the mayor and could be voted out of office if she wasn’t too careful. From what he heard from Graham and David, Regina has wanted to downsize the library and she has been making it her mission to undermine and cut down Ms. French’s attempts to her job as the librarian. It was frankly infuriating and the wolf in him wanted nothing more than to rip out her throat and piss all over her.
Not that he would. But the image did put a smile on his face.

Of course, while all eyes were on him, he knew that she was watching him as well. From the moment he walked in, he knew she had been keeping an eye on him but instead of fear or worry… he sensed curiosity.

If she knew who he was, then he expected some other reaction than the one she was exhibiting. Well, one way to find out for sure.

He moved his head so he looked at her directly. She was indeed very beautiful. Strikingly so. And she did look quite delectable in that little yellow dress. Not bad… for a half-demon. The man in him appreciated the view, but the wolf… saw only an enemy. Until he knew her motivations and intentions, he had to remain on his guard.

He gave her a predatory grin, feeling a surge of victory as she quickly looked away and tried to make herself busy with the other guests.

*Point to me,* he thought. He sent Ms. French retreating and that worked splendidly for him. If she was intimidated by him, then he could make certain she wouldn’t stir up any trouble. And if she could be easily frightened with one look, then he wondered if she was a lesser half-demon with very weak abilities. That could work for him if that was the case.

Nevertheless, Gold did not lose track of his prey.

As he mingled and conversed with those he could tolerate, he kept an eye on her, his nose on alert just in case her scent betrayed her. And thanks to his heightened and keen hearing… he knew she was asking about him. First, she had gone to Ruby Lucas for answers. Truthfully, not the best source of information since Ms. Lucas only knew about the sordid of details. It was great to keep out trespassers, but even her tales were too outlandish for his taste.

At least she got it right about him being “a fair man.” Unlike his father, Gold was much kinder and far more forgiving. If someone was late on their rent, then Gold evicting him or her showed kindness compared to what Malcolm Gold would have done. So it paid off that people respected him and feared him at the same time.

Ms. Lucas eventually separated from Ms. French as the latter continued greeting and chatting up the other patrons for donations. He could hear snippets of Ms. French’s strategic and meticulous pitch about the importance of the public library and literacy in general. She clearly had some good ideas on how to get people interested in reading again, in particular the children. As she spoke, her blue eyes would light up with such passion that even her diction would become so infectious that people would start pulling out their wallets and checkbooks. She had an effect over people and he wondered if this was her ability, yet deep down, a voice was telling him it was simply the charm and excitement she brought that reading can be inspiring.

Gold had to admit he could buy into what she was saying. Not that it would take much being an avid reader himself and an astute learner. In addition, he home-schooled his adopted son, Neal, since an actual school was not in his best interest. He was a firm believer that education held power and there was a lot person could benefit if they applied the knowledge. Ms. French knew how to talk the talk that was for certain, and there was nothing sinister about her wanting to bring the love of reading back into everyone’s lives in Storybrooke.

Perhaps, Ms. French’s purpose was benign after all.

He, then, spotted the mayor prowling the floor before stalking towards the unsuspecting librarian. No
doubt this didn't bode well if Regina was on the hunt. Even Ms. French seemed to feel the same way if her change in countenance had anything to say. As quickly as her expression fell, she concealed it with a polite smile.

For some unfathomable reason, Gold felt his feet moving towards them. He managed to catch Regina’s comment about Ms. French not needing any funding from the council. That set him reeling as the wolf growled in disagreement. The library needed the funding from the public, meaning the council, if it wanted to continue running. For Regina to say such preposterous words was downright ludicrous. He definitely needed to sit down and have another conversation with Madam Mayor if she thinks she can get away with this.

Putting himself within her line of vision, Regina arched her brow as she noticed him. The look on her face was anything but friendly.

“Mr. Gold,” she said rather clipped. “Nice to see you out and about.”

He returned the glare by lifting his head and squaring his shoulders. Like any good predator would do, he was taunting her and it was paying off judging by the irritation that she was giving off. It was moments like this that Regina reminded him of a cougar, a hunter in her own right, but no match for a werewolf. In fact, that reminded him of a cougar he took down not even a couple of hours ago.

It was then he captured a whiff of Ms. French’s sudden change in behavior. The sulfur still was present, but there was the slightest hint of arousal that he detected. His nostrils flared for a brief moment before he pushed it down so he could regard her with amusement. The fact she was trying not to look him in the eye and failing miserably was interesting. Then again, what in the world happened that led her to react so?

Knowing that answer was going to be a part of the challenge was too easy for him to resist. “You must be Ms. French I take it. I’ve been hearing you’re doing a decent job as the librarian.”

That seemed to do the trick as she thanked him. He nodded. “Of course I can’t understand why you’re putting all this effort into a fundraiser when you should be receiving the necessary funding to do as you wish.”

This was directed more to the mayor as he levelled her a look. If she was doing her job properly, then Ms. French wouldn’t be in this situation but alas Regina couldn’t keep her greedy paws to herself.

“You see Mr. Gold, had you attended our bi-monthly council meetings, you would have known that we had to make some cuts. Unfortunately, the library was among the decided areas to reduce funds for our budget. Yet Ms. French has proven to be quite resourceful as you can tell.”

Ah, so she wanted to play it that way. His attendance has no affect over the proceedings or the budget that was set at the beginning of the year. Oh no. Regina was twisting the rules and changing things to fit her agenda. And if someone else had the balls on the council, then they would have called her out beforehand about her usurping the library’s budget when the year wasn’t even over.

It looks like I’ll have to start attending again, he thought with disdain. He hated those meetings. They always would run late and there was only so much he could do sitting still and listening to Regina prattle on and on.

“If the town is suffering that much of a hindrance, then it should have been your duty to inform me Mayor Mills. You know I’m a big supporter when it comes to education and reading. This falls under that category or did you forget?”
It hit the mark as Regina flinched, albeit subtly, but saying it aloud certainly made it sound like she wasn’t a supporter. And if anyone was listening in on this conversation… it would make them think twice about supporting her.

Once more, they were at war with their silent gazes and unspoken threats. Sometimes Gold wouldn’t mind taking a page from his son’s book when it came to dealing with enemies and just giving Regina her due. Then he wouldn’t have to deal with her crap or her absorbent narcissistic tendencies.

Yet it was Ms. French’s soft-spoken, “Excuse me,” that had him reeling as her arousal slammed into his nose.

He managed to catch her running towards the bookshelves before ducking behind one so she wouldn’t be noticed. Something wasn’t right about her and he was determined to find out exactly what was wrong with this half-demon and her strange libido.

Maintaining his charade, he limped over to the bookshelves until he felt he was safe to move normally and swiftly until he found Ms. French. The wolf in him seen it as another game—hide and seek with rabbits—and she was certainly an attractive rabbit if he had to admit.

“I wondered where you ran off too.”

Her eyes flew opened as she stared in alarm at him. Yes he caught her unawares and he couldn’t hold back his smirk, except she was all wound up and her body seemed to be aching for release. That didn’t help his own body from reacting and he wisely anchored his cane in front of him so he couldn’t act on his desires. Not that he would but her scent was so strong, so alluring… How could any man resist?

But resist he did and that took Herculean effort until he found it necessary to breathe.

Then the overwhelming pheromones assaulted him as he staggered forward, holding his hand out to grab the bookshelf. He clenched his jaw and sent her a smirk.

“You seem rather flushed, dearie.” God… how good she smelled! “What could it be that created this I wonder?”

Her tiny mouth parted and words were difficult for her to form as she could barely look away from him. Then as quickly as it came, her lust was gone and she seemed to return back to normal. Or as normal as it could be for a creature of her kind. But the game was over and it was time to find out where this young woman stood in his town.

“My, my,” he drawled. “I never imagined in my lifetime that a half-demon would enter my town. Especially a pretty and lively one.”

The look on her face was priceless as he moved closer for the kill:

“Welcome to Storybrooke.”

Chapter End Notes

Next... The X-Files.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle is given her first assignment by her partner Agent Gold. And this one was specially requested by A.D. Nolan of the Bureau. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own anything in relation to The X-Files. I’m borrowing the setting to fit in with my favorite pairing of all time.

The X-Files

Agent Belle French was becoming anxious. She had been with the FBI for a few months and during that time she was assigned to work with Agent Gold as part of the X-Files. Not that she was complaining about her superior officer, but Agent Gold for the lack of a better word, was not an easy man to love. Let alone to get along with. Yet, she managed to make do with his wild mood swings and crazy conspiracy theories.

But Belle was itching to do an assignment on her own to prove to Gold she wasn’t as green as he thought her to be. She would have thought that after working alongside him this whole time he could see that her skills (medical and combat) were good on the field, instead of being sent to perform autopsies during ungodly hours or at his whim to prove a hunch of his.

She was born to be an agent and she was waiting to prove her resourcefulness so either Gold would let up on his goose chase involving the existence of extraterrestrial creatures or he would see her potential was being wasted on his obsession since she clearly did not share his point of view that aliens were plotting against us. However, despite her skepticism… Gold refused to let her leave. He kept insisting she was doing a great job, but Belle didn’t feel like it not when he continually ignored her input to their cases.

So when one morning when she walked into the basement, she was startled to find at her corner of her desk (it was really his but he was “kind” enough to let her share part of it) a file with her name on it. Gold was already in his seat, drinking his coffee, his brown eyes flicking towards her as she rested her hand on top of the file.

“What it this?” she asked.

“What does it look like? You have a case Agent French,” he told her plainly. “A.D. Nolan came down here personally and delivered it with you in mind.”

Belle paused, trying to fight the excitement that was fluttering in her chest. “A.D. Nolan did?”

“Yes. He thinks I’m not giving you much of an opportunity to grow and this is your chance to show him what you’re made of. After all, I know that working on the X-Files wasn’t a dream of yours.
Don’t bother to hide it. I know you don’t believe in the existence of U.F.Os.”

“Gold, there are a lot of things that can be explained scientifically—“

He waved her off. “Just go on and read it.”

Sitting down, Belle tore into the sealed folder and pulled out a piece of paper that contained an address, directions, and a time. She frowned. There weren’t any other instructions or notes explaining what she was supposed to do, except to be at the address by eight tonight.

“Did he say anything in particular? Like… is this supposed to be a stakeout?” Belle questioned.

Gold shrugged. “Haven’t a clue. But more than likely, you will be watching for someone or for some kind of suspicious activity.”

“Yeah…” She glanced down at the paper again. “But there should be something else written down. Anything to give me a head’s up. Maybe if I speak to A.D. Nolan—“

“I wouldn’t do that,” Gold said rather quickly, snapping the back of his chair up. “He might think you’re incompetent for not following these simple directions.”

“But… it’s so vague. I mean, am I alone on this?”

He snapped his fingers as if recalling something. “I almost forgot! He did mention you will be in contact with another agent. They’ll give you an update on what you’re doing when you arrive.”

Something didn’t sit right with Belle, but she wasn’t the type to defy orders so she let it drop. However, she did have one more question.

“Did A.D. Nolan say who it was I’m supposed to be meeting?”

“I believe it was an Agent Swan that’s your contact.”

“Agent Swan? I don’t believe I know them.”

“Trust me,” Agent Gold said with a grin. “You won’t forget this one.”

xxXXxxx

Hours later and Belle drove up to the assigned address. She parked across the targeted house and was baffled as to why she was here. The house was the ideal apple pie American image with a white picket fence and wrap around porch with a swing. Nevertheless, she knew looks could be deceiving and wondered if this was a drug house or part of a human trafficking ring.

The minutes ticked by and Agent Swan never approached her car. Drumming her fingers on the steering wheel, Belle couldn’t see any other surveillance vehicle and that funny feeling that something was wrong returned once more in her belly. *Maybe I should have spoken to A.D. Nolan anyways,* she thought. *At least I would know why I’m here.*

The porch light went on and she saw movement in the window. Then she heard a blood-curdling scream.

Belle jumped out and had her weapon drawn as she began to run towards the house. In the back of her mind, she knew she should be calling for back up, but the scream sounded young and if she could figure the situation out… then she might be able to help. Keeping her gun at her side, she stepped on the porch just as the door opened.
“Agent French! I was worried you got lost. Hopefully you had no trouble finding the house.”

Blinking rapidly, Belle hid her gun behind her back and clipped it back in its holster. “A.D. Nolan… Um… I n-no I didn’t.”

“You have no idea how much I appreciate this. Come on in!”

Belle remained tight-lipped as she followed her boss inside. She flinched when he called, “Mary Margaret! She’s here!”

Coming down the steps was a lovely dark pixie-haired woman in a casual black dress. She stopped in front of them with a huge sparkling smile. “You must be Belle! I’m Mary Margaret. Again, I have to thank you for doing us this favor. I know it’s highly unconventional but we didn’t have any choice.”

“Uh…” Belle wasn’t sure what they were talking about.

“Our number is on the fridge and she already had her dinner and bath. She can watch TV for a half hour but then she has to go to bed. Now, she does tend to get wind up when it’s bedtime so be firm with her. It’s the only way,” Mary Margaret told her.

“Who?” She was even more confused now.

“David, you better call her down,” his wife said.

He nodded. “Emma!”

There was a thud and then a thundering stampede as a small figure ran down the stairs. Belle caught a flash of blonde hair and then a sharp jab at the back of her leg.

“You’re under arrest!” cried a shrill, childish voice.

Belle glanced down to see a pair of flashing hazel eyes with a hard glint as she poked Belle again with the plastic gun. Hard.

She winced as her boss sternly called his daughter to come by him. Dropping to his knees, he gazed at his daughter’s face. “Now, Emma. This is Agent French. She’s going to watch you while Mommy and I go out. You listen and do what she says. Is that clear?”

Emma bobbed her head in understanding as he straightened up. “Good. Agent French if you please.”

He motioned Belle to follow as Mary Margaret said her goodbye and warning too.

Once they were out of earshot, David murmured, “I’m going to be honest and tell you that she can be a handful. And the only way she will listen if you call her Agent Swan, okay?”

“A-agent Swan?” Belle stuttered and her boss sighed, nodding. “Yeah. Swans are her favorite animal and she already has her mind made up that she will work at the Bureau too. Well, I’m sure you will have fun. Thank you again Agent.”

Belle watched helplessly as her boss walked out with his wife.

xxxxxx

The very next day Belle strode up to her partner’s desk with a fixed glare.

Lacing his fingers together, he asked, “So how did it go last night? You look awful by the way.”
Without speaking, Belle threw her cup of tepid coffee into his face leaving him sputtering and cursing as she stormed out of the basement to go inform A.D. Nolan that she would be taking the rest of the day off.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Future fic. Belle hears a couple of agents talking about her and her partner, Agent Gold, which causes her to reflect on their relationship—both professionally and personally. (Rated T for language)

The X-Files

“There she is! Mrs. Spooky.”

“I can’t believe that’s her…”

Belle walked past the two gossiping agents as they tensed up and tried to make it appear like they were busy. No doubt they were new from the way they sounded, but Agent French didn’t spare them a glance as she went on her way.

Had this been three years ago, then perhaps, Belle would have confronted them, but now… Now, she was past caring what her colleagues thought of her and her partner. French and Gold… Mr. and Mrs. Spooky. That’s how they were referred as once Belle was assigned to work on the X-Files with Agent Gold.

In the beginning, it bothered her that her fellow agents had clumped her together in the intimate moniker with the infuriating and annoying Gold. Once she was banished to the basement where he worked, Belle wanted to get out desperately. He was difficult to get along with and having a sensible conversation was out of the question when all he did was continuously obsess over the X-Files, particularly those that were involved with aliens. Their first assignment together had been bizarre to say the least and while Belle was a practical person… even her curiosity as a scientist was piqued and she thought she would try sticking it out for a while. Of course, it meant she would have to endure endless hours of Gold and his annoying habits of throwing pencils at the ceiling tile and spitting sunflower seeds all over the floor.

Not to mention, his cockamamie theories and supernatural explanations for everything they encountered. Some cases could be explained with factual logic and human behavior as motive, while there were some that could not be readily explained. Yet, Belle maintained there was nothing supernatural or unnatural about it and that led to her and Gold butting heads all the time.

He, the believer; and she, the skeptic.

What a pair they made but over time… something changed and Belle couldn’t imagine ever wanting to leave the Files or Gold. Sure, he got on her nerves now and then and there were times when she was tempted to kick his scrawny ass, but she wouldn’t change a thing.

There was too much history between them now and there were things that Belle seen... experienced… that she couldn’t take away, let alone forget. The pivotal moment for her had been when she was kidnapped by an alleged alien abductee, William Smee, and while it was the single most frightening experience of her life… it was also the strangest. There had been a bright flash of light and she felt a cool prick at the back of her neck that caused her to black out. Afterwards,
everything had been a hazy blur and she couldn’t make much sense on what was going on or where she was or what was happening. Although, she did have nightmares about lying on a table with her stomach ballooning in front of her and deflating by this tube. Other than that, her memories had been scattered with a lot of gaping holes in it.

She did remember seeing Gold’s face when she woke—the fear, relief, and concern all wrapped in one emotional countenance. He looked like Hell and smelled like he hadn’t showered in days, but she was so happy to see him that she wept. Then he wept too and it was then that everything changed between them.

He started calling her Belle but only outside of work and he began to accept her point of view and explanations. It was disconcerting at first, but eventually their professional relationship moved into friendship territory with him stopping at her apartment with pizza and cheesy Sci-fi flicks. She even went to his apartment (shockingly, he had a home) and they would drink a couple of beers and talk about their lives prior to working at the FBI. He told her about his missing son and his quest for finding the truth with the X-Files. She told him about her hectic life dealing with an alcoholic father and a failing florist shop, and a broken engagement.

He told her his name was Rumford, and yes, his parents had been cruel to name him that and it was why he preferred to being called Gold than anything else. Slightly buzzed, she had joked if it was all right she called him Rum and he told her that was fine. Belle reserved that privilege on certain occasions, especially if his dark mood took over and he needed someone to bring him back to reality. All it took was her soft voice saying “Rum” and her partner would return to her. He once said she was the flicker of light in the sea of darkness that was his crazy and upturned life, and in some twisted way, so was he to her. She never realized it or noticed that her life was messed up as his.

They were loners, work alcoholics, and stubborn as Hell, but they were fiercely loyal and protective of the other. She even loved him a little, and Belle suspected he did for her as well. There wasn’t a damn thing she wouldn’t do for Agent Gold and there was never another person that made her feel that way.

She would die for him, she discovered. If it came down to it, Belle would willingly give up her life to save her partner and she knew he wouldn’t hesitate to do the same for her.

They had the type of partnership that was rarely seen and it took a kidnapping situation for them to realize how special the other was. There had been other cases where it almost looked hopeless that they wouldn’t make it out alive, but somehow, Agents Gold and French prevailed and came out on top with another piece to the mysterious puzzle in the X-Files.

Eventually, Belle had to stop lying to herself and accept that something was happening within the Bureau that could possibly be linked to Gold’s son’s abduction as well as her own. The deeper they investigated… the uglier and hairier things have become.

Belle unconsciously rubbed her fingers at the back of her neck, the slight rise of a scar that remained when she had the implant from her kidnapping removed. It was a souvenir of that nightmarish situation and one that raised a lot of questions for her.

What was the purpose of the chip? To watch her? To kill her? And most importantly…

Why her?

Gold believed it was because of him that this happened to her, but Belle thought otherwise. There was more to it than an attack on Gold. This was personal and possibly because she discovered something that she shouldn’t. If only she remembered what it had been, then it might ease her
nightmares.

Sighing, Belle entered the elevator and pressed the button for the basement. As it began its descent, Belle couldn’t help the chuckle escaping about those two agents. Maybe another reason she didn’t mind the nickname so much was perhaps it was true. She and Gold may not exactly be legally married, but they were married to the X-Files and his pursuit for answers now has become hers as well.

The elevator stopped and the doors slid opened. Belle’s heels clicked on the hard floor as she approached the office door and went inside. Already, Gold was waiting for her as he readied his ancient slide projector.

Looking up at her, he gave her his signature half-raised smirk. “Good morning Agent French. I have an X-File case here that you’re going to find fascinating.”

Belle rolled her eyes, like she always did, and sat down next to the projector and crossed her legs over. “Come on Gold. Let’s hear what this is about.”

“Anxious?”

“Let’s just say I’m ready to dive into a new assignment,” she said matter-of-factly.

“All right. Just to warn you… some of these images are disturbing.”

“Please. I’m a doctor,” Belle rejoined wryly.

“Don’t say I didn’t warn you,” Gold teased. “Okay, there was a deceased infant found in Home, Pennsylvania...”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Future fic. Agents Gold and French have been placed in quarantine for the exposure of an unknown contagion. While in the decontaminating showers, Gold gets a little sneak peek at his lovely partner. (Rated M for obvious reasons)

Chapter Notes

This is inspired by the episode "One Son."

The X-Files

Everything happened so fast.

Gold was having pizza with his partner French at his apartment and going over the latest findings and possible connections between French’s abduction, his son’s, and Henry Hart’s. In addition, they were trying to figure out how the Cigarette Smoking Woman and the conspirators tied into this and the possible existence of extraterrestrial life. Their peaceful meal was interrupted by frantic knocking and Henry Hart stumbled in, pleading to Gold to kill him.

“You have to shoot me,” Henry said, his eyes wide and wild. His gray hair was unkempt and the bags under his eyes proved he hadn’t been sleeping well in days. “You don’t understand. I need to die or else it starts. Please Agent Gold! I’m begging you!”

Gold had his gun poised and cocked, but French had her hand on his arm, imploring him not to do it. One glance at his partner and he could see her blue eyes reflecting her disagreement over the idea, but the urgency in the older man’s voice meant serious trouble if he didn’t. He raised his arm up an inch and French let go, the pitch of her voice high as she cried, “Gold, no!”

Yet, he paused. Not because of French’s pleas but because he had questions of his own he wanted answers for and he had a feeling that Hart knew it.

However, that all went out the door when his apartment was kicked in and the room was flooded with smoke and flash lights as men in hazmat suits poured in with guns aimed at them. All at once, all three were on the floor, trying to fight the smoke from entering their lungs when the cool, solemn voice of his first partner, his ex-wife Milah Fox was heard.

They believed Hart was carrying an unknown contagion that possibly infected him and French hence the raid by the CDC. French’s protests went unheard as the three were put into custody. Hart was removed entirely to a facility since he was Patient Zero, while Gold and French were transferred to a secure location under quarantine until they could be cleared.

It was all nonsense since they had been in contact with Hart prior to this without any indication he was diseased and the likelihood of developing any virus was absurd. As a doctor, French would
have known if Hart was ill and she kept insisting that no one was sick and that Milah was doing this for no good reason. He had to admit his ex-wife kept her composure and spoke with little emotion as possible when she explained: “It was better to be safe than sorry.”

Once again, it was another indication that they were onto something huge and the conspirators used their control and manipulation of the system to intervene and prevent him from finding out the truth.

Nevertheless, there was little to be done in their current situation. So as they were shuffled into different rooms, the CDC agents demanded that Gold remove his clothes and step into the showers.

“Hold on dearies. A strip tease will cost you extra,” he quipped but none of his babysitters seemed amused with his joke and grumbled that French would have chuckled at least. Begrudgingly, the clothes were off and he was pushed into the sterile white room and frigid floor where he was directed to a stall. Immediately the hot water began to fall and he was left alone.

Or so Gold thought.

The stall across from him was also turned on, and fortunately, there wasn’t much privacy in the decontaminating room saved the concrete walls covering his lower half. The upper portions had this huge window cut in between each stall so one could peek through the other side.

It didn’t take a rocket scientist to know it was French and Gold’s body felt a tiny jolt at the sight of his beautiful partner.

Her back was facing him and he gulped at the alabaster white skin… so smooth and artfully crafted as he stared at the water trailing down her spine and over the round swells of her buttocks. Her normally curly hair was flat and darkened as her hands ran through her tresses, patting and smoothing the ends out.

He quickly tore his gaze away, closing his eyes and mentally counting to ten to calm his body’s reaction. He always knew that Belle was gorgeous… you had to be a eunuch not to notice, although he was certain she probably thought he was in the first months they worked together. But she wasn’t vain unlike some women in his acquaintance and she always kept a prim, professional appearance about her. Truthfully, she didn’t have to try hard and it had been a test of iron strength on his part not to act on his lustful urges.

He wasn’t a young man but he was good-looking and he worked out plenty (in this line of work, you had to be at the top of your physical peak), and sure, he mainly had one night stands if he could convince a woman to come home with him. Often times… half of the time—okay, most of the time, it would be Gold, his hand, and his collection of porn. Then walked in this incredible woman with those pouty, luscious lips and fierce blue eyes and a brain to boot, and Gold wondered what in the world did she do to end up in the basement as punishment (or could it be he was a very good boy and this was a belated Christmas present), either way, Gold couldn’t stop eyeing his partner every chance he got.

Of course, there was no way he was going to get slap with sexual harassment, so he kept his admiration discrete. However, he did try flirting with her and that backfired immensely. Either he was rusty or she was oblivious so he liked to think it was her fault to save his injured pride. Then the butting of heads and theories and his trick in getting her to babysit A.D. Nolan’s wild kid and like that… a beautiful friendship was born. He never made it known to her, but she had guts and she could hold her own in a hairy predicament. He admired that greatly and he took for granted that his partner, Belle French, would always be there to watch his back.

Then her kidnapping by Smee and her disappearance for five months… Not knowing if she was
dead or alive killed him. He blamed himself for what happened to her and it took every ounce of his strength and resources (along with the help of the Lone Gunmen) to find her. It was the same kind of helplessness he felt when his son was abducted and in that split second… Gold knew he needed her to be at his side to help him with his mission. He had to find her, to save her.

Miraculously, Belle turned up in a hospital—comatose—but alive and he broke down and prayed to whatever God would listen, thanking Him for bringing her back to him. He made a promise to himself he would stop taking her for advantage and appreciate her contribution to the X-Files as well as bringing some light into his meager life. So when she woke up and was well on her way for recovery… Gold kept his promise and opened up to her. Not a lot but enough to prove to her that he saw her as more than a colleague but a friend.

A genuine friend.

Ever since then Gold had been grateful to have someone like Belle around. They both experienced bizarre things that no one could understand, but at least the other did and there was no judgment. Belle suffered too much for his selfish need for the truth; what with the implant and later the cancer… any other woman would have broken under that duress, but not Belle, his brave girl. She was a trooper and she rallied when it seemed it would get worse. She never gave up on hope and she taught him that little life lesson. Thanks to her, he had hope now that he will find his son again, and together, they will bring the Cigarette Smoking Woman down.

However, as platonic as he wanted to keep his feelings for her… now and then Gold would have this surge of this particular emotion that he wanted to keep unnamed. To give voice to its meaning was something he wasn’t prepared to do and it did call upon a pretty big leap in their relationship, which he wasn’t sure where she stood with her feelings. He knew her heart had been broken (as was his) and she wasn’t willing to risk the chance so her love life was almost nonexistent as his.

And it was that damning reminder that had his member starting to stiffen of its own volition.

There was no way… No way in Hell he was going to have an erection in here of all places and with his partner literally a foot away.

He bit down hard on his lip, almost drawing blood, to stop his mind from replaying that mental image of Belle’s backside, and for a moment, it worked. His soldier was at ease and he sighed through his nostrils, relieved that he wouldn’t embarrass himself now.

Gold opened his eyes and smiled at his triumph. He thought about saying something to Belle… a prison joke coming to mind as he leaned to the side and…

His eyes bulged at the same time his jaw dropped and he was certain his tongue rolled out too. So much for that joke anyways…

Belle was now facing full frontal in his sight, her eyes closed as her head tipped back to allow the pelting drops to hit her face and her body.

He was dammed now and there was no ignoring the view as his eyes greedily feasted on the cascading water rivulets as they dotted her collarbone and snaked its way down to her breasts. Two perfectly rounded globes arched up as Belle leaned back, the water gathering and lapping at the dusky pink nipples, begging to be lick and tasted. Onwards, the trail went down the slope of her pale torso where it split with one pathway heading past her tone and flat stomach, the other over the curves of her hips, and lastly, the journey ended at the center of her apex, the dark curls glistening from the water’s trek.
As wondrous and tortuous it was to watch the shower caress her body, Gold noticed that his partner’s seemingly flawless skin wasn’t so flawless after all. His eyes were riveted on the scar that was above her belly button—a pink, jagged line that hinted to the possible testing she underwent in her terrifying abduction. Most of it was healed but when it was done… Gold suspected that it had been red and angry, a constant reminder to her collaboration with the X-Files and with him. It was amazing that she harbored no resentment for him, which Gold had expected once Belle regained her senses to realize he was bad news. Yet, she continued to prove him wrong in his assumptions about her and she remained steadfast and loyal, never once casting a shadow of blame in his direction. Regardless of how much he truly deserved it.

There was slight bruising at her right side, near her ribs, and her left leg sported a good one too. Not suspicious considering their line of work and Gold was again thrown through a loop at how remarkable this woman was. Belle wasn’t afraid to get dirty if she needed to and she could fight, which only made the guilt worsen when she was kidnapped… knowing she had been caught off-guard and left vulnerable in its wake. He didn’t want to know how that left her shaken or doubting her skills as an agent. He didn’t want to know the details about her nightmares or if she has to double check to make sure everything is lock and clear in her apartment before bed.

He didn’t want to know because he had nightmares for her.

Belle French wasn’t fragile or frail. She made that one clear from the get-go, but she was like every other person on the planet and was susceptible to the terrors that could be inspired by the darkness. And while he had faith in his partner, Gold still worried for her and this situation had him wondering if it would serve in her best interests to quit the X-Files for good.

But then one more look at the battle wounds and scars she endured and her steely determination and resilience and he remembered he was working with an Amazon. After her return and the half of dozen dinners of pizza and take-out, Gold had told her she should leave. He would never forget the fury in her clear blue eyes as she told him in no uncertain terms that she will ever quit the X-Files or him because of this simple and true fact:

“No one decides my fate but me.”

Yes… his partner was a rare one. Better too than Milah and Gold could at least trust and depend on Belle to protect his ass. And Belle cared more about helping him find his son than his own birth mother. That alone spoke volumes and Gold’s heart thumped a little faster as he forced himself to look away lest he should be caught.

The last thing he wanted was an angry Amazon aimed at him, but on the flipside, he had plenty of ammo now to fuel his fantasies for years.

Gold only hoped they would be release soon so he could enact on one now. Staring hard at his rising cock, Gold groaned to himself that this had to be the longest shower in human history.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Takes place a month after the 3rd prompt. Gold is on a stakeout. (Rated K+ for Agent Gold being adorkable)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The X-Files

Out of his entire career in the FBI, this was absolutely the hardest stakeout Agent Gold ever had to do. There was so much that was riding on this moment and he knew his life was very much on the line if he was caught.

Oh yes… this assignment could lead to his literal demise if he wasn’t too careful.

“Whatcha doing mister?”

The childish voice spooked him and Gold jumped from his seat on the bench. Turning to glare at the intruder, the boy was no older than ten with brown hair and matching eyes that Gold was forced to bite his tongue to keep something inappropriate from slipping out.

“Go away kid. I’m busy,” he growled, hoping the tone of his voice would frighten the child away. Instead, it made the kid curious as he sat on the other side of the bench. “Doing what?” he asked innocently.

Rolling his eyes, Gold ripped out his ID from his coat pocket and flashed his badge at the youngster. “I’m with the FBI okay and I’m busy working a case so if you don’t mind—”

“Cool! I always wanted to be part of a stakeout!” the boy chirped and Gold groaned. “So who’s the bad guy you’re watching?”

“Where’s your mother? I’m sure she’s looking for you.”

“She’s there.” The kid pointed to a woman with blonde locks inside a store behind them. “I came out here because it was boring.”

“Well, hate to break it to you, but you can’t stay here with me,” Gold told him and the boy sighed.

“I promise I’ll be really quiet.”

“No.”

“Please.”

“No.”

“Pretty please?”
The kid was irritating but Gold couldn’t help from noticing that he looked a little like his son and he was giving him these big puppy eyes and that tiny hopeful smile that his son would do knowing Gold would fall for it. To his chagrin, Gold felt himself nodding in acceptance and the boy began fidgeting with joy.

“But you got to promise that you cannot, and I mean, cannot make a sound or make it appear we’re watching, okay?”

“Okay!”

_I hope don’t regret his_, he thought. “All right, so we’re going to keep sitting on this bench and watch that window but don’t make it too obvious that we’re watching otherwise they will know.”

“Got it,” the kid said, giving him a punctuated nod and looked in the direction that Gold was referring to when he huffed indignantly, “They don’t look like criminals. It looks like a dat—“

“It’s a shady business,” Gold interrupted with a glower. “And we’re watching the man, not her.”

“Why?”

“Because I suspect there is something fishy about him.”

“Like what?”

“Jeez, kid, when I agreed to let you stay here I wasn’t inviting Twenty Questions.”

“Sorry,” he muttered. “It’s just… he doesn’t look bad. They look like they’re having fun.”

“No,” Gold said. “They’re not. Can’t you tell how she is forcing to laugh at his bad jokes? This is anything but a fun time.”

“I don’t know,” the boy insisted. “She’s smiling.”

“Yeah but it’s not a real smile. Her eyes are not lighting up.”

“How can you tell?”

“I can and quit asking questions!”

“Sorry.”

They both fell silent and finally the boy spoke up again. “Mister, if you like her… you should tell her. Girls appreciate honesty which is what my Mom always says—“

“I don’t like her.”

“Okay but I’m saying if you did like her… you should tell her your feelings.”

“That’s—kid, I get where you’re going, but it’s not like that.”

“So why are you here watching them if that’s not it?”

“I—“ Gold was at a loss for words and then shook his head. “I don’t trust his intentions. And I do believe he’s part of some cartel or mafia thing.”

“Right.” The kid pumped his legs once, then twice and grinned. “You’re right! She doesn’t look all
that happy now that you mentioned it. She’s doing that nod thing so she can look at her watch to see what time it is. My Mom does that all the time.”

“How’d…? Yeah, you’re right,” Gold agreed, and sure enough her face dipped as if laughing again but it was obvious she was looking at her watch. “Good observation kid.”

“Thanks,” he replied. “My Mom’s a cop so I get it from her.”

“And the interrogation skills too,” Gold noted.

“No. I get that from my Dad,” the kid rejoined. At Gold’s look, he added, “My Dad’s a lawyer. The Law Firm of Cassidy, Darling, and Darling. They have some ads on the TV and in the paper.”

“Oh,” Gold said. “Right.”

The boy twisted his face as disappointment overcame him. “It looks like my Mom is done shopping. Guess I have to go.” He hopped off the bench and turned to look at Gold. “You really ought to tell her your feelings. You’re unhappy and she’s unhappy. And you wouldn’t have to do this stakeout anymore.”

Gold was bewildered as the boy walked up to his mother and they left, leaving Gold to himself and his thoughts.

“If only it was that simple,” he murmured and turned to look at the window when Belle was looking right back at him.

Busted.

Chapter End Notes

I'm gonna stop right now and post the rest later. The next series of prompts is called The Time Traveler inspired by my two favorite movies- Timeline and Kate & Leopold.
Hope you like so far!
1 The Time-Traveler Rated K

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Spinner Rumplestiltskin comes to the aid of a beautiful stranger. (Rated K)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: These prompts are inspired by the movies Timeline and Kate & Leopold. I own a copy of each movie but not the ideas. Just adapting them for Rumbelle!

The Time-Traveler

It was a brisk autumn day and Rumplestiltskin was returning from the village after trading his leftover thread for more wool. Such a task should have put a smile on his face, but alas, it wasn’t a worthwhile trade. His fine thread should cost more than what he received, but Rumplestiltskin was a coward… and a coward does not always receive his due price.

Tightening his grip on his walking staff, Rumple limped over the leaf-covered path to his home, which lied on the outskirts of the village. It was a bit of a distance and he had to trudge through the forest to get to it, but it was a small cost for peace and quiet and to avoid necessary disturbances. No one bothered to travel to his humble cottage to abuse him, not when it was a hike to get there.

His right leg throbbed but it was a pain he had grown used to over the years after he purposefully lamed himself to avoid battle with the invading Britons. Of course, what was the point now when it has become inevitable the Britons would soon take over France? The last bit of news Rumple heard was how the Brits were east from here and it was hard to tell if they intended to come this way or not. A few villagers left and while Rumple wished he could have moved as well… his injury prevented such a new relocation. He only prayed that if the Britons came… they would be swift and merciless or maybe they will leave him be since he posed no threat to anyone.

He hoped for the latter.

As he came around the bend where the river flowed, Rumple heard what sounded like a feminine grunt. He froze, not sure if his ears deceived him. For all he knew, he was the only person to walk this way. No one came this far out from the village, not when the river also circled it.

Maybe it was the Brits.

His heart leaped to his throat as he trembled. But then again… why would a female accompany a band of soldiers? Unless she was a woman for strictly pleasure, which Rumple’s cheeks stained with red just by the thought. If that was so, then the men should be nearby and the last thing Rumplestiltskin wanted to do was cross their path.

Just as he turned around to go in a different direction, he heard that same distinct cry and there was a muffled curse and a moan of what sounded like she was in pain. He glanced behind him,
contemplating if he should follow or if this was some wayward trap. The longer he waited, the longer his conscience was berating him.

What if he was wrong? What if it wasn’t a trap but an actual woman in trouble? Could he ignore her like that?

Rumple didn’t know what to do—never being in this position before and it was unnerving that he should make this decision. Yet, there was a snapping of branches and leaves crushing as if she was attempting to stand up, and then the woman yelped. At last he made up his mind and Rumple headed in the direction where he heard the woman’s cries.

It wasn’t far but he did catch what looked like a pair of legs crawling into a makeshift cave where the moss and grass made a curtain over the opening. He stared, stupefied, as the woman managed to fit inside the tiny space and as she looked up, she started at his sight. It was difficult to see what she looked like, but there was no denying the gasp of terror and Rumple wanted to put her at ease.

Of course, how did one pacify a frightened creature? Had she been an actual animal, he could whisper to it with soft pats and caresses, but that would have been improper and improbable since if he touched her it would seem to be the opposite of his intent.

So he settled on what he hoped was a reassuring smile as he held his hands up to show he wasn’t a threat to her. But the strangest thing was that she held her finger to her lips, in an unspoken plea not to make a sound. He wanted to ask what was wrong when the roaring thunder of hooves cut him off and he gazed up to see three horses and their riders.

Rumple gulped, slightly relieved it wasn’t the Britons but not exactly happy it was the French. The leader looked down at him with obvious disdain, his eyes staring at the walking staff. Rumple was of age to fight and he was close to the physical requirements to serve, yet it was the staff that gave away his invalidity. Rumple didn’t recognize the man so he wasn’t present when Rumple hurt himself, so if anything; the soldier probably thought he was born that way. How life would be much different if that were true…

“You! Cripple,” the man barked. “Have you seen a woman running in these parts?”

The woman hidden tensed and Rumple stood still, not sure how to respond. Should he stay silent or tell them she was hiding beneath them? What did this woman do that required these men to chase her?

“Wonderful. We come across a mute,” the leader growled. “Listen, boy, there is a woman in these woods. She’s a spy for the enemy so if you know where she went you will do us a great service. Now, can you tell me or at least point to where she went?”

Rumple swallowed thickly, his Adam’s apple quivering as he shakily shook his head. “I have seen no woman, sir.”

The leader’s eyebrows rose in surprise. “Ah, so it does speak! Are you certain?”

Rumple nodded. “Y-yes sir. I live out here all alone. I have seen no woman.”

“Very well. I doubt you have,” the leader continued. “Very well. Come on men. She couldn’t have gone that far!”

With a flick of the reins the three men charged off, leaving Rumple alone with the woman as she emerged from her hiding spot. Grabbing the moss, she pulled herself up tentatively. Immediately, he noticed she was favoring her left leg as she limped her way to him. As his eyes rose up, Rumple was
startled by the crystalline clear blue eyes that pierced his. Never had he seen such a striking color before or a wild mass of chestnut curls that framed her heart-shaped countenance. Her lips were a rosy pink like two delicate petals and her smile was dazzling with such perfect straight teeth. The last thing he noticed was her clothing, which in all appearances, did look like a peasant’s; although, the tan shade was too bright and the dress was too much in good condition to be worn every day. There was a lack of patches also so this dress wasn’t very old, but the likelihood of an almost pristine outfit was unfathomable for this lifestyle.

Already Rumple knew she wasn’t a peasant and recalling what the soldier said about a spy…

She spoke something to him and he recognized it as English with the little broken language he knew. His face must have reflected the stark white terror that she was the enemy until she switched to his native French. She spoke it so fluently and in such a lilting tone full of warmth and gentleness that Rumple really had to concentrate on what she was saying.

“Thank you,” she said. “I know you could have given me away, and I thank you that you didn’t. I know they said I’m a spy but I’m not. I promise I have nothing to do with this war between your countries. I was separated from my friends and got lost in this forest. Sadly, I’ve never been good at directions or navigating so I don’t know exactly where I am. If you could somehow help me find someplace safe where I can rest a while, then I can find my friends.”

She certainly talked strangely and she didn’t appear to be dangerous, but Rumple remembered the little of his basic training that appearances could be deceiving.

“I have no right to ask you this. You don’t know me and I would understand if you left me here, but please… I beg you.” She shifted her weight and winced as she put too much pressure on her ankle.

Quickly, Rumple put his arm around her waist. “You’re hurt. I might be able to bind your ankle for you at my cottage. Lean on me milady.”

She did and while it didn’t help his condition any, Rumple felt a slight thrill down his spine for doing something brave. He was helping this woman. And no one ever allowed him to help them.

“I’m Belle by the way,” she said and he couldn’t help but think that the name aptly described her. “And what’s yours?”

He wasn’t sure if revealing his name would do him any good. What if she has heard of him and his reputation? Then again… there was a possibility she might not since she was certainly not from these parts.

“Rumplestiltskin,” he supplied.

“Rumplestiltskin,” she pronounced carefully and the sound of his name on her lips caused him to shiver. “I don’t believe I’ve heard that name before. Very unique I must say. Well, lead the way Rumplestiltskin.”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Even after Belle is healed she comes back to visit Rumple and he decides to do something brave. (Rated K)

The Time-Traveler

The next several weeks were the best and worst of his life.

The Lady Belle had been a blessing in his wretched, lonely life. Ever since that moment he helped her escape from those soldiers, Rumple had grown attached to her very quickly. Not only was she beautiful but also inquisitive, intelligent, and sweet and caring. To be honest, Rumple barely spoke once Belle entered his cottage. Not that he couldn’t… it was unnerving for him to have a woman in his home that he wasn’t exactly sure what to do or say. Yet, Belle managed to chip away at his timid shell with her questions, even though his answers were sparse in length.

She was fascinated with his spinning wheel mostly and it was a topic of conversation Rumple felt confident in contributing. However, if anything strayed from that subject then Rumplestiltskin’s mouth closed up with the exception of single-worded replies. He sensed her frustration and confusion over his behavior, but she was too kind to confront him about it. Instead, she would switch it back to his spinning and he could speak again.

When her ankle was well enough for her to support her weight, Belle thanked him for his hospitality and as she was about to walk out the door, he worked the nerve to ask her this—“W-will I see you again?”

His question surprised her and even more so was her answer to him:

“I think you will. Adieu.”

Frankly, Rumplestiltskin believed he would never see her again. Once Lady Belle was gone, he found himself facing his cottage alone and everything around him seemed darker than when she was there. In a short period of time, Lady Belle brought lightness into his dreary world and it was extinguished when she left.

As the days went by, Rumple wondered if he dreamed her up. There was a part of her that seemed too unreal to be true and it only crushed his heart to think Lady Belle was a figment of his imagination. However, to his astonishment, Lady Belle came back one morning. He had been feeding his animals when he heard his name shouted and there she was standing there in the center of the sunrise, the sunlight bouncing off her hair in red streaks, her blue eyes shining with mirth.

She came back.

He had to rub his eyes a couple of times to make sure she was real, but there she was in the flesh. Not a dream or a fantasy, but a living person.

Lady Belle stayed a couple of hours but it was the best two hours of his life. She asked him how he’d been and if he sold or traded his latest supply of thread in the village. He answered her
questions in very short responses, but what he really wanted to know was about her—where did she go? Was she all right? Was she somewhere safe from the soldiers? Yet, he couldn’t find the right words to form and cursed his shyness for blocking him from saying what he really wanted to say. He feared she would think it was a mistake for her to return, and he wouldn’t be shocked if she decided this time never to come back.

But Lady Belle did. Over and over, she returned and instead of waiting for him to ask her questions, she went ahead and informed him that she has been well and she has been careful not to cross any soldiers lest she should be accused of espionage again. It pleased him that she hasn’t been in trouble, but she never once explained where she was from and where she would disappear to.

Then there was the odd object she wore around her wrist. He noticed it when the sleeve of her dress drooped when she was tucking a strand of hair behind her ear. It was a black band and he caught a flash of something glowing from it. Rumple didn’t react to it, although the need to was quite strong. He didn’t want to do the wrong thing or say the wrong thing in case he frightened Lady Belle away for good.

However, Rumple paid attention to that band and the way Lady Belle would discretely peek at it until she would announce she had to go. It was evident that the band had to do something with her visits and Rumple’s curiosity only grew.

Of course, he wished she would stay longer. Lady Belle was the first person to treat him as if he mattered and she seemed genuine with her sincerity about his regard. Sometimes she would bring bread with her so he had something substantial to fill his belly and other times there would be fruits and cheeses. She would often be wary, watching his reactions carefully, when he looked at her gifts. It was almost like she was gauging to make sure what she brought was acceptable. And why wouldn’t they? Some of the fruit he hadn’t ate for years, not since he was a young boy. Though he did wonder where she found them.

Finally, he worked up the nerve to ask her where she was from so he could return the favor and visit her. At this, Lady Belle paled and a pained look crossed her eyes. “I don’t think that would be possible Rumple,” she told him.

“Why not? If it’s a far journey, I can manage it,” he said.

She chortled dryly. “If you only knew,” she mumbled to herself. Gazing up at him, Lady Belle gave him a small smile. “Rumple, there is something about me that you don’t know, and sadly, I cannot tell you. I’m breaking a lot of rules just coming here to see you the way I’ve been doing and there will come a time when I might not be able to. I know I shouldn’t have but I’ve enjoyed our time together and it’s selfish of me not letting you go so you can live your life. You could be settling down with someone and I’m getting in the way of it. I think this will have to be my last visit. I’m sorry Rumple, I…” She closed her eyes and when she opened them, tears gathered in their depths. “I’m so sorry.”

Belle rushed out of there as fast as she could, leaving Rumple bereft and baffled over her emotional response. But the one thing that registered in his mind was that he will never see her again and it filled him with dread unlike any other. He couldn’t let her go. He couldn’t lose her, he realized.

Grabbing his walking staff, Rumple followed her within seconds. It was the sheer panic that drove him onward that he never once thought what this would mean for him.

He soon came upon her in a clearing, her back to him. She was preoccupied with something and as he drew nearer, he could see it was the black band on her wrist. She clicked something and before Rumplestiltskin knew it… the field was covered in a burning white light and he blacked out.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Rumplestiltskin follows Belle and she makes a decision. (Rated K)

The Time-Traveler

“Oh my God—!”

“Who is that?”

“What the Hell?!?”

“Belle! If—“

Rumple’s head was buzzing with snippets of voices and winced as he felt a sharp pain in the back of his head. His eyelids fluttered as the same blinding white light seared his vision, but the one thing he could make out was the silhouette of a beauty with long tresses and a pair of the two radiant blue orbs glittering in the darkness.

A gentle palm cradled his cheek as a soft, soothing voice called out to him. “It’s okay Rumplestiltskin. You’ll be fine. The first trip can knock the wind out of you, but stay with me. Keep your eyes open.”

He felt his head nodding but the light was too painful and he wanted to block it out. As soon as his eyes began to shut, he felt a sudden jerk by his chin causing them to fly back open. His vision started to focus and he could make out clearer shapes, though everything around him seemed to be in a chaotic mess. People were running about, shouting in foreign tongues, and as he looked above him, he saw this tall arch of silver gleaming as if he was inside the mouth of a beast. Fear started to choke him as his chest rose in rapid pants, his breathing coming in faster and harsher.

“Rumple?” He settled his gaze on Lady Belle’s calm features and just like that… his panic faded away in his breast. Her nails gently scraped his scalp and the nape of his neck as she continued to stare into his wide brown eyes. The comforting sensation combined with the soft cooing of her voice was the magic touch to ease his erratic heart-rate. He was with her now and they won’t be parted ever again…

However, the spell wore off as his body began to shake uncontrollably. The serene look in Lady Belle’s face immediately changed as she twisted her head and began yelling: “Graham! Get Whale now! Hurry!”

Cradling Rumple in her embrace, Belle kept repeating over and over, “You’re going to be all right. You’re going be all right.” Then: “Someone help! He’s going into shock!”

Figures began to materialize around him as Rumple drifted off into oblivion.

xxXXX

“You look like you need a drink.”
Belle lifted her weary head as her best friend, Dr. Ariel Finn, sat beside her. She didn’t want to be far from Rumple but she knew she would be interfering if she stayed at his side with Whale checking him out. So she sat outside the room with her knees pulled up, her braid messy and strands sticking out from all over. Streaks of tears stained her face and she was still wearing her peasant disguise. Appearances didn’t matter when the life of another was hanging in the balance and she couldn’t help but blame herself for placing Rumplestiltskin into this situation.

“Hey,” Ariel said, placing a comforting hand on her shoulder. “It’s going to be all right. Victor’s the best.”

“Yeah I know but…” Belle fought back a sob. “God, this is my fault! I knew it was a mistake to go back, but I had to see him one last time and then he followed me! If he dies—“

“He won’t,” Ariel said firmly. At that very moment the door opened and Dr. Victor Whale stepped out. Closing it behind him, he took off his surgical mask as the two women struggled to their feet.

“How is he?” Belle demanded with worry laced in her words.

“He’s shocked to say the least,” Whale informed her. “I have him stabilized right now and he’s out like a light. Probably going to get the best sleep he’s ever had.”

“Thank God!” the brunette breathed. But Whale wasn’t done.

“This isn’t easy not knowing his medical history, but I didn’t want to risk him catching anything lethal so I gave him a low dose of penicillin. So far there hasn’t been any reaction to it, which is a good sign. Yet, depending on his exposure to our time, he will need other vaccinations.”

“Right.” Belle was just too happy to know Rumple was going to be fine. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome,” he said. “But Belle… you know this is very sensitive. You know very well the guidelines and protocols when traveling and this guy… Regina’s going to have a fit when she hears about this.”

“I know, I know!” bemoaned Belle. “It’s not like I purposely did it.”

“Yeah Victor. Lay off,” Ariel said with a disapproving glare.

He raised his hands. “I’m being practical. I know you didn’t do it on purpose but you know how she gets. And sending him back will be difficult since he’s already seen too much.”

The thought of sending Rumplestiltskin back only put a bad taste in her mouth, but Victor was right. He seen too much of the future and returning him would be a horrible punishment to his system. On the other hand, he couldn’t stay here forever. They had no idea what the consequence might be by ripping someone from the past to the future—accident or not—and it was a risk no one wanted to take, especially when the outcome could very well lead to the end of funding this project and shutting it down indefinitely.

“Okay but let’s look on the bright side. Only a handful of us know this happened, right?” Belle looked at her colleagues as they nodded silently. “Then we won’t tell Regina. Once Rumple is ready and strong enough to handle a trip back, then we’ll return him without anyone being the wiser.”

“Only problem with that Belle is that he sticks out like a sore thumb,” Whale remarked. “I could hardly understand him with that medieval French he was speaking. And if he stays here… Regina is bound to notice him.”
The petite beauty sighed. “Well, there is one other way.”

The three whispered amongst themselves for another five minutes when it seemed that the scientist wasn’t going to budge from the idea, the other two relented. To Whale, it was a bad idea but he didn’t want to see this project jeopardize either so he agreed to be quiet on the matter. “I’ll find Graham, David, and Mary Margaret and tell them the plan. I trust you know what you’re doing Belle,” he told her before walking away.

Belle glanced at Ariel whose expression was unreadable. “Well?”

Ariel shrugged indifferently. “It’s your plan. I’ll support you one-hundred percent all the way.”

“But?” Belle emphasized, knowing there had to be more the redhead had to say about this.

“I was wondering if that was the guy that you’ve been—ahem—‘data collecting’ when you separated from us.”

Belle’s face flushed scarlet as Ariel smirked. “C’mon. You thought you could hide something like that from me? I knew something had to be going on since you’ve been taking care of your costume a little too well for our missions. Speaking of which… you really ought to change. I’ll see if I can get one of the guys to lend some clothes for our guest.”

Once Belle was in the locker-room, she peeled off her peasant garb and pulled out her jeans and T-shirt to change into. A part of her moved as if in a dream and she had to suppose it felt like one. This whole situation was surreal and she wasn’t sure how to decipher what it all really meant. To know that Rumplestiltskin unknowingly risked his life to follow her was… Belle didn’t know what was running through his head when he made that decision, but a part of her was secretly thrilled that he did.

Ever since that fateful trip to the past, Belle couldn’t stop thinking about the man she met by the river. She could never forget what he had done for her when he took a big risk in lying to those men who were chasing after her and then taking her to his home so she could heal her sprained ankle… It was a big risk for her too since she didn’t know him and he could just as easily decide she wasn’t worth endangering his life over. Yet, he welcomed her and took care of her when she wasn’t his responsibility. When she was well enough to go… leaving him was one of the hardest things to do.

Not even her break-up with Gaston was this emotionally difficult. She knew she couldn’t stay there for long, not when she needed to return home to charge her battery on her Time Band. However, she was already mentally planning her next trip and what she was going to say to her team members so she could sneak off and see him again.

Normally, protocol wouldn’t allow them to separate for a long period of time, and while Belle had to stay overnight… she was fortunate the trip was meant to be that long. Once she regrouped with her team, she assured them she was all right and for the sake of the mission, no one mentioned a word about her separation to the boss lady. So once they went back, Belle told them she wanted to go on her own to do some data collecting by a village. Being one of the linguists and sociologists, Belle wanted to observe the natural happenings so it wasn’t an unusual of a request. Yet, there was the danger of the roaming patrols and Belle was permitted to leave only for a short time.

Afterwards, it became the norm for her to break off and conduct her study in private without anyone interrupting. There was something about the shy spinner that drew her to him and she couldn’t help herself from returning over and over again.

And now…
Here he was and Belle was afraid how he would react when he does learn that this wasn’t his home anymore.

*It looks like it’s my turn to risk my neck for him,* she thought wryly and finished getting dressed so she could go back to his room. Ariel was waiting for her there with men’s clothing in her hands.

“These are David’s spares,” Ariel told her. “Victor thinks they should fit our friend, but he will need clothing of his own with his thin frame.”

“Thank you Ariel.” Belle accepted them and counted her lucky stars that her colleagues were good people in going along with her harebrained scheme. She just hoped this won’t backfire on her and hurt them in the process.

Turning to the door, Belle took a deep breath and entered. The sedative Whale had to give Rumple was starting to wear off and he appeared cognizant—his head snapped in her direction when she walked in. The anxiety in his eyes wiped away as they landed on her, but his brows knitted in confusion.

“Hey,” Belle greeted warmly and timidly as she stepped closer to the bed.

“Milady?” Rumple questioned and there was more he wanted to say, but the initial fear started to take over and he began to tremble.

“Take it easy, take it easy,” she said, setting the clothes at the foot of the bed and reaching to take his hand. Squeezing his affectionately, Belle was relieved to see him calming down again.

“Where is that man?” he whispered, sending a nervous glance at the door.

“Dr. Whale? It’s okay, he’s a friend. He was helping you.”

“Helping?” Rumple repeated with uncertainty.

“You went into shock,” she explained. “But you’re fine now.”

It was evident he didn’t know what she was talking about. “Where am I?” he asked so quietly that she almost missed it.

“Rumple,” she said, exhaling deeply. “I know you’re terrified but trust me when I tell you that no harm will befall you. Do you trust me?”

He didn’t hesitate in his reply. “Oui.”

His response was so innocent and naïve that Belle felt guilty for what she had to tell him next, but there was no use in keeping this a secret from him.

“There’s something you need to know Rumple. I know it might be hard to comprehend at first… but I hope you will understand why I had to keep this from you. It’s not 1357 France now.”

He blinked in bewilderment. What was she talking about?

“You’re in the year 2014… the future,” she added. “My name is Dr. Belle French and I’m part of a very special expedition of scientists that can time travel to the past—your present—to understand the world and its history. Forgive me. I couldn’t tell you beforehand for obvious reasons, although things are different now.”

Standing up, she reached for the clothing on the bed and laid each item by him so he could look and
touch them without trepidation. “You helped me once when I needed it. I never forgot that and now… now this is my turn to repay you for your kindness towards me. Rumplestiltskin, I’m going to take you home with me until it is safe for you to return to your home.”

It was then her words sank in and Rumple realized the extent of his impulsive decision to follow Lady Belle. Yet, he couldn’t find it in himself to fret for long. He may not understand what she said, but he knew he was going to stay with her and perhaps… perhaps his bravery will continue so he can court her.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle takes Rumple to her apartment. (Rated K)

The Time-Traveler

“Home sweet home!” Belle declared as she ushered Rumplestiltskin into her apartment. The spinner was still in a daze over her announcement he was in the future, not to mention the horrendous travel inside her blue mechanical horse. His stomach was feeling queasy even after he embarrassingly made a mess in the belly of the creature. Lady Belle insisted it was all right and she gave him a tiny, hard circular piece of what she called “candy” to “suck on.”

He still had the candy in his mouth, which made him feel a little bit better, although he was certain it would be the last time he ever stepped into a horse again. The ride to her home was prolonged so Lady Belle could get her car cleaned out, which that prove to be a harrowing experience as well, despite her assurances it wasn’t a monster and she did the controlling of the long neck that spouted water. Eventually, Rumple covered his eyes with his hands so he couldn’t watch, yet the thunderous pounding of water against the windows and body was a sound he would never get out of his head.

It was a miracle they made it in one piece, but Lady Belle was very brave and she spoke to him about everything they saw so it wouldn’t seem as scary. Her voice certainly had the soothing lull to it and Rumple was more captivated by her tone than the actual words she was saying. Furthermore, he was able to stop picking at the strange clothes she had him wear. They weren’t… awful but the material was so much softer than his rags and it didn’t scratch him at all. Yet, the “jeans” Lady Belle referred them as were stiff and he didn’t like them at all. However, she explained to him that he had to dress from this time period so they could leave and he definitely wanted to leave that small white room. The only thing he wouldn’t part with was his walking staff and Lady Belle told him he could bring it with them, but she will have to buy him a cane. He didn’t know what a cane was, but Lady Belle knew he would need one so he took her advice into consideration.

Truthfully, Lady Belle was the only thing in this foreign land that made sense to him. But there was still more for him to learn and as long as she was by his side Rumple could adapt. Or… attempt to adapt. She already told him he would have to learn to speak English, and while he knew a few words of his enemy, he quickly realized it wasn’t the same when she demonstrated.

Stepping into her apartment as she called it, Rumple looked around in awe. It was slightly larger than his cottage, yet the place was clearly Lady Belle’s. The walls were covered in a cornflower blue with white trim—delicate and soft as his host—and the furniture was cozier and comfortable looking than his wooden chairs and wool as cushions. There were some other objects in the main room he didn’t recognize and he didn’t like how this rectangular shiny black monstrosity reflected back at him. It looked too much like a hole but it was slanted and held upright on a table of some kind and Rumple glared it with disdain.

The rest of the room was bright with the perfume of spring flowers in the air and the lovely petals in vases around. There was a small fireplace against the wall and to the side of it were a couple of bookshelves filled top to bottom with books. That put a smile on his face, recalling how Lady Belle told him that she loved to read.
Walking further into the room, Rumple spotted a small table by a very wide chair that had an ebony and silver rectangle frame with people inside it. He recognized Lady Belle’s face smiling at him along with several other faces he didn’t know. There was another such object in a brown frame with more people, and he did recognize the woman with the long red hair as well as the three men posing. They knew Lady Belle and while it was a relief that she could vouch for him… he distinctly remembered the one man with a needle, which he didn’t like. Then the last frame had Lady Belle in it with an unfamiliar man with his arm wrapped around her waist. Before he could inspect it, Lady Belle placed her hand on his shoulder, steering him over to another entryway that led to her kitchen.

Like the living space, the kitchen was in pastel colors, this one was a lavender and sea green. Rumple immediately sat in one of the chairs at the table while Lady Belle was busy with opening cupboards and pulling out cups and tea bags. The kettle was already filled as she started a fire below it. She continued to look for snacks for them to eat, but Rumple couldn’t help and think how inadequate his cottage was compared to hers. Grant it, he wasn’t wealthy and he didn’t have much for comforts, but he made most of his things by hand. Now, looking back he wished he hadn’t brought Lady Belle to his home. She probably was disgusted with his pauper-like ways and pitiful home.

“Okay, you might be used to this, and I’m sorry to say I haven’t been to the grocery store, but I have cheese and crackers to go with our tea. I also have petit fours too.” Belle laid out the items on a couple of plates for him to choose from. Rumple carefully picked up a cube of cheese and swallowing the candy, he popped the cube in his mouth. It was cheddar and very delicious.

“Thank you Lady Belle,” he told her and she gave him a wistful smile. Since the water was still boiling, Belle slipped in the chair across from him. “You don’t have to call me Lady Belle,” she said. “I’m not a Lady. Belle will do just nicely.”

“But—but you are a lady,” Rumple insisted. “You speak like one and your hands…”

“What about my hands?” Belle asked, curious as to why he was adamant in calling her so.

Rumple gulped, fearing he might have insulted her, but she didn’t look upset. If anything she was intrigued and a part of him wished he had kept his mouth shut, but it was her glimmering eyes brimming with kindness that gave him the courage to go on. “It’s… your hands are very smooth and flawless. There are no callouses or scars to show hard labor. Only nobles and those born with a higher status lack the marks of a peasant. It was probably one of the reasons those soldiers feared you were a spy.”

Belle blushed at his compliments and his explanation made sense, which she couldn’t believe she didn’t notice it beforehand. The clothes helped you get into the part, but the rest of the physicality of it was missing. It seemed so obvious, and yet, Belle and her colleagues never paid attention to that particular detail. They assumed if they dressed like peasants, spoke like one, then that was all that was needed to assimilate. Well, that had to change.

The kettle whistled and Belle got up to fix their tea. She added a touch of honey to hers and brought the cups to the table. Setting his in front of him, Belle sipped hers carefully.

Rumple’s finger traced the golden rim of the white teacup and the blue floral design, thinking at how pretty it was and how inferior he felt for having such luxuries shared with him. The cup was hot though it felt good to his cool skin and he at last picked it up and managed to swallow some of the tea, mimicking the tiny sips Belle made. It was very good and certainly flavorful than the coarse, bitter taste that his tea sometimes tasted. He gave her a smile to let her know he liked it and she seemed to be pleased with his reaction.
They made small talk with her speaking slowly in English and Rumple repeating her. But they switched back to his native French without realizing it and as Rumple took another mouthful of his drink there came a loud ringing that startled him. The cup slipped from his fingertips falling to the floor next to him. Luckily, he had the remaining tea in his mouth as it scorched his throat all the way down. He wasn’t sure if he could handle the humiliation of making two messes on the same day.

Belle was out of her chair and ran for the object that made the shrill noise. It stopped as soon as she picked it up and placed it against her ear.

“Hello—? Oh, hi Gaston,” Belle muttered, sending a nervous look in Rumple’s direction before she turned her back on him. He couldn’t make out anything she was saying as it was in English and very rapid too, but whatever it was… Rumple knew it couldn’t be good. He was all too happy when Belle stopped talking to the oddly shaped object and she turned around to face him.

Her countenance was strained but she forced a smile on her lips. He longed to ask her what was wrong and what that horrid thing was, but it was her gasp as she noticed the cup at his feet that seized his attention. Bending down, Rumple picked it up and winced when he saw the chip that cracked from the rim.

At once, he mentally berated himself for breaking such an invaluable teacup and now Lady Belle reserved the right to remove him from her home for damaging her belongings. To his astonishment, she didn’t yell or curse him or demand he leave at once. Instead, she took the cup from his hand and placed it back on the table and checked his palm to make sure he didn’t injure himself.

His face was blazing hot as her finger-pads trailed his flesh for any markings and dipped his chin as she retrieved the tiny piece from the ground.

“I’m s-s-sorry,” he stammered, feeling like a fool and an idiot all in one.

She flashed him a smile and threw the broken piece out. “It’s okay Rumple. It’s only a cup,” she said but even that didn’t make him feel any better. However, she didn’t seem to be mad and he would rather she lost her temper instead of having this calm demeanor. When she went to the cupboard to get him a new cup, Rumple quickly grabbed the chipped one and hastily told her: “It’s all right. I rather keep using this one.”

Belle lifted a thin brow and shrugged. “Okay. Well, it does look good and it can hold tea from the looks of it.”

He nodded eagerly and she couldn’t help but grin even wider at his boyish behavior. “Very well. It does give it some character I suppose,” she chuckled.

It didn’t take long for that cup to be claimed as his whenever they had tea.
Chapter Summary

The Daughter of santan prompted: Belle shows her world to Spinner Rumplestiltskin. Of course, it’s not as easy or smooth. (Rated K+)

The Time Traveler

It had been a couple of days but Belle felt it was time for Rumple to brave her world. She was actually eager to share whatever she could about her time and way of life before—well, she didn’t want to think about what would happen when it came time for him to return to the past. Right now, she wanted to savor each moment and return the favor since he had taught her a thing or two about his world when he believed she was a lady.

Then again, he still insisted on calling her Lady Belle. No matter how many times she tried to correct him, he persisted with his respectable title for her. Eventually Belle decided to drop it. In his own good time he will see she was no true lady, just a scientist. Or, at least, she hoped he would.

Of course, she hadn’t taken into the account the hectic week that had followed.

Thursday

There were a lot of things in her world that Rumple considered mystifying. One of which he was strongly convinced she possessed some kind of magic.

That interesting development came about his first night in her apartment when the sky became darker. She had turned on the lights, and at once, Rumple was startled by the return of day when it was clearly so late. His eyes had grown so wide with the astounded wonder that he kneeled before her in supplication. And also, she surmised, partially with fear.

“I had not known my lady could do such miracles,” he said. “I have heard tales of people with the ability of magic, but I never thought it was possible or real.”

It took her a moment to realize he was referring to the light.

“It’s not magic, Rumple,” she tried assuring him. “It's electricity. See? You can do it too.”

Belle took him to the switch and had him flick it on and off to see there was no magic involved. However, his features lit up with the delight that he had mastered this magic without complication. Of course, he continued to endlessly turn the lights on and off that she had to stop him before her eyes began to hurt and her electric bill went up. She figured she would explain the mechanization much later once the novelty wore off.

If it did.

Friday

Next were the wonders of indoor plumbing.
Belle woke the next morning to the sounds of muffled footsteps and soft but masculine murmurs. Her eyes flew open when she remembered that Rumple was in her apartment. And from the sound of it, he seemed anxious and perturbed as she could hear him moving back and forth and objects being moved around.

Quickly, she grabbed her robe and threw it on over her pajamas. She slipped on her slippers and opened her bedroom door to see what the ruckus was all about.

As soon as she reached her living room, Belle froze mid-step as she stared in mortification at Rumple.

He was right next to the couch turned bed and was squatting over one of her ceramic bowls she used for baking. She didn’t even want to think what he was doing.

Yet, it was her sudden squawk that had him jumping upright and hastily pulling up the sweat pants she lent him for the night. His face was burning red and his jaw quivered at being caught in a private moment.

“I-I couldn’t find a chamber-pot,” he stammered.

The situation as comical as it was (not to mention riddled with common sense), she couldn’t be upset. In her exhausted, sleep-deprived mind she forgot to mention where he could do his business should he need to relieve himself. Something she obviously took for granted and something she should have known due to her scholarly background but sadly forgotten. If anything, she was mad at herself for not being the proper hostess and guide to this new world.

“It’s okay. You didn’t—“ she trailed off.

Rumple shook his head, still wide-eyed. Belle sighed in relief as she ran a hand through her curls.

“Good. Let me show you the… bathroom.”

She was grateful Rumple understood the concept what the toilet was for with her flustered instructions and very pink face. She closed the door to leave him to his privacy after she explained the importance of washing his hands afterward.

As for the bowl, Belle contemplated if she should dispose it or give it a very hot and soapy wash. Maybe three times through the washing cycle on her dish washer. By itself.

There was nothing in the bowl. She thanked whatever God was out there for that little mercy. But her rattled mind couldn’t shake away the image or what could have happened if she didn’t interrupt it in the first place. And she definitely didn’t want to think what Rumple would have done after as she eyed the window in the room. Her neighbors and anyone walking by would have been in for the shock of their lives.

At least it was a crisis that was averted for good.

While she busied herself in cleaning the bowl with rubber gloves and a very rough scrub, she heard the familiar sounds of the flush and more water joining in the chorus as she ran her sink. Then the door opened and Rumple came into the kitchen.

Not wanting to further embarrass him, Belle quickly hid the bowl under the suds and pulled off the gloves and set them down in the sink. She smiled brightly at him and said, “Good morning! I hope you slept well.”
He nodded, refusing to make eye-contact. Well… she couldn’t expect him to jump back from that moment.

“I’ll get some breakfast for us. And I thought we could take a little adventure outside. How does that sound?”

Rumple nodded again as he limped his way to the table. It didn’t take long for the tea to be ready and the cereal to be poured. She didn’t have many options for breakfast and made a mental note to take him to the grocery store as their first excursion.

He did speak once to have the chipped cup with his meal, which she happily obliged. As for the food, Rumple picked up on how to eat it by watching her through his lashes and seemed to like the honeyed grain oats soaked with cold milk.

Breakfast was a silent affair but Belle tried to draw him from his shell by telling him some stories about her world. He did lift his head and by the time they were done eating, he was finally looking her in the eye. It was progress and Belle accepted it as victory.

She took care of the dishes and told him that she was going to take a shower. He nodded, although he had no clue what a shower was, and put on the same clothes from yesterday while Belle was in the bathroom as she called it.

He could hear the sound of water coming from behind and guessed it was some kind of bathing routine. Speaking of which, he raised his arm and sniffed.

Lady Belle was very polite and hadn’t said a word, but Rumple knew he must have smelled something awful. It had been a few days since his last bath, and technically, he wasn’t due for another one in a month or so. But this was Lady Belle’s world now and there were different rules in place. And if he wanted to prove himself worthy of her attention, then he had to go along with her rules.

He waited when she came out and he requested his use of the “shower.”

Belle was surprised but agreed, thinking that might be a good idea. She was pretty much used to the smells of the fourteenth century, but people here wouldn’t be and the last thing she wanted was for Rumple to be humiliated over something he didn’t know.

He mastered the toilet so she assumed the shower would be no different.

She explained to him how the dial worked and where the water would pour from, which he seemed to follow until she left him alone. He had accidentally turned the dial all the way to the red side and… Well, his piercing shriek got her attention and he burst out of the bathroom, panting and breathlessly telling Belle that a demon must have taken hold of it.

Immediately, she diffused the situation before the neighbors should start to worry with Rumple’s shouting. She gently explained what he did and that it was no demon that turned the water burning hot. She made sure a warm, soothing temperature came on before she left but Rumple wanted her to stay just in case the demon should return. Keeping her eyes averted along with his own attempts of modesty, Belle stayed nearby if he needed anything. When the shower was done, she excused herself so he could change.

However, combined with the scarring episode of the morning, Rumple wasn’t up to an adventure. So Belle thought it was best to stay in for the day.

Sunday
The next couple mornings went a lot smoother.

In the meantime, Belle figured they would start off slow… just so Rumple could acclimate to the new and strange surroundings.

First, she took him to the park.

It was relatively quiet and there wasn’t as much of a shock to the system with all of this technology present elsewhere. If anything, it would help him get use to some of the sounds.

However, Belle hadn’t counted on his initial fear that the enemy could be lurking behind the trees. She tried assuring him that the British were not hiding in the park and that they were quite safe in the open. Like a nervous lamb, he kept a wary eye on every tree they passed on their walk, so convinced he was that someone would attack since the French thought Belle was a spy. When it was clear that nothing bad was going to happen, Rumple began to relax and started to enjoy the pleasant walk with the Lady Belle.

Until the mugger.

Rumple had let his guard down too much that he hadn’t noticed the man creeping up alongside them until Belle was pushed in Rumple’s direction and she let out a cry. He froze when Lady Belle was suddenly in his arms and his senses were engulfed with roses and vanilla and soft curves. Then, in a flash, she was out of his grasp and she was running after the thief.

Fearing for her safety, he went after her with panic-filled thoughts flying through his head. What would he do if they caught up to this man? What if the man tried to hurt Lady Belle? Rumple was a spinner and a coward to boot. He didn’t have much experience with combat of any kind, and in a fight he would be absolutely useless. Yet, he knew he couldn’t let anything bad happen to her and he would do whatever he could in his power to defend her if he must.

At least he told himself he would.

Well, Lady Belle didn’t need his help. Once he caught up to them as fast as he could with his limp and cane, Rumple was taken aback with the thief flat on his stomach, Lady Belle’s knee digging into his back as she pinned both arms to the ground. Her purse, he saw, was out of reach for the two of them. Yet, she was busy trying to keep the thief still as he struggled and bucked against her hold.

“Rumple, get my purse please!” Lady Belle exclaimed. She let out a grunt and dug her nails into the thief’s bare skin as he let out a yowl. “Rumple!”

Snapping out of his reverie, Rumple quickly did as she bid and held her bag tight to his chest so no one could take it. Thankfully, the Sheriff was at the park doing his daily jog when Belle called for him. The thief was taken into custody shortly after and Belle was relieved that it was over. She couldn’t say much about the spinner who was flabbergasted about the whole thing and she felt like she should apologize after all of her assurances that they were safe.

“I come here all the time and this is the first time that I’ve been robbed. I swear,” Belle said. “This was just a fluke.”

Yet, she felt it was best if they left and leave the park for another day.

**Wednesday**

Belle did put this off a little bit longer than she liked, but there was no point in avoiding the elephant in the room: Rumple needed new clothes.
Of course, he didn’t seem to mind that he still wore the clothes lent by David; she had a difficult time explaining that people in the future didn’t wear the same things every day. The concept of new clothes and various outfits to choose from was mind-boggling to the spinner, and of course, he was reminded of the fact he was poor. There was no way he could afford the best quality of clothes, but Lady Belle was adamant he should have some of his own while he was here with her.

Although it didn’t help that she paid for everything. He wanted to pay her back for the kindness she was bestowing on this poor cripple, but Lady Belle wouldn’t hear of it. She insisted it was a present for everything he had done for her when she was in his time.

The shopping experience was… interesting.

Rumple had never seen so many clothes before in his life and the fact he wouldn’t have to wait for them to be tailored to him was astonishing! Lady Belle enlisted the assistance of a seamstress to help with the selection. She was nice but the girl smelled funny and her face was garnished with all this paint that Rumple was initially suspicious. He didn’t want her to cheat Lady Belle; however, the good Lady must have felt the same for she checked on all the square-shaped decorations to ensure the price was suitable.

Lady Belle had an armful of what she called shirts and pants and something called jeans. The seamstress led Rumple to the “fitting room” as she called it and Lady Belle escorted him inside and hung up the items on the wall.

“Remember how we got David’s clothes on you?” she asked him in his native French.

Rumple nodded. “Good,” she replied. “Do the same thing with these. I’ll be waiting out here to see how they fit.”

Then Lady Belle left him alone.

For a moment, Rumple stood in the tiny, enclosed space as he nervously shifted his gaze to the clothes and to the looking-glass beside him. It was very shiny and tall, which Rumple’s mirror had been small and dirty. He was able to see his face in the one back home, but this one revealed his whole body. Rumple wasn’t sure he liked that and it only made him self-conscious about his thin frame.

But Lady Belle insisted he put these clothes on and she requested to see them. He couldn’t refuse her wishes so Rumple very carefully removed what he wore and set them on the bench. He took what he saw first and slipped into them. Then he glanced at himself in the mirror and almost didn’t recognize himself with the navy blue buttoned-up shirt and the dark indigo stiff trousers. Even his hair had been neatly brushed before their venture out, completely losing its former wild and scraggly look.

Cleanliness was important in the future Rumple had noticed, since no one reeked of animals, covered in dirt, and the scent of blood and fear were not to be found.

He liked that about Lady Belle’s world

But the clothes… he didn’t know if he could get use to them. He preferred the warmth and comfort of his rags, despite being old and thoroughly worn through. These pants, on the other hand, were scratchy and rough against his skin.

“Rumple? Are you done so I can see?”

Hearing her call, Rumple hoped she did approve. While he still was getting used to the luxuries and magical properties of this world, he very much wanted to fit in and earn Lady Belle’s approval.
Giving a perfunctory nod to himself, he unlatched the door and stepped out for the beauty to behold his newest transformation.

Belle’s eyes widened as soon as the spinner came out of the fitting room. For a man who had spent years living poor in the forest… he was very dashing and becoming in the future. And the jeans fit well on him—really, really well Belle had to admit to herself. Tight too. Just in the right areas as well, which she forced herself to look at his face and not let her eyes stray lest she should make him uncomfortable. Though when he began to turn around at the store associate’s insistence with a twirl of her finger, Belle couldn’t help stealing a peek at how well those jeans formed certain parts.

*Stop it, she scolded herself. The man has been through a lot and the last thing he needs is you ogling him. Now wait… you don’t ogle. Ariel and Ruby does that. You admire, maybe look once in a while, but you don’t stare blatantly.*

“Uh, how do you like them Rumple?” she asked, in parts of distracting herself and praying to God he hadn’t noticed her checking him out. That was the kind of complication she wanted to avoid when it came time for him to return to his home.

“Are they meant to be like this?” he asked innocently, moving his hips side to side just a bit so not to aggravate his leg. “It feels so strange. How can people wear these?”

“It’s more for casual wear,” Belle informed him. “But we don’t have to get them if you don’t like them.”

“I couldn’t—“

“Rumple,” she interrupted with a smile. “It’s all right. I won’t get upset if you don’t like the jeans. A lot of people don’t like them. I want you to be comfortable with these clothes. Tell me what you do like.”

“Well,” he confessed. “I did like the trousers that your friend gave me.”

Those had been dressy pants that David rarely wore unless he had to. She suspected he liked them because the fabric was looser and softer to the touch compared to his original outfit and the jeans. And if that’s what he wanted, then Belle saw no reason not to get them.

Foregoing anything that was denim, they ended up with several shirts and three pairs of pants along with socks and boxers (much to Rumple’s embarrassment once she explained their purpose). She noted he liked the darker, muted colors compared to the brighter and lighter shades for men. Not that it was a bad thing. She thought the neutral and dark tones suited Rumple very well. Yet, as a scientist and scholar, she knew the color choices were more of a survival instinct. One would not dare to wear a robin’s egg blue shirt when the enemy could be hiding in the foliage. However, after the incident with the mugger, Belle felt it was best not to bring up that point again.

Next, she took him to a shoe store so he could have a couple good pairs of shoes to walk around in. The store clerk there did his best to hide his confusion when Rumple spoke to Belle in his native tongue. She did all the translation and threw in that he was a relative visiting from France to the salesman. At the clothing store, Rumple barely spoke when the salesgirl was nearby. Belle believed it had to do with his inability on how to interpret the situation since the salesgirl was gushing over his accent. It didn’t help that she had been spouting question after question and Rumple didn’t know how to respond other than clamping up. Perhaps he felt a little more confident with himself now since this salesman wasn’t asking him endless questions.

Once the shoes were paid for, Belle and Rumple walked back to her apartment to put his new clothes
away. It was after one and Belle’s stomach rumbled hungrily as soon as they finished hanging the
clothes in the hall closet that she cleared out for him.

“Why don’t you change into one of your new outfits and we get some lunch?” Belle suggested.

Rumple lit up at the idea and nodded eagerly. He changed into an evergreen shirt and brown
trousers, and slipped on a pair of the brown laced-up shoes. He couldn’t help the big grin from his
face when Lady Belle looked pleased with his choice.

“I was just thinking. You would look good in a tie, I bet.” He didn’t know what a tie was, but if
Lady Belle liked them, then he would like them too.

She took him to a place called Granny’s and the thousand smells that assaulted him once they entered
had him very hungry all of a sudden.

“Granny’s the best,” Lady Belle said. “A lot of her dishes are homemade.”

He didn’t care if Granny chopped the meat and cooked it in front of everyone. But Rumple did note
that the tavern was very clean and tidy compared to the tavern in his village. Or any other tavern, if
he had to be honest. In addition, it wasn’t rowdy and people weren’t drunk or getting into rows,
which was a blessed change.

Once seated at a table, the server-girl approached them with their drink orders. Lady Belle ordered
water for them and once the wench was gone, she showed him the menu and explained each dish
that he pointed to. She told him how the cheeseburgers were her favorite and so Rumple decided he
would try it. She told him it was beef and it had been a long time since he had such a delicious
morsel. While they waited for their food, Belle went over his English with him.

He was happy and proud of himself that he was catching on rather quickly. He knew it was Lady
Belle’s doing and he couldn’t have asked for a more patient and kinder teacher than she. When their
burgers came, Belle recommended the condiments he should add to it.

“Try the ketchup,” she suggested. “You will find that it tastes like magic.”

And she was right! The cheeseburger was delicious and the potato sticks called French fries were
just as good, if not even better. He could see why this was his lady’s favorite.

Afterwards, Belle had asked if he wanted to call it a day or continue exploring. While the day did
contain plenty of excitement, Rumple was getting a little tired and he wanted to spend some quiet
time with her. Not that he said those exact words. That would have been implying he wanted certain
favors from her, which he did not. Well, he did but not in a sordid way. She was a lady and he was
determined to court her accordingly and delicately that was befitting her station.

To his amazement, she reached for his free hand and held it as they walked back to the apartment.
He didn’t know if it was an accident or if she was aware what it meant, but Rumple kept his face
straight ahead so she wouldn’t see how his cheeks were flushing.

Her touch was the sweetest he ever felt and certainly his favorite part for that day. Now, he wanted
to make sure that every day ended like this for as long as he lived.
Chapter Summary

Emospritelet prompted: Rumple is left by himself and as he scrolls through the magic box with pictures… he encounters a particular type of movie that has some interesting side effects. (Rated M)

The Time Traveler

“What? Ariel, are you kidding me?”

Rumple looked up to see Lady Belle pacing, her one hand gesturing wildly while the other cradled the phone (he was quite pleased with himself that he was remembering the names of these modern and strange objects). However, his inner congratulations were short-lived due to her distress. He didn’t like it when she was upset and something was certainly agitating her.

Sighing, Belle wearily muttered something in agreement and hung up. Turning to face him, she tried to put on a smile for his benefit, but the annoyance was quite frank in her blue eyes.

“I’m sorry Rumple. I’m afraid we’ll have to put our lesson on hold for later. There’s some paperwork that needs to be filled out and it can’t wait any longer.”

This was unfortunate and Rumple concealed his disappointment. It wouldn’t do to make Lady Belle feel any worse than she already did, and as much as he loved his lessons with her… He understood that duty calls. Besides, he couldn’t begrudge her place of employment. If it weren’t for them, then she wouldn’t have been sent to his time and they never would have met. Rumple shuddered at the thought that he would still be the same mistreated cripple, alone and fearful of the world he was raised in. At least here with Lady Belle he had a chance to prove something of himself. What he did not know yet… but his English was improving and he wasn’t as startled about new things as he first was when he arrived.

She went around the apartment grabbing her purse, coat, and keys. “Where did I put them? Oh yes…” After slipping on her shoes, Belle turned to face him. “Now, it shouldn’t take me long to get this done. If something happens or you need to reach me—”

“Your cell is on the icebox,” he stated proudly.

She grinned. “Good.” Refrigerator had been a difficult word for him to pronounce, but icebox was easily understood. “All right. I’m off. Stay out of trouble, okay?” she teased and he couldn’t help but blush. There were some things he still wasn’t sure about and having Lady Belle jest with him always made him feel things. Nothing bad, of course. But he wished he knew how to tease right back. Or the very least feel comfortable in doing so.

Belle gave him a wave good-bye and she was gone.

Now, alone in the apartment, Rumple looked around at a loss what to do until his attention settled on the flat box propped up on a table. Lady Belle explained once about the “TV” and how he could watch moving pictures and hear people’s voices. In the beginning, Rumple was absolutely certain
that it was sorcery of some kind and he took care to never stare too long at the black empty screen. She asked him why it bothered him and he told her:

“Magic can do terrible things to a person. An enchanted mirror similar to this could entrap one’s soul and I daren’t tempt its wrath.”

She had laughed at that and insisted that the TV would not trap his soul or hers. “Well, it can… but not in the way you’re thinking about.”

He supposed he finally understood what she had meant. Lately, Lady Belle has been insisting they watch something called *Get Smart*. He still had difficulties understanding what happens in the show, but it made her laugh. And he loved to hear her laugh.

Deciding to turn the TV on, Rumple picked up the stick (*remote*, he corrected) and hit the button with the circle and a line going through it to wake it up. Immediately, the black screen transformed into colors and noise and he was pleased once more that he made this happen all by himself. The image he saw did not contain much storytelling to it and it seemed rather pointless—how does a horseless carriage have a mind of its own?

Shrugging, Rumple held up the remote and tapped the arrow button with his finger. One by one the screen flickered and switched pictures as he paused to see what it was and then move on to the next. There were a lot of these commercials and Rumple was getting bored with the lack of entertainment it should have been providing. Lady Belle said this TV was a blessing and a curse, and he more or less had to agree.

At last he settled on a program that had a young girl with long brown hair like his lady’s. She was lying on her bed, her ankles crossed, as she flipped through a book. It seemed like a normal activity, except her clothes were a little strange. She was wearing a white T-shirt that was riding up her back and snug in the front that her—ahems—were straining against the fabric. Her pants were also cut very short, which Lady Belle had once explained that it was acceptable for women and men to wear short pants that exposed so much leg. He blushed, nevertheless, but didn’t think anything suspicious.

In fact, apart from the unusual choice of clothing, the girl did look like Lady Belle. She had the same vibrant blue eyes and that small, playful smile on her lips when Lady Belle is amused. He wondered if she knew this show existed and if she had ever seen this doppelganger…

As the show continued, there came a loud knock at the girl’s bedroom door. She appeared somewhat puzzled but she unhooked her ankles and got up to answer it anyways. Her hand hovered over the doorknob as she let out a breathless sigh, “Who is it?”

A guttural voice behind the door answered. “I have a delivery.”

Frowning now, she replied, “I didn’t order any pizza.”

However, she opened the door and standing in the doorway was a man wearing no shirt but very tight jeans, hanging off his hips. In his hands he held a box as he smirked lasciviously.

“I didn’t say it was pizza,” he said, coming into the room. Slamming the door shut behind him the man looks the girl over and murmurs, “You’re a naughty girl answering the door to a stranger.”

“What can I say? I’m very naughty,” she purred suddenly and she was running her nails down his chest and to his jeans. She slipped her hand inside the denim and ran her tongue over her lips.

“Hmm… I remember now. I ordered this.”

The box was discarded and he was pushing her to the bed. The book she had been reading earlier
was unceremoniously tossed to the side as she landed on the mattress, bouncing up and down, making her lady parts jiggie. The man roughly grabbed her chest and began massaging her as her lips parted and a tortured groan was ripped from her throat. Her tiny white shirt provided no protection at all and it easily fell apart in the man’s animalistic handling.

With her nipples now on display, the man took delight in pinching and rolling them, eliciting more groans from the girl that eventually turned into a long, drawn out moan. Then his mouth was on them, grunting while he sucked and fondled her. Her fingers were in his hair, pulling at the ends as she shook her head side to side, eyes closed, and mouth wide-opened as she cried, “Oh yes! Oh yes!”

Then he forcibly moved away from her and paused for a second to grab her shorts and soon those were in a pile on the floor. Fully naked, the girl lounged on her elbows, her brow arched as her blue eyes were now darkened to a midnight blue.

“No… let me see if I’m satisfied with this order. I hate to return it,” she teased.

The man chuckled. “Didn’t I mention? There is a no return policy. Only 100% guarantee satisfaction for our customers. Sometimes a 200.”

His jeans now shed; he began to crawl over her and between her legs. The girl gave him a wide berth and soon he was rutting against her. Her cries and shouts continued to grow louder. “Oh! Oh! There! Right there! Yes! Yes! YES!”

To his credit, Rumple sat there with his chin dropped, his eyes now the size of saucers. He knew how the world procreated… he had seen animals before… but this was—this was…

His face was growing terribly hotter as the man pulled out and flipped her girl over so her butt was in the air. There was no time to spare and he was back pumping in and out of her as she fistied the bed-covers and continued to follow his thrusts with her consistent “oh yes! Oh yes! Oh yes!”

Eventually sense entered his brain just as she screamed, “A 100! Oh, it’s a 100!”

Seizing the remote control, Rumple turned it off and then let it fall so he wouldn’t have to touch it anymore. He closed his eyes, trying to soothe his erratic heartbeat and sudden panting, but he couldn’t get the image of the faux Lady Belle’s face contorted in pleasure out of his head.

This was wrong! This was horribly wrong!

Lady Belle is full of goodness and sweetness and she deserves the world… but his face continued to burn as his pants were becoming constricted and he let out an embarrassing whimper.

Yes, she deserved everything in life but another part inside him also wanted to make her come undone. It was the darker side of him, the part that often brought shame, but he wanted to do everything that man had done to that girl… He wanted to put his mouth on Lady Belle’s breasts and he wanted to take her like some possessive beast. He wanted to make her scream until the whole world knew she belonged to him and no one could have her.

“Whew! I thought I would never get out!” Belle chirped as she walked into the apartment.

Rumple froze, his eyes flying open, as Belle suddenly appeared in front of him. Her brows were knitted in confusion as she placed her hands on her hips.

“Rumple? Are you okay? You look… flush,” she told him. Then she glanced down in his lap (and please let the Gods kill him now) as her eyes widened, her lips separated in a soft gasp.
He wanted to crawl in a corner and die. Better yet… return to his time and home so he wouldn’t have to endure this humiliating moment. No doubt Lady Belle is disgusted with him and he couldn’t blame her if she decided to throw him out. After all, she welcomed him into her home and she provided him sustenance, a bed, new clothes, and she was teaching him to speak in her native tongue. And how does he repay her kindness?

His mental scolding should have taken care of the problem, but alas, Rumple’s blood was still on fire and he was in a desperate need to free himself to relieve the pressure from his pants. Gods, he was so pathetic!

“Oh Rumple…” Lady Belle began to say as he finally looked up into her face. To his astonishment, she looked flushed herself! Then she arched one thinly brow as her eyes sparkled with amusement and hunger?

“What were you doing when I was away?” she questioned teasingly, as she looked down and saw the discarded remote. “Let me guess…” Picking up the device of sin, she twisted to turn it on. The screen lit up as a close-up of the girl’s face appeared and the man was still moving erratically behind her, but her back was now pressed against his chest, one hand was holding onto him and the other was tugging on her nipples.

“Why Rumple… I never realized you were so incredibly naughty,” she purred, slowly turning on her heel so she could gaze into his incredulous countenance. Her blunt aroused expression left him speechless… not that he said anything since she returned but this was the last thing he expected.

Turning the TV off, Belle set the controller on the coffee table, never once breaking eye contact with him, as she set her hands on his legs and began to slowly move them upwards to his crotch. His pupils instantly dilated as he tilted his head back and an unsteady puff of air fled his lips. To feel her soft hands on his legs! It was such a wonderful sensation and when she let a couple of fingers caress his bulge… He jumped.

“No, no,” Belle ordered, clicking her tongue. “None of that now. Sit back, relax. Let me take care of you…”

The bubbling urge to whimper again overwhelmed him, and Rumple did as Belle pulled down his zipper as his manhood burst out from its confinement. The cool air against his scorching flesh had Rumple hissing through clenched teeth, and before he could prepare himself, Lady Belle was stroking him.

“My Rumple,” she stated firmly and possessively. “I know you’re shy but you must remember what I said… ‘I’m no lady…”’

Then her face began to lower and—

“Whew! I thought I would never get out!” Belle exclaimed as soon as she came home.

Startled, Rumple stirred from the couch and his eyes immediately went to the TV. It was off (thank the Gods…) and his lap was normal. It was only a dream…

He barely had time to react before Belle plopped down next to him. Seeing he just woke up, a pale pink stole across her cheeks. “Sorry Rumple. I didn’t mean to wake you—“

“It’s no bother. I was waking up already…” he said lamely, but refused to look her in the face. The last thing he wanted was for her to see his transgression in his eyes. Gods! How will he ever look at her again after fantasizing her in such a torrid way…?
“Oh. Well, since I’m back, do you want to have our lesson or do you want to watch something?”

He didn’t want to either of those things, but she mistook his silence for the latter since he was staring at the TV intently.

“I bet I can find a good comedy. Your shoulders are so tense. Laughter will ease it,” she said matter-of-factly and turned it on before he could stop her.

Indeed, the afternoon became one of the most embarrassing days of their lives as Belle decided it was best to turn on the parental locks to avoid any future disasters.
1 Broadway Rated T

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Gold makes a decision on stage. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I'm borrowing the lyrics to The Phantom of the Opera to fit in with this story. It's one of my all time favorite musicals and thank you Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Broadway

Panting heavily, a man stares at the love of his life—shock, disbelief, and desperation warring within his countenance, but mostly disbelief that she kissed him—him—of her own volition. For a minute the world ceased moving as it was just the two of them standing there with only the sounds of their harsh breathing intermingling in the empty air.

Then a raspy gasp reminding him that they weren’t alone, and as the steady beat of drums echoed in his ears, he knew this dream of his could only have one possible outcome. He didn’t deserve her—never did—and the reality of it crushed his heart and soul. He couldn’t condemn her to this life in the darkness where threats and ultimatums were his tools of manipulation to gain what he wanted.

Moving away from her, his eyes never once strayed from her blue ones or her parted lips that only had caressed his in a sweet and promising kiss of redemption. She looked so hopeful and was there a smidgen of happiness glowing in those sparkling orbs? He couldn’t tell but he knew if it was… it could not be directed at him.

Grasping the candlestick, the tempo of the drums started to quicken and he glanced now at the intruder and his staccato breathing—the hero of this tragic story. The young man’s expression was full of spite and hatred as well as revulsion. At least he was handsome compared to this loathsome monster that held his life in the balance. There was no denying his constant heroism to the bitter end and being so much worthy of the dream beauty clad in silken white.

He lunged, releasing the pent up scream rising in his chest, as the flame of the candle cut through the noose, freeing the Vicomte from certain death. Pointing a quivering finger at her direction, he bid:

“Take her, forget me, forget all of this.”

As the rest of the scene played out, the Phantom aka Raphael Gold felt the tug of melancholy that overcame him during the final performance of every show he ever starred in. However, this one was bittersweet as it was the last time he would take the stage and sing alongside the beautifully talented Belle French.
His voice carried the anguished emotions that his character felt for the past several months, but he ejected more into the lyrics—something he never done before and something that could be felt in the audience as if, they too, realized the heavy weight of this moment. When Christine came back for the last farewell, Gold fought back the personal attachment as he sang “I love you” to Belle. This wasn’t him and it wasn’t her, but Gold hoped to God it could be, and to his astonishment, he thought he seen the same sadness flickering in her features.

Now came the torturous part…

“Say you’ll share with me one love, one lifetime…”

Instead of turning to stage right, Belle was looking directly at him as her melodic soprano voice washed over him.

This was wrong! Christine wasn’t supposed to sing to the Phantom! She was singing to Raoul, her true love, and yet, she stood there as if silently imploring or waiting for him to finish the duet.

His mouth opened to respond but the irritating rubbernecker Garrett beat him to the punch, reaching and turning Belle around to face him to finish the love song.

But it was that moment of improv that caused Gold’s heart to thump harder. Did she feel the same for him as he did for her? Or was it an extension of her character’s feelings since Belle had always been vocal in insisting that Christine loved her Phantom? It could explain why she might have picked tonight for the rebellion in blocking, but Gold couldn’t shake away the memory of the emotion in her visage or her voice.

That wasn’t Christine, just like it wasn’t the Phantom.

When the rest of the cast gathered on stage for the finale and bows, Gold felt his face burning as Belle grabbed his hand and squeezed it affectionately. She flashed him a dazzling smile and mouthed, “We did it!”

They shared a glance and right then Gold made a decision. The run of The Phantom of the Opera might have been over, but it didn’t mean it had to for them. Tonight at the after party or better yet… in the dressing room (why prolonged the wait?) he was going to tell her.

The Phantom might have been afraid to be confident in his heart for Christine, but Raphael Gold wasn’t a coward. He was going to confess to Belle that he loved her, and maybe later…much later, they could share that one love, one lifetime together.

Chapter End Notes

I know in the 25th Anniversary production, Sierra Boggess does in fact pause and sings as if she was directing the lyrics to the Phantom before Raoul comes in and takes her away. You can see the regret in her face for leaving him but at the last moment… she loses her courage and goes with her childhood sweetheart. I have seen this musical on stage three times and I have never seen Christine do this before. I loved it because I do feel she loves him and she’s not sure how to express it since everyone around her is saying he’s a monster and such. So thank you Sierra for doing that for all of us EC fans!
Prompt: World renowned singer Raphael Gold is offered a chance to reprise his role as the Phantom in an anniversary tour with newcomer Belle French as his Christine. He refuses, believing Ms. French will only ruin the show, and receives an unexpected surprise that he now can’t refuse. (Rated T)

Broadway

Raphael Gold was a successful Broadway singer—bringing many unforgettable characters to life on the stage. During his career span of twenty-five years, he had been nominated for the Tony twenty times and won half in addition to a dozen wins of the Lawrence Olivier Award as Best Actor, Best Supporting Actor, and overall Best Musical or Revival.

For as long as he could remember, Raphael was always singing. Even as a young boy in Scotland, Raphael delighted many crowds with his folk song renditions and crooning to the tunes of Frank Sinatra, Dean Martin, and Bing Crosby. When he reached the age of eighteen, Raphael moved to London in hopes of getting started in West End. He did land a job in the chorus for Runaways and later got his break in Les Misérables as understudy for Enjolras. From there he eventually made it to New York City where he took the rest of the musical world by storm.

Favoring darker roles and often times the villains, Raphael was best known for his performance as the Phantom, beating out the fan favorites Michael Crawford, Colm Wilkinson, Ramin Karimloo, and Howard McGillin.

Even in retirement, Gold was still hailed as one of the greatest Phantoms ever performed and it was a title he favored the most. The Phantom of the Opera was his favorite production, which he always referenced in his interviews but never revealed how he was able to bring the Phantom’s suffering to life not without exposing his private affairs. Truthfully, it was something Gold was familiar with and he could easily relate to the character. He knew what it was like to love someone so unconditionally and to have that someone break his heart. At least the only good thing that came from that ordeal was his son Baden.

Following in his father’s footsteps, Baden, or Neal Cassidy as his stage name was known as, had his own blossoming career. However, unlike his father, Baden preferred the good guys, the heroes, in the shows. Not that was an awful pick but Raphael found those roles tedious and boring. But he supported his son even when Baden decided to change his name so he wouldn’t be associated with his famous father. At least he could earn his roles on his own talent without having them handed down to him.

Lately, Baden was making the transition from stage to film. That was never an option for Gold, despite being offered many attractive offers and deals in the movie industry. He preferred the organic-ness of the stage, the closeness to the audience to develop that connection as opposed to the sterile emotions felt on screen.

However, Raphael knew he had to allow his boy to make his decisions about his career, even if he didn’t agree with him. There had been too many arguments about why it was a bad idea, but Baden
was always strong willed. He had the uncanny ability to conquer whatever came his way and this was nothing different—just another Mount Everest for him to climb. As a result, Baden was doing well and his popularity was growing… yet, Raphael hadn’t been able to see much of his son, not when he was off on location for his latest movie. Sure they spoke over the phone, emailed, and even Skyped, but it wasn’t the same in seeing his boy in the flesh and he missed him very much.

Boredom was terrible for Raphael Gold and it was one of those moments he wished he didn’t have to retire. Were it not for the Incident, Gold could be diving into a new role right now.

But no one wanted to hire a cripple even if his name would bring in big money. He was a liability and directors avoided him like a plague.

So one day when his phone rang with the chance of a lifetime, Raphael figured it had to have been a mistake. They probably wanted his son and the numbers were mixed up, but it was his name they were asking for and now they were waiting for his answer.

“Reprising the Phantom for the 30th Anniversary?” Raphael repeated in bewilderment. “You do know I’m retired, right?”

“Yes but this is the perfect opportunity for you to do one last hoorah in the role that brought you such fame. You know your fans will appreciate it and go nuts for one more Raphael Gold performance. Plus, we have a fantastic cast in place and all we need is the perfect Phantom for our show. And you’re that man,” pitched Leroy, the salesman of a casting director.

Not one to fall for flattery (Gold was smart and shrew after all), he asked inquisitively, “Who else is cast?”

Jumping at the bait in thinking Raphael was already lured, Leroy launched into the names. “There’s Garrett Champion as Raoul, Mary Margaret Blanchard as Meg Giry, Fran Lucas as Madame Giry, Regina Mills is Carlotta—“

Gold groaned, interrupting the spiel. Regina Mills? While the part was very apt for her (and he knew she couldn’t be happy about it), the last time he worked with Regina had been a nightmare with her diva demands and childish behavior. As fresh-faced as she was when they first met, Raphael had high hopes for her and even advised her when she was only a chorus girl. He recognized her capability and encouraged her to audition to be the understudy just like he had done. Yet, it didn’t take long for her true colors to emerge and once she was guaranteed the part… Regina went out of her way to ensure no one undermined her, even including a no understudy clause in her contract once she landed a major role.

Raphael didn’t see her until five years ago when they worked alongside in Bonnie and Clyde. By that point, he heard the rumors about Regina’s behavior and was startled to see they were true. They constantly butted heads during rehearsal and when opening night approached… the Incident happened. After that, Raphael was forced to drop out and later retired. Now, there was no way in Hell he was going to work with this prima donna and get mixed up in her melodrama.

“I know you and Mills had an altercation in the past,” Leroy said quickly. “But she was requested personally by Sir Webber as are you.”

As an honor it was to be hand-picked by the Lord, Raphael wasn’t sold. Andrew Lloyd Webber could offer him a million and he still wouldn’t do it, not with Regina in one of the main roles.

“We also have Belle French cast as Christine Daaé.” This was Leroy’s last ploy to convince him and Raphael could tell from the pleading tone in the other man’s voice.
Now, this was interesting to say the least. He didn’t know her personally but he knew her name from his Broadway circle of friends. She was an import from Australia and still considered a newcomer with only one major role under her belt as, ironically, Belle from *The Beauty and the Beast*. Her résumé also included being the understudy as Ariel in *The Little Mermaid* and Fiona in *Shrek*. It wasn’t bad she scored that position but it was her choice in musicals that put Raphael out.

Everything she had done… even as a backup dancer… consisted of fairy tales. While the stories are wonderfully told, the musical adaptations were not true art on the stage and he despised such shows. He was grateful to avoid them, even as he started his career. There was no substance to them, no range of skill or difficulty in the songs. Any non-singer could sing them with ease.

And to hear that Belle French was to be in a demanding role such as Christine was a slap in the face. Sure, she had a nice pleasant voice but could she belt those high notes on command? And, most importantly, could he sing alongside this chit of a girl in this dark, seductive role as the Phantom?

“You’ll love her!” Leroy gushed, taking the silent pause as a good sign. “She charmed Andrew and everyone else! She knows the part as well as you know the Phantom! You two are a perfect match with your voices melding together—“

Raphael rolled his eyes. “That’s nice but I’ll have to decline. Goodbye.”

He hung up without giving Leroy a sputtering chance to continue. Regina was one thing but to have Belle French as his leading lady? Forget it!

Frankly, he was relieved he wouldn’t be a part of this horrendous butchering of a classic production. He would rather keep the memory of its integrity in his mind than to condemn the world to a bratty and half-talented act.

However, the next day the phone rang again, and the next, and the next—all for him to return to the stage as the Phantom. Each time Raphael said no and hung up before another word could be spoken.

But he wouldn’t be left in peace.

Even his son called to tell him to take it. Apparently, the news reached Baden all the way down in Atlanta. Knowing his father’s stubborn willingness not to do it, Baden insisted he do this. “I met Belle and she’s fantastic! Don’t let her past roles fool you. She can sing!”

Yet, Raphael wouldn’t budge.

Until one fateful day when he was leaving a coffee shop and a young lady bumped into him. Thankfully, his coffee didn’t spill on either one, but he was ready to give her a good tongue lashing on the proper etiquette of watching where you are going, when said tongue became stuck in his throat.

She was utterly breathtaking with a pair of the most bewitching blue eyes he had ever seen. A strand of russet curl fell across her face, which she quickly tucked it behind her ear. His gaze strayed down to her cherry red mouth as she worried her lower lip with nimble teeth that a crazy thought popped into his head on what she might taste like.

In his line of work, Raphael had come across many attractive women in all shapes and sizes, yet none seemed to have captivated him so quickly or intensely as this one did in that split second. She was rather short, petite in stature, but the darkened hue of her eyes was what captured him in the first place and then those pretty lips of hers stretched into a beaming smile.

“You’re Raphael Gold!” The recognition pleased him immensely and the fact she had a warm,
caressing accent only made his heart skip a beat. He supposed he could forgive her for running into him, being an obvious fan and all.

Giving her his trademark smirk, Raphael nodded. “Indeed, I am.”

“Wow! This is amazing! I love your voice,” she said, blushing, bringing an adorable shade of pink to her ivory complexion. “I mean, I’ve been a fan of yours for quite some time.”

“Oh really?” He didn’t often entertain the groupies (sort of speak) but he felt he could make an exception. Then again… the bitter reminder of his cane and the twinge in his knee only served to remind him that he was a retired old man and he didn’t want to disappoint her expectations of him. Not to mention he sounded like a desperate man, which he definitely was not.

Still…

“Well, it’s always a pleasure to meet a fan.” His Scottish brogue was one of his attractive features and he was delighted to watch her blush deepened as he emphasized “pleasure.”

“Yes—I’m sure you get this a lot but I’ve always loved your Phantom,” she went on.

“Ah, one of my favorites.”

“I know. And it’s a shame you’re not reprising it… or at least that’s what I heard.”

At this, his brow rose. “Oh?”

She nodded. “It’s awful really because I think the world could use to see you again as the Phantom.”

“Well, I…” He cleared his throat. “I appreciate it but I’m afraid it’s not in the cards for me.”

“If I may ask, why is that?”

“Just some disagreement over the casting that’s all. It happens time to time.”

It was then he realized he was standing in line with her and when it was her turn… she stepped up to the counter to place her order. The barista asked her what the name was for the order and she replied, “Belle.”

A chill went down his spine but he shook it off thinking the odds were slim to none. Belle was a pretty common name, a nickname for many, but there was something about her accent…

Turning back to him, she chuckled. “I guess you’re right. After all, you don’t want to have a singer who sings subpar next to you.”

“It’s nothing like that. The Phantom is a challenging musical and it’s not for every voice in the world.”

“I see.” Her tone had a level of playfulness to it but there was something underlining it, which Raphael didn’t realize until it was too late when Belle picked up her tea and nonchalantly took a sip. “So… not every voice, hmm? Even mine?”

“I haven’t heard you sing dearie,” he said.

“Yeah that’s kind of the point,” she rejoined. “You haven’t heard me sing and yet… you don’t think I can do Christine. Can you explain that to me please?”
Oh, crap.

A smug of satisfaction washed over her and she knew that he knew who she was. “The way I see it, Mr. Gold, I have no choice but to prove it to you.”

She handed him her drink as she backed up a couple feet, her eyes never once leaving his as she met him head on with a challenging glint. Taking a deep breath, Belle began to sing—vocalizing as she started to build towards a crescendo. Higher and higher her voice grew until she tossed her head back with arms raised as she sung in perfect pitch and clarity the high “C.”

The shop broke into wild applause as Belle gave a little bow for her impromptu performance. Strutting back to Raphael, Belle took her cup from him as he continued to stare at her with bewilderment. After drinking a victorious mouthful of the hot drink, she raised her cup in the air in a mock toast.

“Thank you Mr. Gold for the lovely opportunity to showcase my voice. It was truly an honor.”

As soon as she walked away, Raphael pulled out his cell. “This is Gold. Yes... I’ll do it.”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Gold never tells Belle his feelings after the last performance. Some months go by and he catches her in the musical Love Never Dies, reprising her role as Christine but with a new Phantom in the lead. How will he react? (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own Love Never Dies—it all belongs to the talented and wonderful Sir Andrew Lloyd Webber.

Remix! Broadway

It had been months since the last time he saw her. And, truly, he had no one to blame but himself.

The final show of The Phantom of the Opera was the most difficult one he ever had to do and it came at the cost that he would never see his costar—the beautifully, talented Belle French—again. All throughout the performance, Raphael couldn’t stop thinking about Belle and how he couldn’t let this end. He had to tell her that during their rehearsals and five-month run he had inadvertently and irrevocably fallen in love with her.

However, as he approached her dressing room door once the cast took their final bows before the standing ovation, he heard his other costar Garrett Champion in there. He couldn’t make out exactly what was being said, but he did hear Belle’s unique and charming laugh that he lost the nerve and walked away. Of course, she would rather spend time with that boy. He was young and handsome, while Raphael was old and crippled. There was no way she would ever feel for him like he did for her. Never mind the late-night chats once rehearsals were over and the numerous take-outs they shared every time before a show started. Or how she would hang out in his dressing room while his prosthetics were being applied to pass the time so he wouldn’t get bored from sitting still. Or how they developed camaraderie against Regina Mills and her incessant demands, having a little bit of fun at her expense during Poor Fool, He Makes Me Laugh.

It was those little things and more that Raphael couldn’t help but be enamored with her. She was so full of light and wit and she challenged him on a regular basis that he forgot he was a middle-aged singer coming out of retirement. She made him feel young again and it gave him such hope that he had to wonder if her feelings for him went beyond professionalism. The last show seemed to give him that courage, but hearing Garrett dashed everything. He was only fooling himself to think she could love him and left without saying goodbye. He didn’t bother to show up at the after party and ignored any calls, text messages, and a visit to his apartment. Eventually, the attempts to reach him stopped and Raphael was left alone as before.

Yet, he couldn’t help torturing himself with thoughts of her and what she was up to since The Phantom. Finally Baden had enough of his father’s lack of reason for his foul mood swings that he told him he heard about Belle starring in Andrew Lloyd’s Webber sequel Love Never Dies. She was
Raphael heard of this musical and was pleasantly surprised that it came to the States. It had once started in West End, and despite the mixture of support and criticism, it stopped only for it to pick up in Australia with some major tweaks to the lyrics and staging directions. It did well and after some time it has finally made its way to the stages of Broadway in New York City. And to hear that Belle landed her favorite role was wonderful news. As for the Phantom himself, they casted some newbie singer as the lead and Raphael wasn’t thrilled with the choice since the actor never starred in *The Phantom of the Opera*. It also didn’t sit well that the two will play former lovers reunited after ten years separation.

He should have stayed away… he should have but his son had to bring it up and his curiosity got the best of him that he had to buy the tickets for the first performance. Luckily, his ties still worked and he managed to score a ticket for Baden as well since his son wanted to see her sing.

When the night came, Raphael was sweating bullets and he wished he could take it back. However, the point of no return had passed and he and Baden were among the audience as the lights began to dim and the orchestra warmed up. Swallowing hard, Raphael gripped the arms of his seat, anxious to see his Belle on the stage once more. This time he was a spectator and he wasn’t sure how he could handle this particular part.

The musical started with the Phantom singing of his love for Christine in hopes he would one day see her again to hear her sing once more. Raphael winced at the boy’s singing and shook his head at how too desperate he sounded. Yes the Phantom pined for Christine, but not like some lovesick teenager. It progressed to the chorus and Meg Giry greeting the audience to Mr. Y’s amusement park on Coney Island. It wasn’t half-bad and Raphael was surprised to see Mary Margaret reprising Meg too. She was a good singer herself, and initially he thought she was too timid for the part, but he was proven wrong when Regina thought the same too and tried to boss her around. Mary Margaret was a silent warrior with the knack for subtlety, which Regina discovered too late when her makeup and perfume bottles were encased with Jell-O. After that, he had newfound respect for the pixie-haired woman and he was glad to see she was doing well obviously.

Raphael was a bit disappointed that good ol’ Fran wasn’t back as Madame Giry, but this one certainly had a greedy side to her, which he thought was unlike the character. This Madame Giry had an agenda and it didn’t bode well for her daughter or the unsuspecting Christine Daaé, leaving Paris to sing at a rival’s opera house.

As the scenes progressed, Raphael’s heart clenched as his Belle finally graced the stage, her hand holding a young boy’s who was no more than ten. It was as if time had slowed as he gazed upon the woman that captured his heart. She hadn’t changed in the months they parted ways, but there was a glimmer in her eyes… a haunted glaze as she forced a smile once she was surrounded by reporters.

Of course, it was part of the play.

Baden elbowed him and wiggled his eyebrows, but his sight was on the Vicomte as he took control of the swarming pests, speaking on behalf of his wife and son about her singing debut in America. It wasn’t Garrett but David Nolan in the role. Raphael met him a couple of times and he liked the man, although he did have this insufferable thing about honor and he was usually cast as the Prince Charming in any production. So when one of the other actors asked the Vicomte about his gambling debt… that tidbit took the veteran singer by surprise. Nolan didn’t directly answer the question though it did seem clear that the Vicomte wasn’t the same man in the *Phantom*.

Then the Trio from Mr. Y’s freak show came to welcome the family and whisked them off to the hotel all under the guise they worked for Hammerstein (the American in contract), but it was really
the Phantom pulling the strings to lure his soprano back to him.

To his astonishment, Nolan was not the Prince Charming as he usually was. This Raoul was truly a changed man—a lousy father, a drunkard, and a gambler. The first thing he did was head towards the bar in the room while his wife tried to placate him. Raphael would have liked to see Garrett back in that position, no longer being the knight in shining armor, but Nolan’s performance was excellent. The only thing Raphael didn’t like was how submissive Belle had to be. He had to remind himself that it wasn’t Belle, this wasn’t real. Belle wouldn’t allow anyone to boss her around. She controlled her own fate, but this was Christine… and Christine did not have that luxury from the looks of it.

Marrying her childhood sweetheart was not the best idea after all, and Raphael couldn’t stop thinking about how Belle had her looked back at him at the end. That Christine didn’t want Raoul but she still married him… why? What happened to her? What caused this change in heart?

So Nolan disappeared to the hotel bar for a “meeting” while Gustave, the boy, lamented how his father didn’t love him. According to the playbill, Gustave was played by Henry Swan and right away Raphael could tell they struck gold with his marvelous child. It was obvious he admired (both Christine and Belle) and their duet was sweet. In that moment, Raphael wanted to switch places with him as Belle tenderly embraced him. He knew from the past her skin was soft and warm…

Caught up in the past, Raphael didn’t pay attention to the mood change until the music shifted to a startlingly blast as the balcony door opened to reveal the Phantom, the elusive Mr. Y, thus reuniting the two after ten years. What he saw next made his blood boil.

The guy had his hands all over his Belle! His! Oh, he acted like he was starved for her touch, but it was really Raphael who sincerely felt that way and there was no way the Phantom would be pawing at her like some horny dog. He would be respectful and reverent in that this Angel allowed him such pleasure to even graze her fingers and arms. He wouldn’t be groping her!

And the lyrics!

They were more suggestive than “The Point of No Return” and that was filled with innuendos. His jaw locked, his teeth sliding into his tongue as he watched the two actors interact. It took every ounce of his willpower not to leap on that stage and ripped that man away from her, a feat which would have been impressive if he could do such a thing. Yet, the pain in his mouth kept him grounded, rooted in his seat, as he kept repeating to himself, “It’s not real. It’s not real.” Yet, he couldn’t stop himself from seeing it was Belle that was being caressed and seduced with that man’s whisper in her ear, causing her to tremble in his embrace. Even when they pulled away as he sang of his decision to leave her, there was no denying the magnetic pull as they gazed longingly at the other as if recalling those blissful moments spent in each other’s arms.

Like he knew her intimately…

The playbill crinkled as he twisted it in his shaky hands that Baden leaned over and whispered, “You okay Dad?”

“Yes,” he answered tersely through his teeth. “I’m peachy.”

The look on his son’s face wasn’t convinced, but this wasn’t the place or the time to get into it. Baden sighed and returned to watch as the two launched into another duet… this one about regret and how their decisions cannot be undone. Raphael knew he was overreacting, his imagination was getting the best of him, but he found it totally unacceptable for that other man to act as if he owned her. Although, he did take little pleasure in that Belle did keep some space between them, even as Mr. Y blackmailed her to sing for him.
Intermission couldn’t have come fast enough, especially near the end of Act I when Christine and Mr. Y almost kissed when she revealed the truth about her son’s paternity. Of course, Raphael was thinking that it was his version of the character’s son she had, not this pathetic excuse of a so-called Dark Angel.

He did manage to calm himself down to reassure his son he was really all right. Raphael was relieved that Baden was in the same opinion as he that this Phantom wasn’t even subpar and that he did sound whiny in parts. It just burned him that it wasn’t him onstage with her. This Phantom wasn’t her equal and if Raphael knew it… chances were… Belle knew it too. After all, she always knew Christine as well as he knew the disfigured composer. There were certain things that don’t change and it was how one felt about his or her character that stays the same. Belle was a talented actress and she knew how not to let her real feelings interfere with a character’s.

He just prayed that her interest in Mr. Y was only for the benefit of the stage, not in real life.

As Act II began, the disgraced Vicomte was at the bar and drinking away his sorrows. He can’t get over how Christine chose to remain at his side after all this time and how she could possibly love him after everything. Then entered little Giry to comfort him and convince him that he and his family must leave. Mary Margaret touched Nolan’s hand and a small smile spread over Raoul’s features, and Raphael suspected it was really David grinning back. As quickly as it came, the smile was masked as Meg gives him one last warning before leaving.

The Vicomte yelled after her how he had won once before and he could do it again before stumbling back to the stool for another round. Of course, all that provocation led to a confrontation with the man he despised in “Devil Take the Hindmost.” This was a terrific song and David Nolan was vocally stronger than this Victor Whale as Mr. Y/Phantom. Raphael had to check the name during the break and immediately loathed Whale’s smugness in his photo.

The rest of the Act was much darker than its predecessor and Raphael found it a lot more enjoyable since Whale didn’t have any more solos, just short snippets within other songs. However, Belle stole the show in the climatic and title song “Love Never Dies.”

Raphael leaned in the edge of his chair, completely mesmerized with her raw emotions as she sang this aria. Her soul poured into it, making the audience realize the depths of Mr. Y’s love for her and for her to recognize she felt the same. It was an epiphany for Christine as the courage was seen in her expression to seize the moment as she raised her voice to the heavens, practically professing her love for her old tutor.

This was by far Raphael’s favorite song and scene from the whole musical. But as he thought about the words—and truthfully the rest of the musical—he realized how much he allowed his fear to get the best of him. There was so much pain and regret in these characters and it was evident they were all miserable with their lives, with the exception of young Gustave. Though, even the boy was starting to see the truth and Raphael knew this couldn’t continue.

He had hopes that seeing Belle perform would be the closure he needed to move on, but it was the opposite. He had to see her more; he had to tell her the truth. He couldn’t let his cowardliness rule him any longer. And he certainly wasn’t going to wait ten years to make a move.

The ending was purely tragic and Raphael shed tears at the extraordinary performance Belle gave. In fact, she moved everyone to tears, even Baden was silently weeping. Yet it made him even more determined and anxious to speak to her.

Wiping his eyes dry, Raphael gave the loudest cheer and applause as Belle took her bow. He hoped she would see or hear him, but everyone in the house was giving her a standing ovation. Baden
whooped and hollered, “Go Belle!”

Maybe not Raphael… but surely his son couldn’t be missed.

Once all the cast members bowed and the curtains closed, Baden clapped his father on the back. “Go and talk to her. Mary Margaret is going to stall her.”

Raphael blinked. “Wait—what?”

Baden smirked. “Dad, I wasn’t born yesterday. You haven’t been the same since *Phantom* and I know it has something to do with Belle. You forget—I was there at that last performance. I saw what happened between you two and it’s no fling either. You love her, don’t you?”

“Yes,” Raphael said.

“Then tell her. Go before it’s too late. Besides,” he added. “I see a very attractive blonde over there.”

He gave his son a fleeting smile in thanks (and a little eye roll) and hurried over to the backstage. There were dozens of people in the corridor and cramped spaces, which made maneuvering difficult for him and his cane. He couldn’t see Belle or Mary Margaret in the throngs until the latter approached him from the side.

“She’s in her dressing room!” Mary Margaret shouted over the loud voices. Grabbing his elbow, she guided him in the direction of the room. “Go get her!” she cheered, giving him a cheeky grin and a thumb’s up.

Raphael straightened his posture, smoothed down his tie, and began to head to her room. He saw her name up ahead and increased his step. His heart was in wild palpitations and his palms were sweaty, but he would not lose his nerve. He will not lose her again.

As he reached the door, he raised his fist to knock… when he heard voices behind it and one was distinctly male.

Bile rose in his throat, and for a second, Raphael contemplated in leaving once more. He was a fool to try again.

But he swallowed back his fears and knew he had to check—to know for sure where Belle’s heart lies. With a steady fist, his knuckles wrapped against the paneling, the sound echoing in his head.

“Come in!” Belle sang out sweetly.

*This was it*, he told himself and with a decided twist, the door opened and he went inside.
4 Broadway Rated T

Chapter Summary

Prompt: A look into Belle’s past and the rehearsal for Phantom involving a particular kiss with one Phantom. (Rated T)

Broadway

For as long as Belle could remember, she loved to sing. Next to books, singing was her other passion and she certainly had a knack for it.

Of course, she hadn’t intended on having a career in singing alone. Her dream was to one day own her own bookshop and maybe write a novel or two. Singing was another hobby she took pleasure in and did it for fun at karaoke with her friends. She did perform on stage while she was in school; even in college she managed to land some minor parts.

At first, she didn’t try to audition for the lead. She did that in high school and her performing in college was only meant to practice her vocal chords. Then one night both the lead female and understudy were ill and Belle was asked to fill in. She knew the lines and blocking—she had a very good memory—and there was little choice.

So she did it.

And as a result, a casting director from the Regent Theatre in Melbourne saw her and went to her for a job. They were doing *Into the Woods* and needed an Ugly Stepsister. She accepted and as they say… the rest was history.

She became part of the chorus and new dreams began to take root. Belle made people happy when she sang, and it was a different type of literature she wanted others to enjoy. So Belle decided she would sing professionally.

She did have her favorites of Broadway—Sarah Brightman, Patti LuPone, Linda Eder, Jerry Orbach, Colm Wilkinson, and of course, Raphael Gold. He was by far her idol and her favorite Phantom. Belle did manage to see him perform in the role when on vacation to New York her senior year of high school. It was certainly a life-altering experience and more than likely was when the seed of professionally singing was planted. Of course, Belle didn’t put that much thought in it, but she did fantasize about being his Christine.

His performance had been so raw and honest—the Phantom’s turmoil was his and she wondered what happened that made him feel that way. Did he have his heart broken? What was his story?

For someone as famous as Raphael Gold was his life was not an open book. He kept his life private and that was it. She did learn he had a son close to her age and that was extent of it. So there had been a woman involved and she gathered it couldn’t have ended well since there wasn’t one in the picture. Yet, Belle wasn’t one to pry and she had to leave her curiosity unquenched. Whatever pain he felt… he used it for inspiration for his character.

*The Phantom of the Opera* had been a favorite book of hers as well as musical and after seeing
Raphael Gold—her love for it was strongly renewed. Belle saw the story differently and she noticed Christine’s struggle to admit her love for Erik (the Phantom). She couldn’t negotiate the loving Angel of Music with the intense and explosive temper he had. Then there was his face… As viciously and horrifically deformed he was, it was the shattering of childhood fantasies and the hard, cold reality that hit Christine the hardest. She never realized how difficult life could be and with no parental figure in her life (with the exception of Mama Valerius but even she treated Christine as a child) she didn’t understand her maturing feelings and emotions.

She was frightened only because no one explained to her what these feelings were or how love can be wildly passionate. She didn’t understand and her ignorance was the price paid in Erik’s mad attempts to win her over in addition to other factors that affected him.

Belle believed the veil was removed from Christine’s eyes when she saw how broken he was after she kissed him. It was then everything made sense and she recognized she loved him, not fear like she was told she felt countless times. Everyone said how evil he was and how she should be frightened that she went along, thinking it must be the truth to how she felt. Yet it didn’t excuse her constant need to return to him—how could that be fear when it’s your free will that decides to go back over and over?

The kiss sparked that recognition of knowledge, but she was too weak and fragile to pursue her heart and allowed someone else to make that decision for her. Belle knew it was the ending that people expected the kind of cookie cutter ending where the beautiful damsel is rescued from the beast. She had to be weak to leave with Raoul and not fight for her true love—this deformed man that people didn’t understand. It wouldn’t make sense for her to be with the villain that people would be outraged if there was a change in storytelling. So Christine had to leave with the handsome young man for a happily ever after.

But Belle knew she would be miserable without her Phantom. The audience may not see it, but it would be there, lurking in the background. The Phantom and Christine were meant to be, but no other Christine Daaé on stage seemed to get it.

It was something Belle wanted to change if she ever got the part to be her. For now, she settled on similar roles like Shrek and Beauty and the Beast. Those were her absolute favorites to play, while her deepest desire to be Christine remained.

Then one day she heard about The Phantom of the Opera anniversary and she had to be part of it. So she did some research and found where Sir Webber would be and flew to London to audition. Her rendition of “Wishing You Were Somehow Here Again” brought tears to everyone in the room and for the Maestro to announce she was the one. She was overjoyed that her dream was finally coming true! She was going to be Christine!

All the other parts were filled, except the leading title and their eyes were set on Raphael Gold. Then he refused. Over and over he said no.

Belle wondered why he would do so until she heard an acquaintance of hers, Neal Cassidy, that Raphael Gold was not impressed with the selection of Christine. Regardless of her stamp of approval from Sir Webber himself, he felt she couldn’t do the demanding part. She heard the same thing repeated from a few others and it angered her that her idol judged her before he ever heard her sing.

Well, that had to be rectified.

It was fortunate the show was going to run in New York so as soon as Belle landed… she made it her goal to find Raphael Gold and put him in his place.
However, the coffee shop incident wasn’t planned. The last thing she expected was to run into him at a public place, and she took it as a sign to run with it. She decided to play the adoring fan and while that would have been true years ago… she was still upset that he dismissed her so easily without the benefit of a doubt. Belle had to do something to prove he was an ass and she accomplished it. She sang right there in the bustling shop, rendering him speechless and dumbfounded.

She hadn’t expected him to take the part afterwards. All she wanted was a little revenge for his criticism, but the joke was on her as rehearsals began.

As much as she wanted to stay angry at him, Belle couldn’t when he was in character. Like that, he had transformed in a blink of an eye and he was now the love-spurned Phantom. But even Belle wasn’t one to hold onto grudges for long. He was her Phantom, her costar and she would get along with him, despite their differences in opinion of talent.

To her astonishment, he offered her an apology. He shouldn’t have judged her and he was sorry for disregarding her voice when it was obviously apparent she was picked for a good reason. At least he recognized it and made amends, which was more than what Belle expected from Raphael Gold.

So with bygones be bygones, Belle was eagerly anticipating this run on Broadway. And to top it off… she was working with her favorite Broadway singer/actor—how awesome could that be?!

As the days went by, Belle and Raphael became friends. It was funny how quickly it became but there was sense of camaraderie between the two.

They protected their characters fiercely, they felt for their characters, and they knew the other got it. Such clicking and meshing of two actors’ minds and personalities didn’t happen so often, and it went beyond great chemistry. On stage, they weren’t Belle French and Raphael Gold… they were Christine and the Phantom, bringing the tragic lovers to life. Since day one the rest of the cast and crew were witnessing something magical; and even Belle had to admit she never felt this connection with any of her male costars. When she looked into Raphael’s eyes, she saw the Phantom looking back at her and it was a powerful and awe-inspiring feeling.

She had always admired him but somehow that admiration shifted and something else was beginning to grow inside her. Raphael was an attractive man and she would be lying to say she didn’t notice. More than that, he had a barbed sense of humor, which most wouldn’t have picked up on or noticed when he was jesting. Belle did and she couldn’t help but chuckle at one of his quips, which he was taken aback that she understood him. In addition, he was quite intelligent and well-read that she couldn’t help but follow him during one of their breaks and found him reading Henry James. Like her, he loved the classics and they spent plenty of breaks discussing and debating the many books they’ve read as well as current events and politics.

It would seem that for a couple of actors there was more than what meets the eye and both were starting to realize how alike they were. Of course, the actual shift from mutual attraction to something else didn’t occur for Belle until they rehearsed Act II.

They were going over “Down Once More/Track Down this Murderer”—the biggest scene with all three principal actors. From the start, Belle ignored and avoided the advances of Garrett Champion. He was a nice enough guy and all, but Belle’s first mistake was having coffee with him when they met. All he ever did was talk about himself and his accomplishments that Belle couldn’t get a word in edgewise and when he did ask her question about herself… she got maybe twenty seconds at least before he interrupted her with a story about himself. Afterwards, she turned him down whenever he asked her out. Apparently, the coffee date had him decided they were meant to be and her refusal
further convinced him it was kismet. How he reached that conclusion Belle didn’t care to know, but it was a tad annoying how he hung near her dressing room and called her “his sweetheart” when the other cast members were nearby.

She was grateful when they did “All I Ask of You” he didn’t get too touchy-feely or shove his tongue down her throat when they kissed. He kept it chaste like an innocent first kiss, and even his hands stuck to an acceptable position. Sadly, the only time she could tolerate Garrett was when they were in character. However, when the Phantom lurked nearby or even Raphael, Garrett would go into overbearing hero mode. It bugged Belle to no end and she politely asked him to stop, which thankfully, he toned it down.

Later on Belle will find out why Garrett had been so obnoxious with his feelings for her. Eventually, they would reach a better understanding with each other and have a better performance altogether. Until then, Garrett was the besotted actor who wouldn’t leave her alone.

Seeing him with the “noose” around his throat was mentally gratifying.

It played out well—Raphael never paused as he dragged her across the stage or shook her when he yelled his frustrations at her. She had told him beforehand not to hold back and he had laughed, informing her “he never did.” He was in his element, the master at his craft, and she was a firsthand witness to his genius. Being the spectator years ago didn’t compare to the physical interaction and she gave everything she had in return. As they moved about, Raphael did have to be careful with his bad leg but the brace he wore allowed him to move without the aid of his cane. Although, Belle could tell it wasn’t always easy or painless and she hoped that come opening night he will be all right.

They were approaching the part with the kiss and Belle was suddenly nervous. She had no trouble kissing her male counterparts in the past, but this was Raphael Gold. He wasn’t some actor she had no desire in impressing. He was Raphael Gold for Pete’s sake! Yet, she couldn’t let her nerves get the best of her so when the time came… Belle kept her mind blank and focused on the characters… she was Christine and he was the Phantom, her tutor and her beloved Angel of Music… and right now, she had to convince him to stop the madness.

The moment her lips touched his it was like a brilliant light exploded in her, blinding her with its force. Even her body felt its earthshattering impact as her blood began to heat in her veins, her heart racing with unimaginable speed. It had been so intense that even Raphael appeared startled when she drew back for a breath.

The second kiss wasn’t as jolting as the first, but it was still vibrant and tender. His mouth was incredibly soft, his lips shaping against hers as if they were made to be together. There was no awkwardness or roughness to the touch, not even a hint of bad breath that would ruin the mood as they separated and gazed into their eyes.

“Not bad!” shouted August, the director for the musical. “But it needs to be a little more desperate. Belle—you’re desperate to convince him to do the right thing, and Gold—you’re desperate to make it last since you know this will be first and last kiss you’ll ever get from her.”

There was a strange glint in Raphael’s eyes as his lips curled upward in a devious grin. It was amazing she was even to keep herself from physically reacting to that sly expression on his countenance. That man had something up his sleeve and she was looking forward to see what he had planned for her…

Suffice to say, the kiss did have to be repeated several times before August was satisfied with the vision he had in mind.
Not that Belle would complain, of course.
5 Broadway Rated T

Chapter Summary

Emosppritelet and Grace5231973 Prompted: Raphael Gold goes to visit Belle in her dressing room after the final Phantom performance. (Rated T)

Broadway

He was still in make-up and costume when he headed towards Belle’s dressing room. Raphael didn’t want to waste a single moment, afraid he would miss her once she put on her street clothes. Taking the prosthetics off would take a half hour at least and while he knew he would see her at the after party show… he wanted to speak to her in private.

Approaching the door, Raphael began to tremble. He had never been this nervous before! Even as a young man he went after what he wanted and didn’t give way to nerves. But with Belle… she was different. She made him feel different and he was afraid of her.

Not her as a person, no. She was too kind, too caring. But he was afraid because she held the power of his affections and she could crush it if she didn’t feel the same. If that was the case, then he prayed she would be merciful in letting him down gently. And then, and only then, he hoped they could go their separate ways without making a scene if they were to work again. After all, Phantom revived his need to be on the stage again and coming out of retirement for good sounded like the perfect plan. Knee be damned! He could find work. If Sir Andrew could take a chance on him… then other producers will do the same.

He took a deep breath to quash the flittering butterflies and rapped on her door.

“Coming!” He heard her say in that charming accent of hers as she scrambled to the door. “Raphael! Hi,” she said breathlessly, a full-blooming smile gracing her lips as her blue eyes twinkled. She was still wearing her last costume—the doomed wedding dress—and the curls from her wig were in wild disarray from being pulled and pushed around on stage. It was a shame she had to cover up her real tumbling mass of chestnut curls, but make-up artist and hair stylist extraordinaire Ruby Lucas (Fran’s granddaughter) did a decent job in taking good care of her hair underneath it. Tear streaks still glistened on her ivory cheeks but there was no tears swimming in her eyes. If anything, her eyes were glowing from the exertion and high from a fantastic performance.

She was utterly breathtaking.

Of course, it only reminded him what a fright he must have presented in front of her. Maybe he should have waited after all…

“Why don’t you come in?” she offered, opening the door wider for him. “Please don’t mind the mess. Of course I look frightful. This wig is about to come off.”

Like an obedient pup, Raphael followed her inside, but when she began commenting about her appearance he couldn’t stop himself from saying: “You look wonderful. If anyone’s the fright, it’s me.”
Belle tossed him a look over her shoulder. “Please. Your makeup doesn’t scare me in the least bit. And besides, we’re both a mess after that wild performance. I can’t believe this is the last one. It hasn’t hit me yet but I’m forewarning you—there will be tears. Not the crying I’ve done on stage, but a really god awful sobbing mess.”

He found himself chuckling. “You can’t scare me away, dearie. No amount of sobbing can do that.”

“He says that now,” she muttered with a roll of her eyes, but there was no denying the teasing lilt in her voice. Moving to sit on her stool, Belle began to undo the pins that kept her wig in place as well as the microphone. “So what’s up?” she asked as she dropped each pin on the table.

“Um, well, I was wondering—“ His palms were sweating and he could feel the trickling path on his face as well. Yes… he should have gotten out of his costume and makeup before attempting this conversation. What on earth was he thinking? This wasn’t the way to romance a beautiful woman like Belle or tell her of his feelings when he was dripping hot mess of sweat. Not to mention he probably smelled. He should have left to shower before coming back for the after party. God, why couldn’t he think of these things beforehand?

“Yes?” she beckoned, urging him to continue. When he didn’t answer, Belle took the wig off and set it on the bald mannequin before she turned facing him. “Are you okay?”

Great. Just great. She sounded worried and concerned. Way to go Gold, he thought berating himself. Even his son would be ashamed to see his father behaving like a schoolboy. All right. He was going to just come out and say it. Just throw it out there in the open and let Belle’s reaction be the judge on what to do next. Okay. Any minute now. Just open your mouth and tell her that you like her, that you always have, and that you want to go for a drink before the party...

But the words were stuck in his throat and Raphael knew he was wasting her time by getting ready with his inability to communicate. He was truly pathetic, and if he had to be frank, he couldn’t believe he was Raphael Gold. Why did this one woman unnerve him so much? When had he allowed a woman to get to him in this way?

Even after Milah, Raphael hadn’t been able to trust his heart to another woman, but that didn’t mean he stayed away from their beds. Indeed, if he saw something he wanted… he went for it. The words would naturally come to him and it wouldn’t take much for his silvery tongue to convince a lovely woman to follow his lead.

But Belle reduced him to a quibbling mess and he was quickly losing his courage each passing second. Why was he making this so difficult? All he had to do was tell her he didn’t want them to part ways, that with given time, she might wish to become the Christine to his Phantom forever.

Where the Hell did that come from? He wondered. Proposing marriage was way too soon, let alone even contemplating it. And now… he couldn’t get the image of Belle in that wedding dress out of his head. If she didn’t get out of that dress soon, then he feared he might be tempted to make that final scene a reality but with a far more favorable outcome.

He gulped. “I wanted to say…” Go on. Tell her you want to stay in touch. That you want to be more than friends. Here’s your chance. Don’t blow it. “…your performance was amazing. It was your far best this whole run.”

“I see,” Belle said tentatively. “Thank you and the same for you.”

You coward. “Thanks. Well, I better go and get ready. Can’t let the others start the party without the Phantom now, can we?”
He had so many names for himself right now that he could hardly stomach his own presence. Turning away from her so she wouldn’t see the disappointment, Raphael moved to the door. Yet, what she said next had him frozen in his tracks.

“You haven’t said anything about my improvisation.”

*Good going Gold,* he thought. *How can you forget to mention that?* “Oh? That’s right you did!” It was best to play dumb than actually confess he noticed it. Then again, how could anyone not notice? “August probably had a cow but the audience seemed to love it. He’ll forgive you for it.”

“Uh-huh. What did you think?”

“I…” Was she trying to bait him? If so… what was she trying to get out of him? “I think you were acting on what you’ve always wanted for the characters. It was the last show, so why not give the audience a tease?”

She clicked her tongue. “That’s not it Raphael. Well, I guess part of it was, but that wasn’t my sole reason.”

“And what was?”

He didn’t realize he was holding his breath until he felt her standing close by to him. The warmth of her body heat and her breath near his neck caused the little hairs to stand on ends. If he were to turn around, then he would be too close to her and he didn’t trust his bodily actions would be appropriate.

“Raphael, I don’t want this night to end either.”

“Y-you don’t?” he murmured, his voice catching.

She clicked her tongue. “That’s not it Raphael. Well, I guess part of it was, but that wasn’t my sole reason.”

“And what was?”

He could feel her shaking her head. “I did that because, firstly, Christine loved the Phantom and that kiss was like experiencing True Love’s kiss for the first time. It wasn’t anything like the kiss with Raoul and she knew in that instant that she was meant to be with him. She sang that song as an echo to when he sang those same words after ‘Point of No Return’. And she wanted him to sing it back to her just as she should have done on the stage.”

Her hand rested on his arm and he felt himself turning as she guided him to finally face her. “And secondly, I was singing to you. Now, I don’t expect any kind of commitments or anything right away. We have a lot to get know about each other and it’s a journey worth taking to see what happens next.”

“What?” he croaked, not sure if he heard her correctly.

Belle laughed. “Raphael, you are something else. I believed you were very vocal about me being involved in the production in the first place. You had plenty to say back then, and now… you’re all tongue-tied. I don’t know if I should be worried or flattered, but I can tell you that if we take that next step… I expect our conversations to be two-sided.”

“Oh sweetheart, you have no idea what you’re in for,” he vowed, his courage finding itself as his eyes darkened with the sweet promises that would no doubt find them.

Belle’s blue eyes gleamed with anticipation. “I don’t know. You were wrong the first time.”

“Aye but this time I won’t be.”

She smirked. “Well, there’s one way to find out. But first you need to get out of that costume. Meet
me at my door in about forty-five minutes. There’s an after party waiting for our arrival. We might as well show up together.”

So Raphael did.
Chapter Summary

Grace5231973 Prompted: Belle is asked to reprise her role as Belle from Beauty and the Beast. The only problem—the producers want Raphael Gold to star as the Beast. (Rated T for mild sexual content; established relationship)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: There is a lyric from the musical Beauty and the Beast that I'm including in the story to set a scene. I do not own it but it's a favorite song.

Broadway

“You want me to do—what?” Raphael asked with incredulity. His girlfriend of four months, Belle French, batted her eyelashes innocently.

“Think about it Raphael—you and me—back on the stage, our voices melding together. You have been saying you wanted to sing opposite from me again. It’ll be fun.”

“Yes, of course, I want to sing with you again. But Beauty and the Beast?” he protested. “Belle, you know how I feel about musicals like that one. I figured we could do Sweeney Todd, Jekyll & Hyde—hell, even Death Takes a Holiday! But Disney?” His tone went an extra octave higher as he uttered that one word that was apparently foul to him.

The couple over at the next table looked over at them. Ignoring their looks, Raphael shook his head as reached for his glass of water to wash that word out of his mouth. “There is no way I would sing any of their storylines—feature films or live on stage.”

“I know it’s not your cup of tea, but they specifically requested you,” she went on, reaching for his hand and squeezing it affectionately. Belle purposely picked to go out to eat so she would break the news in a public setting. As much as she knew his aversion to anything Disney related or fairy tale, she was counting on the fact he wouldn’t make too much of a big scene about it. “C’mon Raphael. This would mean a lot to me. This was the musical that jumpstarted my career and eventually led me to play Christine to your Phantom. And when you think about it… the two are very similar with the themes.”

He sighed. “I know how much it means to you, sweetheart. While I’m grateful it helped you, it’s not something I can see myself doing. Besides, you can’t compare the two. The Phantom doesn’t become a handsome Prince in the end and there is no happily ever after. Not to mention all that makeup…”

“Okay I’ll give you that the Phantom doesn’t change, but that’s not the point. Both contain the message that love is not about appearances and both are men in need of redemption. It depends on how they cope with their problems, and even though Phantom is darker… it’s the grown up version
to the Disney fairy tale. And don’t use the makeup as an excuse. You wore nearly as much with that
prosthetic.”

She had him there. He scowled. “Well, it’s too much and it’s hairy.”

Belle rolled her eyes. “It’s only a show, Raphael. I’m sure your fans won’t be disappointed if you
decided to do a different role. And you can be reaching out to younger fans as well. But if the story
is really that much of an issue—we can have it in your contract to do a certain number of shows a
week and have an understudy do the rest.”

Raphael blanched. It was one thing to ask him to do a role like this, but if Belle thought he would be
okay to have some understudy (particularly a younger and handsome one) sing with her… then that’s
not going to happen. He had his mouth open to say how he felt about that when a niggling feeling in
the back of his mind stopped him. This had to be a ploy of hers. She was trying to purposely make
him jealous so he would have no choice but to play the character for the whole run. Well, he would
show her.

“Either way, I’m not going to sign a contract to play the Beast. It’s not me. And besides, I have a
reputation in the Broadway world. All the producers know I would never touch a fairy tale musical
like this so the fact they would even want me is inconceivable.”

Raphael was right. Everyone in the Broadway world knew he never sing fairy tales or do ones with
happy endings. He was born to play the darker roles, the villains, the types of musicals that revealed
the bleak and ugly side to humanity. He knew how to gain the audience’s sympathy and at the same
time disgust them with his actions so the hero can win the day. Even after their performance on
Phantom, the critics applauded Raphael Gold on a triumphant return in the role that made his name a
household one. The only difference this time was that everyone rooted for him to win Christine
thanks to their chemistry. If he could accomplish that in a much beloved musical, then he could easily
do the same in one as beloved by all ages. She knew that and she firmly believed he could tackle the
Beast with the same fervor as he had with his previous roles. It was only a matter of convincing her
boyfriend he could do this.

Belle was oddly silent after his last remark and Raphael tilted his head as he regarded his girlfriend
carefully. Did she—Had she…?

Seeing that she should come clean, Belle sheepishly shrugged. “Well,” she wheedled. “I might have
suggested you for the part.”

His brows rose to his forehead. “You did?”

Defensively, she argued, “Raphael, I know you can do a role like this. Don’t let the fact that it’s a
fairy tale tell you otherwise. This is a fantastic production and you do have beautifully haunted solos
to sing as the tortured Prince. And you get to fight with a misogynistic man!”

“As enticing as that sounds… I’m afraid I will have to pass Belle,” he said. “I’m sorry but that’s
final.” Believing the subject was done, Raphael motioned for the waiter to bring the check so they
could leave.

With his attention averted, Belle murmured with a devilish curl of her lip, “Oh we’ll see about that.”

After all, if she could convince him to do Phantom, then she could convince him to do Beauty and
the Beast. Of course, an impromptu sing off in a coffee shop wouldn’t work this time, but Belle had
other tricks up her sleeve. And since they were in a relationship, she could make this work to her
advantage with the right trick to do the job.
The poor bastard wouldn’t see it coming.

A few days later Raphael came home after having dinner with Baden. He was in a pretty good mood, especially since his son was nominated for an Oscar. He was so proud of his boy and he couldn’t wait to share the news with Belle.

Simply thinking about her always put a tender smile on his face. She was truly a treasure and he counted his blessings that he was so fortunate that she returned the same feelings for him as he did for her. He didn’t deserve her but he wanted to prove she wouldn’t regret being with him. Of course, the bitter memory of that evening about him starring in Beauty and the Beast came back. The smile that was on his lips was quickly dashed away.

He knew his answer disappointed her. And while he would do anything to make her happy… Raphael just couldn’t seem to compromise with this one request. He hoped Belle understood his distaste for shows like this, and he was certain she did, but to ask him to do this? She should have known what his answer would be. Hell, the producers probably tried reasoning with her when she brought his name up in the first place. Everyone knew Raphael Gold didn’t do happy musicals so why was he feeling guilty about this?

Perhaps I should have turned it down gently, he thought. It was nice of her to think of me. I am flattered but this isn’t me. I can’t sing a part like this but it doesn’t mean I won’t support her. I’ll be there for every show if she wants me to be, but only as a spectator. Oh no! I hope she doesn’t think that my answer also meant I won’t see her!

The thought hadn’t occurred until now. What if Belle thought his rejection stretched further than the actual participation? She should know he would be there for her, but what if she thought he wouldn’t?

He had to remedy this as soon as possible. Picking up his pace, Raphael made it to his apartment and paused when he saw the door was already ajar. Frowning, he gripped his cane and pushed on the door.

To his astonishment, Raphael saw the soft and flickering light of candles greeting him as he fully stepped inside. Once again, that same goofy smile overcame him that it was Belle and not some burglar.

Maybe she wasn’t totally disappointed after all…

He closed the front door and followed the candles as they trailed down the hall to his bedroom door, which was wide open. As soon as he approached it, he could hear Belle’s lilting voice calling his name in a husky tone.

Raphael nearly tripped over his feet as he entered in his rush to see her and what was awaiting him. Then again, he hadn’t expected the glorious sight in front of him as his jaw hit the floor.

Lying demurely on top of the covers and propped up on the pillows, wearing only a delicate piece of sheer lace that left little to the imagination, Belle crossed her leg over the other so the negligee would ride up her leg and give him an eyeful. Her dark tresses were coiffed and primped as it framed her lovely face, making her blue eyes and pert ruby lips stand out. She brought one curled finger out in front of her as she motioned for him to come closer.

Like a moth to the flame, Raphael heeded the siren’s call as she whispered his name. His cane had
disappeared from his hand at some point and he was trembling with anticipation as his seductress drew him to her bosom.

“Belle…” he gasped, wanting to touch but at the same time wanting to see what would happen next. If she took the time to plan this little seduction, then she had to have something delicious in mind.

Grinning broadly, Belle allowed her lips to barely brush against his cheek as she turned to whisper in his ear. The look on his face was priceless and she knew she had him then.

*Three Months Later…*

*Tale as old as time, song as old as rhyme, Beauty and the Beast…*

As the music began to drag its final note, Raphael and Belle’s dance came to an end as they moved to their next cue. The part that Raphael dreaded doing was coming up, but it was essential for him to send her away so she could be with her father. It proved that the Beast had changed since this amazing and fierce woman came charging into his castle and demanded to take her Papa’s place. He had never loved his Belle more than this moment when she gazed into his eyes and placed her palm upon his cheek. The audience couldn’t see but her love was reflecting back for him and he knew she would come back.

That was his favorite part of all. For Belle… well, both Belles coming back to him so they could share True Love’s kiss.

*Belle was right, he mused. This isn’t as bad as I thought. It does have its similar elements to Phantom. I guess I was wrong in being too harsh in judging this musical. It's actually pretty good and the songs are catchy.*

He also had to hand it to her for finally persuading him. No woman had been able to make him putty in their hands, but Belle possessed the ability to make him wild with need and how she played him with her hands and voice… His eyes darkened as his breath quickened at the memory. She had him screaming in ecstasy, and in turn, he returned the favor as she wept for him. That had been one night of pleasure that shook them both and he didn’t regret in telling her that yes he would do the part.

Meanwhile, Belle was holding back the big smile over how much Raphael was enjoying himself. And to think… he had insisted he would be miserable. Well, she proved him wrong all right.

*Hmm… I wonder if I can get him to do The Little Mermaid, she thought. Sneaking a glimpse at him, Belle shook her head. Not now. I just got him to fall in love with Beauty and the Beast. Give it sometime and he might be willing to do it.*

She smirked. Perhaps they could go see the show. Once he sees the costume that Belle would be wearing… he would be begging to have them in the show together.
1 Lost Rated T

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Oceanic Flight 815 crashes and its passengers make it onto a deserted island. Nicholas Gold rushes to the aid of a pretty pregnant woman… (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own Lost. Just borrowing the idea for my humble little prompts.

Lost

When he came to, there was nothing but sheer panic.

Tiny explosions were going off, people screaming—lots and lots of screaming and sobbing when Nicholas Gold realized the plane crashed into the ocean.

Dear God.

He was lying on a beach, a shooting pain ripped through his right leg, almost paralyzing him on the spot. His temple was bleeding but not too much to induce dizziness or suggest a concussion.

As he looked around he found a young woman about several feet away from him. She was on her knees, bending over, her long curly dark hair spilling loose from its bun, her arms riddled with cuts and bruises. She was howling in pain, repeating in terror, “My baby! My baby!”

His memory came in spurts as he remembered a pregnant passenger sitting across from him on the aisle. She had smiled at him—him—of all people as if she knew he wasn’t comfortable with flying. Somehow that smile from a stranger, a beautiful one too, had soothed him in that moment and he had smiled back in return.

Then darkness.

Her frightened sobs seized his attention and with an inhuman strength he didn’t know he possessed… Nicholas pulled himself up and ran the short distance before collapsing beside her. Ignoring his leg, he tried to reassure her, checking her over for any other possible injuries.

She was badly shaken though the rest of her seemed fine. Or as close to fine as one could be considering their predicament. Two large, shining blue eyes blinked at him, her voice quivering as she told him, “I’m not due yet. I have two months to go—the baby—he’s coming!”

Nicholas didn’t see any fluids to imply she was in labor. He recalled Milah experiencing something similar—Braxton Hicks—false contractions. No doubt it was stress from the crash, but either way, he wasn’t a doctor and it wasn’t a call he should make. Looking up, Nicholas saw another man running from person to person; stopping long enough to make sure they were all right before moving onto the next. A woman with long blonde hair followed him also stopping to see how the other survivors
were faring.

Raising his hands, Nicholas waved and shouted, “Over here! I have a pregnant woman!”

The man sharply turned in his direction and ran towards them. His glasses were crooked, his shirt and tie askew and ruffled, but he seemed to be uninjured for the most part.

*Lucky bastard*, Nicholas thought as the other man began to look her over.

“I’m Archie Hopper,” he told them. “I’m a doctor—well, I’m a psychiatrist, but I did go to med school. It’ll be okay, trust me. Now, how far are you along?”

While she answered his questions, the blonde woman looked at him, her face pinched in a frown. “Your leg,” she said, pointing to it. “You have a piece of shrapnel in it.”

She was right. A piece of metal was sticking out from his calf. In another place, he would have passed out from the blood that was seeping through, but a foreign emotion began to rise from within his chest. Something akin to bravery…

“Don’t worry about me. Just make sure she’s all right,” he said, turning to look at the petite woman who was taking deep breaths as the doctor instructed. “I’m okay.”

“Hate to break it to you… but you’re not,” the woman told him flatly.

“Okay Belle… that’s it… calm down. You’re not in labor but anymore stress could trigger it prematurely. Slow breaths like so—good girl.” Archie smiled as she did what she was directed. Eventually, the panic worry fled from her flushed features and she appeared to be all right.

*Belle. Her name is Belle.*

“Now, let’s take a look at you, Mister—“

“Gold. Nicholas Gold,” he answered Archie, his eyes never once leaving Belle’s.

Belle looked his way and she smiled at him. And like that, her smile seemed to take away his pain at the moment.
Lost

Prompt: After a day passes since the crash, Nick and Belle bond. (Rated K)

A day had gone by and there was no sign of rescue anytime soon. For now, the passengers of Flight 815 sat and waited on the beach of the island they landed, waiting and praying for a miracle.

Nicholas was lucky the metal missed a major artery, but if medical attention was delayed, there was no way of knowing how severe the injury might become. At least his calf was bandaged and he was given antibiotics to prevent infection; in addition, the good Doctor Hopper found a sturdy branch for him to use as makeshift cane to walk around. As much as the thought worried him about his leg—he was more worried about Belle.

She seemed to be out of the danger zone and she was a lot better once she realized she wasn’t in labor after all. She was fortunate to have found her bag from the plane and he found her leaning against a rock, reading a worn-out copy of *Robinson Crusoe*.

He didn’t want to bother her. He should leave her be. She wouldn’t want some middle-aged man looming over her, even if his intentions were pure. Yet, he couldn’t tear himself away as he limped towards her.

“I see you, uh, came prepared,” he said in a poor attempt at a joke, although the delivery was sorely lacking. He was never good at telling jokes so why in the world he thought he should start with one was beyond him. Shifting his weight, his hand clenched his walking stick. “Any ideas?”

She laughed, slipping a bookmark in place and closed the book. “Well, I know how to build a shelter now with sticks and palm leaves. That counts for something, right?” She tilted her head and patted the spot next to her. “Sit. It can’t be good for you to stand on that leg for long.”

He wanted to object, to refuse but his leg was throbbing and she did invited him… it would be rude not to accept the offer. Fighting back the urge to hiss from the pain, Nicholas sat down and stretched out his injured limb. Together, they quietly watched the surf kissing the sand as the sun was already beginning to set. Some of the others were gathering branches and twigs from the jungle to start another bonfire in hopes it would let the world know they were here.

Sighing, Belle rubbed her belly absently, her gaze distant. “Do you think they know?” she asked suddenly. “Out there. Do you think they know we’re alive and trapped?”

“I don’t know but they should,” he replied. “It’s difficult to get lost in this day and age.”

“Yeah but I figured they would have found us by now.” She paused. “Thank you by the way.”

“For what?”

“For helping me. You didn’t have to but you did. I appreciate it. We both do.”
Nicholas shrugged. “It’s no problem,” he replied. “I’m glad I was nearby.”

She grinned. “Nicholas, right?” At his nod, her grin became wider. “Do you mind if I call you Nick? Or do you prefer Nicholas?”

He did but hearing her say the nickname didn’t sound half as bad. He actually liked the sound of it. “Nick’s fine.”

“I’m Belle, Nick,” she said, holding her hand out for a shake. “I figured it’s time we introduced ourselves properly.”

Chuckling to himself, Nick shook her hand. “You’re Australian,” he noted.

“You’re Scottish,” she deadpanned.

“Guilty,” he said, grinning. “So… what made you decide to take this exotic detour?”

“A yearning for adventure,” she responded. “All unplanned of course.”

“Of course,” he agreed, bobbing his head in agreement. “Then where to after this if I may ask?”

“California.”

“Friends?”

“Not exactly.” She lowered her eyes and cradled her bump. “You?”

“My son’s getting married.”

“That’s lovely!”

“It’s in Boston.”

She nodded. “And what brought you to Sydney?”

“Work.”

“Oh! What do you do?”

“I—“ What could he tell her? He was a drifter, always moving to different cities, different countries, trying to start his own business by spinning wool. That during a demonstration to a possible investor he had choked because he was so nervous? “—I’m a salesman,” he said, settling for the partial truth. He was a salesman before trying to make it on his own. “Not exciting I promise you.”

“I’m a librarian,” she told him. “Not much happens there unless you find yourself in the midst of a great book.”

“Sounds wonderful,” he said. Casting a glance at Belle and then at her very pregnant stomach, he gnawed on his bottom lip as a sudden thought popped into his head. This whole time… even when the plane crashed and he heard Belle screaming… no one else checked on her. No one was looking for her as the other passengers searched for loved ones in the ocean and on the beach. Come to think of it… he didn’t remember seeing anyone sitting next to her either. “If you don’t mind me asking… where’s your husband?”

Her methodical stroking ceased as she stared out into the ocean. A flash of an unreadable emotion filled her eyes as she squared her jaw. “The father is not in the picture,” she said softly.
Like that, he felt like an idiot for even mentioning it, which was obviously a sore spot to her. Of course, the father wasn’t in the picture. It made perfect sense considering here was an attractive and heavily pregnant woman without an anxious husband or boyfriend coddling her. When Milah was pregnant, he was a nervous wreck and was always by her side just in case their son decided to make an early entrance. Then again, his worries caused the rift between them and then came Jones… Closing his eyes, Nick fought back the terrible memories from resurfacing. “I’m sorry. I didn’t—“

“It’s cool. Really. Trust me when I say it’s for the best.”

“But—“

“Nick,” she interrupted firmly. “Stop.”

He did. Milah always said he had a knack for upsetting women. Not that he went out of his way to do so but he upset her all the time with his questions. But he had good reason to question Milah with her constant late night disappearances; however, he didn’t like confrontations and stopped whenever she asked or screamed at him.

Keeping his eyes on his shoes, Nick quietly added, “Forgive me. I-I should let you rest. The doctor said you needed to.”

He tried to stand up, wincing as he did so, but he was startled when Belle grabbed his pant leg. Looking up, she blinked her big, cerulean eyes at him. “Don’t go. Please,” she pleaded. “I like the company.”

It took her little effort to persuade him and Nick found himself returning back to his seat with the staff lying at his side. He didn’t want to admit it… but he liked the company too. Of course, she was being polite and kind to an old man. She wouldn’t be saying that if she knew him. Then again, who knew how long they would be stuck on his infuriating island? Belle would realize soon enough that he wasn’t worth spending time with. It happened with Milah.

To his shock, Belle inched closer to him and rested her head on his shoulder. He remained frozen as he watched as her eyelids fluttered and finally drifted shut. The top of her curls brushed his cheek and he captured a whiff of cherry blossoms and vanilla. It was soothing, reassuring, warm…

This woman saw him as a hero and she was comfortable enough to sleep on his shoulder. If it were possible, he thought his heart stopped beating. It couldn’t be real… it couldn’t be…

Yet, her soft intake of air and quiet snore said otherwise. He didn’t mind. Not really. He liked feeling useful, even if he was being used as a pillow.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle has a nightmare and Nick is there to comfort her. (Rated K+)

Lost

It was the scream that woke him up.

Immediately, Nick knew it was Belle and he was wide awake and alert as he hurried (half-running and half-slipping) to her makeshift tent. He found her thrashing in her sleep, her head twisting side to side as she whimpered in fear. He heard some garbled words she mumbled—something about her baby.

Gently, with a little force, Nick shook her arm, telling her to wake up. Belle jerked upright, her head nearly slamming into his. Her skin was ice cold, her eyes dilated from sleep and frantic as she searched for the nightmarish demons that tormented her just now.

“Belle!” Nick called again and that snapped her out of whatever spell she was in. “It’s okay. You were dreaming.”

“It was so real!” she whispered, shaking her head as her hand came to rest on her stomach, sheltering the baby from her nightmare. “Oh God! Nick… it was horrible! Horrible! They took my baby and I tried to fight… but I couldn’t move. Couldn’t scream. They cut into my belly and—” Belle choked as tears streamed down her face.

He took her trembling form into his arms and rubbed circles against her back in an effort to calm her down. “Who tried to take your baby?”

“I—I don’t remember!” she moaned into his shoulder. “I couldn’t see their faces, but it was awful Nick. It was just awful!”

“Shh. It’s all right. It was only a dream, right? It wasn’t real.”

“It felt real,” she rejoined, her face burying closer to him.

He couldn’t argue with her about that. The way she had screamed… the terror in her voice… He almost swore that someone was in the tent with her too and was doing just as she said it did in her dream. But she was safe. The baby was safe. No one was there to hurt her or the wee one.

“I’m here now. No one is going to take your baby. I promise.”

His words had the calming effect on her and Belle, gratefully, looked up at him with a slight grin on her lips. “I don’t know what I would do without you Nick. This means a lot to me.”

“You don’t have to thank me. Now, close your eyes and go back to sleep. You both need it.”

“I don’t know if I can after that,” Belle admitted. “I’m sorry for disturbing you.”
“Hey,” he said. “It’s not a bother. You were scared—there’s nothing wrong with that.”

“She started and then stopped. “I… I don’t want to be a nuisance.”

“Not another word,” he ordered sternly, a finger pointing at her in mock scolding. “I won’t hear it.”

She chuckled. “All right. Good night Nick.”

“Good night Belle.”

Nick watched as she laid her head back down on the pillow and turned to her side so she was facing away from him. He stayed until he felt she was fast asleep before he, too, closed his eyes and fell asleep next to her.

Little did he know, Belle was awake as a fresh batch of tears swam in her eyes. Nick was such a sweetheart and he meant well… but she didn’t deserve his kindness or his concern. Not when he believed her to be someone she was not.

She could never tell him the real reason she was on that flight to begin with. If he knew what her true intentions were… he wouldn’t look at her the same way ever again and it would kill her if he thought badly of her.

She would be no better than his ex-wife.

For in her dream, there was a couple who wanted to adopt her child and Belle… she was helping them by cutting the baby out of her.
In the beginning, there was nothing to say. Everyone was so focused on helping the injured, salvaging the fuselage, and burying the dead. No one deemed it important or gave thought to a middle-aged man in a business suit that was a size too big helping a pregnant twenty-something year old.

As days turned into weeks… then they started to notice.

At first, it was just a thought no one voiced aloud—that’s nice he’s making sure she has enough water and fruit, he’s a gentleman and caring fellow (probably had experience with his own wife), he’s looking out for her best interest as a father does for his daughter.

It seemed platonic in a sense, but when Belle had her nightmare a couple nights ago… it woke up more than Nick Gold alone. The silent witnesses watched the scene unfold with how he comforted her, stroked her back, whispered soothing words in her ear to stop the trembling and tears. That kind of comfort was beyond what a parent does for a child, especially when he spent the rest of the night at her side. In the morning, his front side was pressed against her back, his hand lying protectively over her child. He had woke up, blushing and apologizing profusely to Belle, but there was no mistaking the slight flush and pinkish hue to her cheeks as she assured him it was “nice” and “she felt safe” with him close by.

It was obvious that Nick Gold was attracted to her, and for some people, it did not sit well with them.

Thus began the whispers of disapproval here and there, then it spread like wildfire to anyone hungry for gossip. Regina Mills, a lawyer, was at the helm of these comments and watched Belle and Gold very closely. Almost immediately, Regina expressed a strong dislike towards Nick (he couldn’t fathom why since he never met her before until now) and even a stronger dislike towards Belle. Of course, she also disliked everyone else but it was these two that were at the brunt of her icy glare. Nick avoided her as best as he could and kept out of her way.

He couldn’t, however, avoid the looks of scorn that were sometimes tossed his way if he was doing something for Belle or if he was spending time with her. He didn’t pay attention to it since Belle was his main concern as well as the little one growing inside her. But it wasn’t long that he couldn’t ignore it either.

Belle’s lower back was sore and she had a hard time reaching the spot that bothered her the most. Nick couldn’t leave her in discomfort so he began to massage her back. Belle closed her eyes in relief and let out a low moan in content. He had to suppress the tremor from running down his spine.
at the sound and the thoughts racing through his mind. It was an innocent sound, she was expressing her delight, but it didn’t keep him from turning to other pleasurable ways for her to make that same sound again.

Then again, he didn’t know much about pleasing a woman. Milah had reminded him of that often enough in their marriage.

“Right there Nick,” Belle moaned once more, encouraging him to focus on that particular spot.

He continued to press his thumbs into her back, working out the kinks and tight muscles. He was also trying to say the alphabet backwards to keep his mind from veering off to other things. It was then he happened to notice from the corner of his eye the frowning countenances of Ruby Lucas and Emma Swan. In front of him he was receiving a similar glare from Leroy.

Part of him wanted to shrivel up and hide from the stares, but at the same time… he wanted to ask them what the problem was.

Truth to be told, Nick wasn’t one for confrontations, a personality defect that Milah would taunt him about. While he desperately wanted to speak up for himself, he kept his lips sealed and his eyes diverted elsewhere to block out the looks. He didn’t want to humiliate himself in front of Belle. If she knew how much of a coward he was…

Well, she wouldn’t and he would say nothing to them. Eventually, it would have to stop. It had to, right?

xxxxxxxx

A few days later and the whispering picked up and this time… they were loud enough for Nick to hear.

Gertrude, Ruby’s grandmother, was doing the laundry on the beach when she glanced up to see Nick walking by. His limp was still present but he felt his leg was getting a little stronger with these walks. As always, Belle accompanied him and she stopped to tread over to the tide to get her feet wet. Nick stood back, chuckling to himself, when Gertrude came up from behind with a basket of clothes.

“You should be ashamed of yourself,” she muttered. “She’s so young.”

He froze, not sure how to react, but the older woman went on her way as if nothing was wrong. Belle came towards him and noticed his paled features. “Is everything okay, Nick?” she asked.

“I’m fine.” The lie didn’t sit well on his tongue but he didn’t want to make a deal out of it in front of her. “Let’s keep going.”

She gave him an odd look but didn’t push it.

Another comment was about his appearance. Self-consciously, Nick touched his stubble, which now was turning into a beard and the silver streaks were becoming more pronounced in showing his real age. He knew he needed to shave but Belle thought he looked distinguished with his whiskers and he decided to give up his ration to the younger men.

However, he was starting to rethink the decision. Milah said he looked like a homeless guy with his beard and perhaps Belle was being polite to not hurt his feelings. He just knew he couldn’t go on like this. Vanity won out and Nick hunted down a razor.
He was attempting to shave himself with water and managed to nick himself a few times. Archie stumbled upon him and his cursing, and ended up helping him to prevent further injuries. He was close to being clean-shaven, but there was still some stubble left behind. It would have to do.

His hair—as unkempt as it was from the winds—was a lost cause. Yet, Mary Margaret offered to trim the ends so it wouldn’t be too scraggly or long. It was close to a civilized grooming he could get, but at least he no longer appeared to look like a homeless man on this island.

Belle was stunned by the transformation, but she didn’t add anything as to why he did it. She told him he looked nice and that was it. He couldn’t tell if she was displeased or not so he reasoned it was more awestruck than anything else.

The next incident was an accident, but Nick didn’t regret the outcome.

He and Belle were doing their daily walk on the beach when his leg gave out. As he fell, Belle reached for him but ended up falling on top of him. It had been bliss for those few seconds, feeling her curves against him and taking in her scent of lavender and vanilla as her hair tickled his nose. She lifted her face and they stared at each other and she began to lean closer when shouts interrupted them.

Belle got to her feet and asked him if he was all right, but before he could answer… he was roughly hauled up by his shoulders with Leroy sticking his face into his.

“What the Hell is wrong with you?” Leroy spat. “Pulling a pregnant lady down like that? You could have hurt her!”

“It was an accident. We’re ok—“ Belle started but Leroy’s boisterous voice overpowered her.

“Were you trying to cop a feel you perverted old man? Huh?”

Nick blanched at his words. He would never do anything unwillingly towards her, despite the fact he had admired how she felt pressed against him. But it wasn’t like he did it on purpose and he was not a pervert. He respected Belle. He cared for her. This… this was an accident.

“It’s not what it looks—it was an accident. My leg—“ Nick tried to say but a small crowd was forming around them and he felt all those disapproving stares piercing his back.

“Christ, you’ve been hovering over her since we crashed on this godforsaken place. You won’t let her be! Just trailing behind like some sick puppy waiting for scraps,” Leroy accused, twisting Nick’s kindness for her.

But he wasn’t done.

“Why don’t you leave her alone? Do you think she wants some guy old enough to be her father panting over her? You think just because she’s pregnant you get some free pass and guilt-free sex? Is that why you hang around her?”

The resounding crack of hand meeting flesh stopped Leroy as Belle materialized in front of him, her fist quivering at her side. Staring hard at him, nostrils flaring, she then glared at the rest of the onlookers—her disgust towards them apparent in her hard, cold blue eyes.

“Is that what the rest of you think?” she asked them, her tone scathing. “You honestly think I would spend time with Nick if any of that was true?!”

“Hey sister, we were—“ Leroy stopped when she returned her gaze on him.
“I can take care of myself,” Belle said. “Just because I’m pregnant doesn’t mean I’m helpless or stupid. I choose whom I want to spend my time with and no one gets to decide for me or decides if that person has bad intentions or not. You’re seriously going to argue over my friendship with Nick because it’s not like we have anything else to be worried about on this damn island! Well, let me tell you this… out of all of you—Nick has been the only one to help me since we crashed. And you know what? I like him. I like being with him. None of this is your concern. This is my life. You don’t decide my fate, I do. So all of you—piss off!”

Then she whirled around at a startled Nick, seized his shirt, and pulled him forward so their lips collided. His brain completely shut down as his eyes remained wide-open in shock as he tasted Belle… Belle… she was kissing him!

As quickly as it happened, Belle pulled away with a self-satisfied smirk. Looping her arm through the dumbfounded man, she began to lead them away from the others. “That will give them more fuel to talk about, but honestly, they have no room to be self-righteous. I heard Leroy is crushing on Astrid the Nun. I doubt that’ll work.”

Nick felt himself nodding in reply, but part of him was still lost in that kiss.

Of course, it wasn’t until they reached the camps that Nick realized he had dropped his walking staff. A minor sacrifice, really, and one he had no regrets when Leroy returned it to him—his cheek still boasting a red hand-shape mark.

After that no one ever talked about Nick and Belle derogatorily ever again.

Chapter End Notes

That's the posting so far for today. Hope you all like! The next series of prompts are a original based ones called Student Teacher. Belle is the student teacher and Mr. Gold is her cooperative teacher. :)
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Rhys Gold has inappropriate feelings for his student teacher, Belle French. To hide it, he behaves like a tyrant but to his surprise… Belle gives him a birthday present and something changes. (Rated M for naughty thoughts)

Chapter Notes

This one is an education based one. Unlike past ones I’ve read, I’m taking a different approach with Belle being the student teacher and Gold as her cooperative teacher. I know there have been TA stories, but this is not in the college setting. These two are teaching at a high school.

Some of these prompts are inspired by actual events during my student teaching and currently being a substitute teacher. Sadly, the whole Mr. Gold thing never happened. No real names being used… just the FTL names.

Student Teacher

This was so completely wrong but Rhys Gold couldn’t stop thinking about the lovely Belle French. Her shapely mouth, strong chin, the slender length of her throat, the pert tiny nose, the luscious and wild tumbling curls of warm chestnut, and the dazzling sapphires that lit up with passion and excitement for each brand new day and the lesson that would follow.

Did he mention that she was his student teacher?

In all of his twenty-five years of teaching, he never came across this aching turmoil. Sure, he had attractive female student teachers in the past, but never quite like one as Belle French. She was different, she was…

Strictly off limits.

So he lived in the world of fantasy just to survive the days (and nights) of his lonely, dreary life. While his dreams gave him some release from his pent up frustrations… the mornings were the moments he truly loathed himself, knowing he would have to face her with the knowledge that the night before he had touched himself with her on his mind.

Therefore, he acted out towards her by being meaner more so than normal around her, snapping at her when she makes a mistake, or even changing her lesson plan (even if it happened to be a perfect lesson). He looked for flaws, errors, mistakes… anything to keep himself focused and do his job well without drawing suspicions from her, their students, and his colleagues.

They couldn’t know, they would never know.
Especially her.

Not that she would ever know… his beastly behavior makes sure of it. However, it pains him to behave so horribly when she means so well and is perfect.

But he keeps reminding himself that her graduation was still five months away—both a blessing and a curse. He still had five months to enjoy her company, her intelligence, and her smiles, but it was a bloody punishment all the same. Everyday his limits and self-restraint was tested and he suspected his ex-wife Milah was rolling in her grave with laughter at his predicament. He wouldn’t be surprised if she had a hand in this—probably one of her curses she threw at him when they divorced. And it was a doozy one too… his personal Hell all wrapped up in a bubbly, carefree girl with a smile brighter than sunshine and the eyes of a cloudless sky.

Yes, Milah somehow orchestrated this from the beyond. He had no doubt of it.

Bad! Bad! Bad!

He was her mentor, her guide for her future profession. He was to give her advice and help her become a better educator rather than giving into his urges to feel what it was like to have her slim legs wrapped around his waist as he pounded her against his desk.

And the whiteboard.

And the bookshelves.

And maybe even on top of the desk of that annoying Greg Mendell.

Most of all, he wanted to revel in her attention and laughter… knowing it was him that could make her happy.

Yet, the truth remained… he made her miserable and it was his fault and there was nothing he could do to change it. He could only pray the months will fly by so Belle French would leave his doors once and for good. Then, and only then, will Rhys Gold find peace and he won’t ever have to think about her again.

As he sat at his desk and finished grading some journals for his sixth-hour class, he heard the light clicking of Belle’s heels and closed his eyes in despair. Heels… that meant she was wearing a dress or worse… a skirt.

He swallowed thickly and sent a quick prayer to help him through the day when Belle’s voice pierced through his head.

“Mr. Gold?” she asked timidly.

He sighed and looked up at her. Inwardly, he cringed as in fact she was wearing a skirt—a chocolate brown pencil skirt with a belt to accentuate her tiny waist as her pink blouse billowed on top. The heels were also brown and the height was a further reminder of how close she will stand to his five-eight height and for him to lift her in a compromising position… as long as his bad knee didn’t give out.

He covered with a look of indifference and considered commenting how her outfit was a violation to the dress code, but in actuality, she was not. But for his sanity it certainly was school inappropriate.

“Yes Ms. French?” he replied coolly, evenly, not a trace of his true emotions.
“I heard from another staff member that it was your birthday, and so I…” He realized her hands were behind her and she moved them to show a gift bag clutched tightly with her fingers. It was nothing fancy since she wasn’t earning a salary, just a plain blue gift bag with newspaper sticking out. “I brought you something. It’s not much but I hope it kind of makes up for my klutzy accident with your mug.”

He lifted his eyebrows as he accepted the present. The mug she alluded to was the one she broke on the first day of school. She had been introducing herself, and once he took over to cover the syllabus, she leaned on his desk and miscalculated how far she was and fell… knocking the mug off.

He had ripped into her on the spot (not the best professional attitude to take with their students present, but it did not ruin her image in the students’ eyes). She apologized profusely and offered to replace it but he told her to forget it. Apparently, her guilt over the incident had not waned, even though he didn’t have any sentimental feeling attached to it. It was only a mug, yet Belle took responsibility that it meant something to him, and he felt awful for raving about it in the first place.

He removed the newspaper stuffing and stared inside. It wasn’t a new mug like he expected, but it was something entirely else and one of value.

A Victorian blue and white floral teacup was nestled carefully in more newspaper. He picked it up, his thumb gently tracing the golden rim until he discovered a tiny crack in it.

“I know you mentioned you like collecting rare objects and the Victorian era is your favorite literature period… so I combined them. As for the crack, the proprietor told me of a story behind it, and since we’re English teachers, I thought you would appreciate it.”

“What’s the story?” he questioned, still delicately touching the cup.

Belle beamed with pleasure that the gift was a success. “There was this landowner, a very rich and powerful man, and generally disliked by everyone. He lived all alone in this mansion, except he did have a live-in maid. She was the only person in town who could stand to work for him and over time… they fell in love. This cup was chipped on her first day because she was so nervous and didn’t know what to expect. He treated her kindly and never mistreated her or belittled her. Yet, it wasn’t proper for them to be together and he sent her away, never to see her again. But he kept this cup because it was the only thing of value he cherished despite his immense wealth.”

It was certainly a tragic story and Rhys felt an inkling sense of kinship towards this unlikeable landowner. “Was there anything else to the story?”

At this, Belle blushed. “There was another thing he told me. It’s not part of the actual story per say…”

“Well, what is it? I would like to know the whole story.”

She nibbled at her lower lip and played with her fingers. “The owner said this cup represented their love. And whoever possesses the cup will also find their true love.”

“True love, huh?” he repeated as her blush darkened. “As interesting as that is… it certainly sounds like a fairy tale, but a cup is a cup. There’s no hidden power in it this particular one about finding your true love. However, the history does deserve a further look into it. Thank you Ms. French.”

“You’re welcome Mr. Gold,” she said, smiling that he did like the gift after all. For a moment, their eyes met and something passed between them… an invisible spark and Rhys cleared his throat, looking away from her.
Belle also looked away. “I—I should probably make those copies for that short story before first hour.”

“Yes.”

Another second and they were looking at each other again, though this time Belle was the first to move away and flitted out of the room, her heels echoing on the linoleum floor in the hallway.

Leaning back in his chair, he held the teacup in deep contemplation. True love was a concept not fit for him and he was past that childish notion that there was The One for him.

But… there was something to it and it happened after he looked at Belle once she finished her story. Right then and there, a strange new feeling began to flare in his breast.

Hope.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Gold defends Belle’s lesson. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Student Teacher

Today her seniors will start George Orwell’s 1984, but before the books were passed out… Belle had a fun experiment up her sleeves.

Once the students entered the room, they were surrounded by posters of Big Brother all over the room as well as posters proclaiming the new classroom rules. Their reactions were priceless and the complaints and protests were instantaneous.

“Write only in black pen? I don’t have one!”

“Can’t sneeze or cough? That’s insane!”

“We can’t raise our hands?”

“Ms. French, my throat’s dry and I need to have this water bottle!”

“Ms. French… Mr. Gold has lost his mind for doing this!”

“Actually, this was me,” Belle replied with a straight face, keeping her lips in an even line. “And if I hear one more word of complaint you will all stand for the whole hour.”

Of course, they wouldn’t listen and Mr. Gold took his cue to start removing the chairs of those were the loudest. He couldn’t hide the smirk or the pleasure he felt at taking away Mendell’s seat. That sent the teen over the edge.

“This is inhumane and unfair!” Greg shouted. “I have rights and if you think—“

Gold yawned. Loudly. “That’s fascinating Mr. Mendell but you heard your teacher. You must stand until she says otherwise.”

One girl, Ana, asked, “I know we can’t ask questions Ms. French, but… if we apologize can we get our chairs back?”

All sets of eyes were on Belle. She fixed her students with an even look. “Would I forgive you? Perhaps. But what about the government? Do you think they would accept an apology for defiance? Look around. Big Brother is constantly watching your every move, every action, and hearing every word you say. If you uttered anything that sounds remotely like dissent… what do you think He might do?”

That got the class buzzing and murmuring. “Well?” she asked again, waiting for someone to
Aurora immediately spoke up. “He would make an example out of you. They wouldn’t want to take
the risk of someone opposing them if they forgave them.”

Belle grinned. “Very good. Sadly, my firing squad couldn’t be here today to make you an example
for my other classes, but you get the point. Mr. Gold, we can return their seats.”

The rest of the lesson was amazing and it was the icebreaker Belle needed to introduce the novel and
get her students excited about reading it. Before the bell rang, Belle had the class promised not to
reveal this situation to the other classes so they could all be surprised. It was a lot to ask from a high
school student, but thankfully, they did keep their word and remained silent when questioned what
they did in English by their friends.

By the end of the day, every class found the experience enlightening and it was the first time the
students saw this dark side to their young teacher. The fact that Belle had been deathly serious about
the rules at the start of class… it was out of character for her but they understood what she was trying
to do and that was the important part of the lesson.

All except for one.

Gold had Belle sit down to review that day’s lesson at the end of the day when Principal Mills
walked in.

“Ah, just the person I’m looking for,” she said smoothly, her dark eyes fixated on Belle. “I
understand, Ms. French, your lesson put some students under duress. Taking their chairs from them
for not complying with some absurd rules? A bit harsh don’t you think?”

“It was to prove a point for the novel we’re reading. No one actually stood for the whole hour,”
Belle said with a nervous twitch to her brow. She didn’t want to appear bad in front of Regina—her
performance would reflect her appeal to other schools if Regina wasn’t in her corner.

“It was to prove a point for the novel we’re reading. No one actually stood for the whole hour,”
Belle said with a nervous twitch to her brow. She didn’t want to appear bad in front of Regina—her
performance would reflect her appeal to other schools if Regina wasn’t in her corner.

“Maybe not but I did have one concerned student who was very stressed out about the ordeal. His
parents called to ask me to inquiry about what happened.”

Gold frowned. It was quite typical in this day and age for parents to go right to the administration
when there’s a problem in the classroom, instead of directly contacting the teacher to get his or her
side first. But it still irked him that was the course of action, especially when nothing really
happened. They weren’t planning on letting any students stand for the entire hour, even if they
couldn’t figure out the main idea; they would have received their chairs. He was more upset with the
fact that it was plainly obvious that Greg Mendell was behind this.

“I’m sorry that happened. I assure you Ms. Mills I only did this as an attention grabber for the novel.
It really opened the door for a dialogue—“

“You certainly accomplished that my dear,” Regina said. “But in the future, you must not do
anything that could potentially hurt your students. You may be a student teacher, but there are
consequences to your actions and I would hate to mention this little incident to a potential school
interested in hiring you. Especially since I was never informed about this beforehand.”

Belle’s face reddened and Gold couldn’t take anymore of Regina’s baiting. “Leave her be Regina,”
he interjected, stepping in between Belle and the principal. “It was a damn good lesson and it
sparked their interest to read this book, which is difficult to do. Instead of berating her… you should
congratulate Ms. French for a job well done.”
Belle’s eyes widened at her mentor’s accolades. When she approached him about the idea in the first place, he was amused by it but he did warn her that it probably would not go overboard with the students. He left her to do the copying and placing the posters all over the room. Even that morning he hardly said a word about her new rules and simply allowed her to take control of the room. So for him to call it a “damn good lesson”… that was the best compliment in the world!

“As for that student who reported Ms. French,” Mr. Gold continued without skipping a beat. “He is a prissy narcissistic know-it-all who cries when things don’t go his way. There was no trouble with the rest and he only stood for ten minutes… oh yeah that warrants duress all right.” The sarcasm bled heavily in his tone and even Regina was flustered by it. “Just drop it Regina. You won’t come out as the winner in this.”

The older woman glared at both of them. He was right and she knew it, not that she would admit it aloud. “Fine. But it doesn’t change the fact that Ms. French never notified me about this.”

“I supervised her,” Gold said. “I have more than enough experience under my belt to ensure nothing gets out of hand without involving the principal.”

“Your student teacher needs to learn—“

“She’s a teacher,” Gold snapped.

That silenced Regina.

“Furthermore,” he added. “Don’t you dare hold this over her head for when she’s looking for a job. Any school would love to have a teacher who thinks outside the box and has some creative ideas.”

Regina shut her lips, pursing them as she looked at Belle and Gold. Then, “Just be sure you run anything else like this by me so I can handle any parent complaints.” Her dark hair whipping behind her, Regina strode out of the classroom.

Alone again… Belle gazed at her cooperative teacher in a new light. He defended her! He called her a teacher and her lesson damn good…

“I know what you’re thinking Ms. French and you should forget it,” Gold said, turning his back on her as he walked over to his desk.

“And what is it that I’m thinking?” she asked cheekily, feeling very giddy that he supported her in front of Regina.

Dropping into his chair, Gold arched his brow. “Don’t you have tomorrow’s lesson plans to work on?”

“Of course.” Belle smiled again. As mean and tough as Mr. Gold behaves… Belle saw a different side to him and she knew how he thought about her. Perhaps she should thank Greg for being a pain in the ass.

Chapter End Notes

For the most part, this actually happened to me. I did this lesson and I had a lot of upset students, but once they realized what was going on… they laughed it off. I did have one parent contact me about this but once I explained it… they were cool about it. But I did
inform my principal about it beforehand to prevent a situation like this.
Prompt: Takes place several months after the second prompt. A student flirts with Belle, Gold doesn’t like it. (Rated T)

Student Teacher

Rhys Gold was walking down the hall and was about to turn the corner when he heard Belle’s voice coming from that direction.

Pressing his back against the wall, he listened as she talked to a student and scowled when he recognized it belonged to Killian Jones, a senior in his English 12 5th hour class. That boy rubbed him in the wrong way and it wasn’t because he was the heartthrob of Storybrooke High or that he left a trail of broken hearts in half of the female population.

No… this boy had an eye on Belle. His Belle.

“As you know, Ms. French, I do graduate in a couple of months,” he heard Killian tell her.

“I do Killian,” she replied in her soft, patient way. “But that depends if you pass English. You’re sitting at a 20%—that’s an LF. You really need to start turning in your work as half credit if you want to pass.”

“I will! I promise… it’s just… Ms. French, Belle, may I call you Belle?”

“No,” she said flatly.

“Well, when I do graduate ‘cuz I will, I would like to know if you will join me for coffee or a celebratory dinner.”

Gold could practically hear her brow arched at the boy’s attempt at charm. Fortunately, her tone did not reflect the incredulity that had to have appeared on her face.

“As lovely as that sounds Killian, you should focus on the present and not the future. With this grade, I don’t see graduation in the horizon for you. At all.”

“C’mon Ms. French,” he wheedled. “You didn’t answer my question. Would you go out with me?”

Gold balked, his face turning white as his knuckles curled tightly over his cane. What was that foolish boy thinking? Asking his teacher out?!

“Killian, I’m your teacher.”

“But when I graduate you won’t be. Think about it. We will be equals and you won’t get into trouble if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“That’s… sweet Killian,” she said as a kind afterthought. “I’m flattered but I still have to pass on the offer.”
He could imagine the teen’s bugged look. No girl turned him down. Ever.

“There are no obstacles, luv. We can be together without consequence. Tell me you haven’t thought about it… about us.”

“No Killian. I haven’t.” Belle sighed. “You will always be my student Killian. Even if I’m not teaching you anymore. You are my student and I will not go on a date with you. Besides, I thought you were seeing Bella.”

“It’s complicated,” he said, hurt laced in his tone. “Ever since she cut her hair in that pixie style… she’s been reinventing herself.”

“She’s only seventeen,” Belle reminded him. “If you care for her, then you will stand by her as she grows into her wings.”

“Is that some kind of literary reference?”

“Sort of,” she said with a smile. “I’ll see you tomorrow Killian.”

“All right Ms. French.”

“And turn in your work!”

Belle rounded the corner and saw Mr. Gold standing in front of her. A stern expression marked his countenance as she jumped, startled at discovering him right there. “M-mr. Gold—I didn’t see you —” she said as her mentor’s glare only intensified.

“I’ve heard Mr. Jones has taken a fancy to you,” he said coolly.

“It’s a harmless crush. I turned him down gently and steered him in Isabella’s direction. No harm done.”

“Ms. French, do I need to remind you of the delicate situation of teacher-student relations? I can only fathom Mr. Jones thought it was acceptable to ask you out if you gave him a reason to.”

Belle’s jaw dropped. “I’ve encouraged no such thing! How could you think--?”

“Come with me to the room and I will explain it to you.”

Her blue eyes widened in dismay as she followed him to their classroom. As the door closed, Belle turned to face him to argue her innocence but his stoic gaze kept her from uttering a word.

“To put it bluntly Ms. French… you’re a tease to the boys. Look at the dress you’re wearing! It’s hugging you in the right places that no hot-blooded male could ignore, especially the view of that pretty arse of yours.”

She placed a dramatic hand over her chest as she smirked. “Well, I had to get your attention didn’t I?” To prove her point, she gave him a little twirl, making sure she gave him more of a view of her backside. The heated look in his brown eyes was all the response she needed. “Looks like it worked nicely,” she teased as he gave her a little growl.

He marched over to her, his arms wrapping around her waist as he pulled her close. “In a few weeks you’ll graduate,” he choked.

She chuckled deep in her throat as her fingers played with the ends of his hair. “Yes and we can be together in front of everyone.”
“You sure? I understand if you change—“ He was silenced when she placed her finger over his lips.

“Rhys,” she said softly. “I would like nothing more than to go out with you.”

“Thank God,” he muttered his lips a breath’s inch away from hers. “I don’t know what I would do if you said no.”

“You won’t ever have to know. Unlike Killian,” she added as he cut her off with a thorough kiss, swallowing her giggle.

Maybe he will pass Killian after all.
4 Student Teacher Rated K+

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle has a bad month and Gold tries to make it better. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Student Teacher

The last couple days had been tough. And it was nothing out of the ordinary too… students complained about the class assignment, whined about the homework, stopped a fight in the hall, allowed a girl to cry on her shoulder, etc…

But it was the stress of the workload—papers that needed to be graded, lessons to be made, calls to parents to inform them that their son/daughter had too many absences or work missing, and her seminar work as well. In addition, she had two cases of plagiarism. One, the student literally copied and pasted several articles including the advertisements. And the other involved a nasty meeting with a parent. Since her son was a senior he should be given a pass; in addition, she looked up the definition for plagiarism and as far as she was concerned, he hadn’t plagiarized since he didn’t publish the essay and she told him it was okay to copy and paste the article for that reason.

Fortunately, Principal Mills was on Belle’s side. Regina may be a hardened bitch as Gold told her but something like this she doesn’t take kindly nor does she like dealing with idiots.

The end result was the student was suspended for three days and he had to rewrite the paper for half credit if he wanted to graduate. Mom wasn’t happy, still believing they were in the right, but when Regina mentioned the possible chance of expulsion for non-compliance… well, that changed her tune.

Belle hated that it got to that point, but if the student thought it was acceptable now… what would happen in college? All in all, Belle felt like a part of her failed him. Perhaps she should have explained it better; perhaps her plagiarized lesson wasn’t as effective as she thought, perhaps…

Mr. Gold told her not to beat herself up about it. The student made the decision to cheat, and his mother was dumb enough to allow it. It wasn’t her fault, but Belle couldn’t help it. This was the hardest part about teaching, one of many, and she hoped the student learned his lesson, though she feared he might not.

Then she and her boyfriend had a fight.

It had been a long week and Belle wasn’t in the mood to see anyone, but Gary called and insisted she needed some cheering up. He hadn’t seen her in days and he almost forgot what his girlfriend looked like. Despite not wanting to do anything, Belle reluctantly went out in hopes Gary will make it right.

Turned out… she was wrong.

It shouldn’t have been a surprise, but Gary didn’t understand why she was upset in the first place. If
anything, he sided with the plagiarized student!

“You should have dropped it Belle,” he said. “If you did then you wouldn’t feel like a bump in the log. Everyone wins.”

"It’s the principle of the point Gary,” Belle said in irritation.

“So?” he shrugged. “It wasn’t like he was selling his paper for profit. You teachers should lay off. Students have it rough and should be allowed to have short cuts now and then. No harm, no foul.”

That pissed her off and she left the bar. Gary followed her and grabbed her arm.

“Belle! Take it easy! I don’t see why you’re so upset about it.”

She whirled on him. “It matters to me Gary! You laugh it off like it is some big joke. You don’t understand why this is important. You can’t even fake it for me. So I’m going home.”

He didn’t put up a fight when she left, but it wasn’t the last argument either. Little things Gary said and did begin to bother her, and even he was getting annoyed with this student teaching. He made a grave mistake in telling her that once she graduated she wouldn’t have to deal with these pesky student issues anymore, and concentrate on the most important thing—settling down and raising a family.

That blew up into a heated fight that had Belle rethinking her future with Gary. It was high time she realized that there was no future with him, and frankly, she didn’t want one with him.

The breakup was a release for her; whereas, Gary didn’t agree. He believed she was overreacting and she misunderstood him, but Belle cut off all ties with him. She wanted nothing to do with him and if taking him out of her life did the trick… then so be it. Breaking up with him felt so good, though she did have her sad moments. They had dated for two years and she did feel something for him, just not romantically.

Then on top of everything else, there was her cooperative teacher, Mr. Gold. He wasn’t a likeable person but he was a damn good teacher. Belle learned so much from his teaching methods and she was thankful that she did have him as a mentor.

But then something happened… it had been his birthday and for some reason she decided to give him that teacup. The story was very interesting when she first heard it, and thought he would appreciate it, but she didn’t realize the full meaning behind it until she told him about the rich man and his maid. Then there was that other incident… he showed a side to him that she never saw before and it changed everything.

Belle was hanging up posters for one of the next books they were going to read. There was one poster from a previous book that Mr. Gold put up that was stubbornly refusing to come down. She yanked on it with such force that she lost her balance from the chair she was standing on and fell.

Instead of hitting the floor, like she expected, she was caught and found herself staring into Mr. Gold’s brown eyes. Frantic worry filled them that it took a moment for her to register that it was directed towards her. Embarrassing enough, Belle realized he had to let go of his cane to catch her and no doubt her weight was putting an unneeded stress on his leg. But he made no attempt to let her go nor did she remove herself from his grasp.

Eventually, he did set her down and she brushed off some imaginary dirt off her dress, anything to keep her mind away from how warm and right it felt in his embrace. He, too, was flustered and muttered something nonsensical, then added that she needed to be careful before he hastily grabbed
his cane and left the room.

Later, she had a dream about him and this time… he didn’t let go of her. Since then, Belle’s dreams have been featuring Rhys Gold more often than she liked and nothing about them were professional. There was no denying it now. She liked him. She liked him a lot and it was so wrong! He was her mentor, she his student! Well, student teacher but a student nonetheless. She was learning from him how to become a teacher and the last thing she wanted was to jeopardize her position with him.

Then again, she was being foolish to think it was two-sided. He saw her nothing more than a pupil he was molding into an educator. If his past treatment of her was anything to go by, then she knew he held no feelings for her other than platonically. Yet, she couldn’t stop thinking about that teacup and how he caught her from falling… from the moment she handed him that present she felt a spark and she was positive he felt it too.

But was it?

After he had so righteously defended her in front of Regina for Greg Mendell’s objection to her 1984 lesson, Belle began to wonder again. So she decided to pay closer attention to his behavior around her to see if her suspicions were correct or if she was reading far too much into a kind gesture (and static electricity).

Until…

One evening they were staying late after school to grade journals and finish up the lesson plan for the next day. The silence was interrupted when Belle’s cell phone continually vibrated as they worked.

“Are you going to answer it?” Gold snapped.

Sighing, Belle stopped her comment midway and checked to see who it was. It had been a text and it was Gary. She quickly typed a message saying she was busy and to leave her alone before it started buzzing again. Gold looked at her with annoyance and Belle could only shrug.

“It’s my ex,” she explained. “We broke up a while ago and he hasn’t gotten the point that when I told him I didn’t want to hear from him again… that extended to text messaging too.”

“Your ex?” Gold repeated quietly.

“Yeah.” Brushing a loose strand of hair from her face, she took a deep breath. “I had a rough month Mr. Gold. So if you don’t mind… I don’t want to talk about it.”

“Who said I did?” he retorted.

That did it. “See? Right there!” she exclaimed. “You constantly do this and it’s getting really old now.”

“What am I doing dearie?”

“Being infuriating,” she rejoined. “I know you’re this insufferable teacher that the students both fear and love, and that the other teachers respect you but they also avoid you too. You keep everyone at an arm’s length and I don’t understand why you have to do this. Even with me… you keep a distance and insult me and compliment me that I get a headache just thinking about it! I don’t know if you like me or you don’t. Because I swear there are days where I wonder why in the world you agreed to take me on as your student teacher.”

She said it now. Everything she had kept hidden before was now out in the open. Even he was
stunned by her bluntness, and for a minute, he did not respond. Belle quickly lowered her gaze to her hands and knew she made a terrible mistake in bringing it up. She was better off holding it back until she was about to graduate. Now it was too late to take it back.

What she hadn’t expected was for Mr. Gold to wearily exhale and softly murmured, “I need to do this. It’s not fair to you but I have no choice.”

“What are you talking about? What do you mean you have no choice?” she demanded.

“Ms. French—”

“Belle,” she interrupted. “We’ve been working together for four months now. I think we can use our first names now.”

“—this is not easy for me,” he admitted. “I think you’re an amazing teacher and you have a lot of potential. But you don’t understand my predicament. So it’s best for you to understand that when I say I do the things I do for your benefit. Now, drop it.”

“No.” Two can play at this game and Belle wanted answers as to why he keeps having these mood swings.

“We’re done.” Standing up, Mr. Gold began to limp away but Belle beat him before he could reach the door.

Extending her arms and legs, she effectively blocked him. “I don’t think so Mr. Gold. I deserve an explanation. From day one, you have belittled me. You have ripped my lessons into pieces and you have sent me home—not once, but six times—for ‘inappropriate’ attire. Thanks to you I have to carry a spare just in case. Yet, you tell my coordinator how fantastic I am and you even supported me when Principal Mills confronted me. But that’s the only time I have heard praises from you. I’m not fishing for compliments… I’m a big girl and I can handle criticism but I feel like you’re constantly looking for excuses to point out my flaws. Why? What have I ever done to you?”

He gaped at her, his jawline quivering, but then he closed his mouth and averted his gaze. “If I told you why… then you won’t believe me. I’m sorry Ms. French.”

There was guilt all over his face and Belle’s heart began to skip. Was it possible? Could he be referring…?

Swallowing all pride and throwing caution to the wind, Belle took a step forward. “Rhys,” she said softly. “Do you like me?”

The cane was shaking in his grasp and he was doing everything he could not to look at her that Belle knew the answer to the question. Resting her hands on either side of his face, she turned him so he had no choice but to look at her.

“I like you too,” she whispered. Lifting her toes, she placed a kiss at the corner of his mouth and moved back to watch his expression change from bewilderment to awe to happiness to lust all in one move. And before Belle could react, he was tugging her towards him and was kissing her as if his life depended on it.

Well… not a bad way to end a rough month.

Chapter End Notes
On a side note, the whole plagiarized situation mentioned in this did not personally happen to me but to another student teacher I know. The part about the advertisements being copied and pasted did happen to me. But… I do have my own stories to share on the subject and some of the crazy excuses I have received in justifying it. The definition argument I have heard a few times and like I tell all my students… publishing means the same thing as turning it in.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle vs. Cell phones. (Rated K)

Student Teacher

In all the four years of college, there was one particular lesson that Belle’s professors failed to prepare her for:

Cell phones.

In hindsight, it should have been obvious that the students on campus were typically on their phones everywhere you go. In classes, the library, cafes, even walking on the sidewalks those little handheld devices were out for the world to see as its user communicated and updated their statuses.

Yes… It was inherent that today’s society has grown quite used to and too comfortably with their electronic devices.

So it shouldn’t have been no surprise that Belle would find herself locked in the epic battle of Teacher vs. Student over a cell phone round 1.

“Oh okay Cruella. I told the whole class to put their cells away at the beginning of the hour. That includes you too. Now, hand it over.”

This was only the first day of school, and apart from her little accident with Mr. Gold’s mug during first hour, the day had been going well until her sixth hour class. Belle didn’t like to judge people based on appearances; she rather let a person’s character reveal their true selves. Well, Cruella De’vil (yes she had to note the irony that without the apostrophe it was “devil”) clearly had a reputation and she dressed the part. Her hair was two different shades—black and white—and her clothes were definitely designer brands, but it was the aura she gave off with her looking down her nose at everyone expression. Right away, Belle sensed the defiance in her when she made her announcement to put the cell phones away after the bell rang. It was practically radiating from her that Belle had the audacity to tell her what to do.

However, it appeared she had done what Belle requested. Once attendance was taken and introductions were made, Belle was passing out and explaining the classroom rules and procedures as well as expectations. It was then she noticed that Cruella was staring very intently at her purse on top of her desk. At first, Belle didn’t want to think she was doing what she thought she was doing. Yet it became apparent that Cruella was doing more than just staring at her Michael Kors purse. So, she made a point in walking close to her desk and she lightly tapped the edge, gesturing to Cruella to put the cell away and pay attention. The young girl glared at Belle but she did it. Now… not even five minutes passed and her cell was back in her hand, her thumbs texting away. The next step for Belle was to take it away since Cruella was clearly not going to do what she was told.

At the moment, the senior’s lips twisted into a challenging smirk.

“It’s my cell. I paid for it and I pay my bills. I don’t have to hand anything over to you.”
And like that... Belle could feel the eyes of all twenty-eight students on her back who were all waiting with abating breath on what she was going to do next. Now, again, her classes hadn’t trained Belle for this situation let alone the scenario if such a thing should arise. Common sense told her that as the teacher she made a simple request since the student was disrupting the class with her inattention and that Belle had to stop her explanation to handle this problem, which shouldn’t have been a problem.

Cruella could have waited to text, go through her email, check her Facebook updates, Twitter responses, Instagram photos, Snapchat uploads, and maybe squeeze a second or two for Face-Timing.

It wasn’t like the world would implode or Cruella would die if she didn’t check her phone every five seconds. She would still have a pulse for keeping the cell in her purse. So it shouldn’t have been a big deal to hand the phone to the teacher so the education could continue. Besides, she would get the damn thing back at the end of the hour.

However, Cruella wasn’t following common sense or reason. Why should she when the cell was her property and it was her choice to ignore the teacher? If anything, the teacher was making more of a fuss over it than she! Ms. French had the rest of the class to cater to not just Cruella. Allowing one student to have her way with the cell wasn’t some mortal sin. And it was just classroom rules, which it wasn’t like she hadn’t heard it all before. So she should let it go.

Now, Belle grew up respecting the authority. School was a place to learn, to become a better citizen, and to graduate into the real world. Grant it, cell phones weren’t prevalent when she was younger. In fact, Belle received her first cell in high school and it was used for emergencies only. It was a blue flip phone and had no texting ability. Those who had cells kept them in their lockers, pockets, purses, and backpacks. The cell phone had no place in the classroom. It was the unspoken rule that was understood.

Today… not so much. And the fact she would have to remind someone to do something that should have been a given (and let’s face it… cells do not belong in a room when class is in session) was ridiculous.

But Cruella waited as did the rest of the class and Belle was torn. If she grabbed it… What would happen? Cruella seemed the type who would literally fight for it, which could lead into a video being taped (on a cell no less) and uploaded on YouTube and later the news and who would want to hire someone with all that negative media attention? Even though Belle would be in the right, the student could spin an old wives’ tale that made her the villain and she could be removed before her student teaching began and then what?

Or… she takes the phone and gives Cruella a Saturday School for her insubordination and she learns her lesson. Or a parent calls to chew Belle out that she had no right to do what she did and they will tell the principal how terrible Belle was because what if there was an emergency and Cruella couldn’t call home or the parent couldn’t contact her?

Never mind the school has phones and a simple call could lead to the message being directly sent to the student. Oh no… The cell was a better option to use during school hours when the student should be working. But what does Belle know? She might not be a parent but she was a teacher and teachers apparently don’t know anything.

Or what if Belle decides to let Cruella keep her phone? Then she made a scene for no reason and the students will see they can get away with their cell phones being out. The classroom will become chaotic and how will she be able to teach them if they would rather be on their phones? That means the other rules won’t apply either and every day will be one fight after another over something…
Or what if Belle was wrong to take the phone? Principal Mills would be upset she broke the rule regarding technology use in the Code of Conduct—Oh Gods—why can’t she remember what the protocols were in this situation?

And Mr. Gold… he was sitting at his desk watching the exchange. What would he think if Belle overstepped her boundaries or failed to follow through? What was the right thing to do if common sense wasn’t prevailing?

She listened to her gut.

“Cruella,” Belle stated again sweetly but firmly. “If you were paying attention to the rules as I’ve been saying—you would realize I do have the right to hold your cell until the end of the hour. I gave you one warning already, which I stated I will do, but after a second infraction like right now I can take it. However, you do have the option to refuse; in that case, I’m sure Principal Mills will love to hear your excuse why blatantly disrespecting the rules and me as well as interrupting my time and that of your peers with this defiance is acceptable. And that will lead into a Saturday School detention, which I’m sure you don’t want. Or you can choose option #2 and hand me your phone with a warning call to your parents. So what’s it going to be?”

Belle had to contain her victorious cheer as Cruella turned off the cell and placed it in Belle’s open palm. Thanking her with a nod, Belle turned on her heel as the rest of the class faced forward for her to finish.

Mr. Gold gave her a pleased look as she set the cell on the desk.

“Job well done Ms. French,” he whispered. “Count this as a lucky win. The war isn’t over yet.”

And, yes, Belle knew that.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle vs. Cell phones Part 2. (Rated K)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Student Teacher

The day had been going well. Minds were being expanded with knowledge, a good discussion occurred with her normally quiet second hour, and she only had to remind a couple of kids to put their cell phones away.

Today was going so well, which meant something was bound to happen.

And it came in the shape of Mr. Greg Mendell and his two cellular devices. Yes… two.

The class had a reading assignment to do on *The Great Gatsby*, and while they read Belle walked around to monitor them. Unfortunately, she caught Greg texting beneath his desk.

Without saying a word (he already had his warning), she held out her hand expectantly but Greg had other ideas.

"Why do you want me to give you my cell? I’m not doing anything disruptive."

"Yes you are," she reminded him quietly. "You’re supposed to be reading the assigned chapters, not text. You know the rules Greg. Give me the phone and you’ll have it back by the end of the hour."

"I wasn’t doing anything bad! Everyone else is on their phones but you’re not taking theirs. Look! Killian has his out!"

Belle was certain that was probably true, but she wasn’t going to take the bait. "That doesn’t matter. Right now my concern is you and what you’re doing or lack thereof. Now will you give me your phone or will I have to notify the office?"

Grumbling, Greg gave it to her. Smiling brightly, she said, “That wasn’t so bad, was it? Now open the book and start reading."

She pocketed the phone until she returned to her desk and glanced over at Killian to see he wisely kept reading. Pleased that the situation was under control, Belle put the cell on her desk and sat down for a moment to rest her legs.

As soon as she did, she noticed that Greg’s book was not opened and his eyes were glued under the desk again. In his hands was another cell!

“Greg,” she said, this time tersely. “I took your phone away and now you’re using a friend’s phone? I don’t care how important you think this is or even if the President is trying to reach you… This is school and you have a job to do. Too bad you had to get your friend involved too.” She arched her
brow in Tamara’s direction, knowing how thick as thieves those two were. “I guess a Saturday School is in order now.”

“It’s not my phone Ms. French,” Tamara said, shaking her head.


Belle blinked. “You have two phones?”

“Yeah—one’s new and one’s old—but they’re mine. I gave you one already but I don’t have to give my other one. And I wasn’t texting. I was checking the time. And, look, I have my book opened now.”

He opened the cover to demonstrate his point, but Belle wasn’t having it. “It doesn’t matter Greg if you’re checking the time. I took your cell away and that should have been more of a clue on what not to do. Hand me the phone now.”

“You can’t!” he exclaimed. “You can’t take it when I’ve done nothing! Why do you pick on me Ms. French? I always do my work and you’re calling me out, even though I wanted to know what time it was? The other kids are doing the same thing!”

“Greg,” she repeated. “That’s enough. You’re old enough to know what’s right and what’s wrong. And you’re right… you’ve done absolutely nothing with your assigned work.”

“I don’t care! I have rights Ms. French! I have a right to use my cell whenever I want and you can’t take it away from me. Unless you want to give me the money for my bill this month—you can’t have it.”

She crossed her arms and raised her brow in an are-you-kidding-me? look.

Greg was sent down to see Mr. Gold in the English Department office sans phone number 2 to complete his assignment and to answer a pop quiz of the experienced teacher’s design for fifty points. Greg’s father was notified of the incident and the following week… Greg had no cell phone(s) at all.

Suffice to say, the time spent apart from his cell did result in twitchy hands and eyes but Greg still survived.

That week had been heavenly to Belle.

Chapter End Notes

That is pretty much the same conversation I had with my student and that was his argument. I did go on to explain to him that owning a cell phone is a privilege not a right and since there is no constitutional amendment that states it… he’s out of luck. Sadly… he didn’t lose his phones for a week. It was only 1 day and he pretty much pouted the entire time but he did get some work done—so victory! Unfortunately, he still has not learned his lesson and this has become something of a weekly thing when he is in school.
Moral of the story: kiddies… leave the cell alone and if a teacher asks you to hand the phone over because you’re not doing your work or what you’re supposed to do and you know that—JUST FREAKIN DO IT! It’s not an argument worth having because it’s not the phone that gets you into trouble; it’s the attitude.

Thank you! Had to get this out of my system.
1 A Long Fatal Love Chase Rated K+

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle longs to be free from her humdrum life when fate intervenes with a shocking proposal… (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own Once Upon a Time or A Long Fatal Love Chase. I’m borrowing the idea to mesh with Rumbelle!

I understand if some of you have not read this book by Louisa May Alcott, but if you ever get the chance… then you need to read this novel. As a head’s up it is nothing like Little Women or Little Men. Actually, this is a fun fact, but this was one of her earlier novels and was rejected due to its inappropriate content and implications with the characters. Of course, when I read this… this reminds me of something Jo March would have written. I will be taking pages from the actual plot to fit in with Rumbelle so if there’s something that seems out of character for Rumple… well, you need to read the novel to know the dark secrets of Philip Tempest. ;)

A Long Fatal Love Chase

A young, beautiful girl sat on the bench of her bay window, gazing out to the crashing waves of the ocean below. Hand placed upon her alabaster cheek, she sighed heavily and longed to be out there on the open sea with the promise of adventure in the air.

But pretty young ladies do not have adventures. Instead, they were porcelain dolls put on display for the entertainment of men and other members of good society. Young ladies do not have their own opinions, young ladies do not speak their minds, young ladies do not wear trousers, young ladies do not run, young ladies do not—

The list went on and Arabelle French wished she was born a boy. At least if she were a boy she would grow into a man and there would not be any limitations or restrictions on what she can and cannot do. She could live freely and say whatever she wanted to say and do whatever she wanted without someone disciplining her or telling her no.

Perhaps she was being wicked in cursing her lot. After all, God made her to be a woman and she should not be ungrateful, however, if she could only break down these stone walls of her Uncle’s house and sail away to a new land. It would certainly be much better than this dull existence and unjust laws. In fact, there was a yacht out yonder and Belle imagined herself going down to the dock and going aboard and leaving this place forever.

With another regretful exhale, she said aloud to the empty room: “I’d gladly sell my soul to Satan for a year of freedom.”
As soon as she uttered this soulful wish, the door to the library opened and her Uncle’s servant, Archibald, entered. Clearing his throat, he bid, “Your Uncle wishes to see you in his study, Miss.”

Belle cast one more longing look out the window and rose from her spot. She wondered what he wanted—probably another lecture about her behavior at the ball last Friday. It’s not her fault the music was flat and her dance partners were a bore.

When she arrived, her Uncle was sitting at his desk while another gentleman stood to the side, his back facing her. Uncle had his hands covering his face—a peculiar posture—and Belle wondered if something was wrong. Was his gout acting up again?

“Uncle?” she called. “You wanted to see me?”

His hands came down and she was struck by the queer look on his countenance. “Belle,” he rasped. “Please come closer.”

As she did, she tilted her head at the stranger, who serenely stood still and had not moved since she entered the room. He was dressed in the finest clothes in English fashion, his hair long and sleek, the dark mane streaked with gray. She could not see his face fully to judge his character.

Once she approached the desk, she finally saw the bags underneath her Uncle’s eyes and his unshaven chin and jaw. Uncle was always presentable looking in his appearance… no matter what. So for him to neglect his toilet… something dreadfully was wrong.

“Belle,” Uncle repeated, a little more clearly. “Allow me to introduce to you Tempus Gold. Mr. Gold, this is my niece, Arabelle French.”

“Milady,” Mr. Gold said, bowing his head. He raised his eyes to peer at her while he took her hand to his lips. He arched a thin brow as his lips stretched into a wry grin that immediately sent chills down her spine. She quickly noted that he possessed brown eyes with tiny specks of gold that danced within them—a very unusual feature, but there was something within their depths that she could not pinpoint what it was exactly. The irises darkened as she stared intently into them that in her innocence she did not recognize the blatant hunger within them. “It’s a pleasure to finally meet you.”

He was Scottish, the baritone in his voice rich and smooth like butter. The way his tongue rolled his “r’s” around the word pleasure had her removing her hand from his grasp quickly, his soft lips leaving behind a scorching trail on her cool flesh. Her swift movement only caused the crinkles in his eyes to glitter with amusement as he straightened his posture.

“Likewise,” she said, relieved her voice was steady and firm, not at all a jumble of mixed emotions whirling in her stomach. “Forgive me. Uncle, what is the meaning of this? Are you ill?”

“Belle… I—there’s something I need to tell you—I—“

“Please, allow me, Mr. Vivian to enlighten your curious niece,” Mr. Gold interjected, the ends of his mouth stretching wider in a disconcerting smirk. Uncle gave a stiff nod, averting his gaze, as Mr. Gold motioned for Belle to take a seat. Then he continued. “You see, dearie, your Uncle has a bit of a gambling problem. He racked up a pretty hefty debt… one that is proving to be very difficult for him to pay back, isn’t that so Mr. Vivian?”

Belle turned directly to her Uncle to see if what Mr. Gold said was true and the eerie silence that befell her Uncle only confirmed it was. This did not bode well and Belle felt a tightened hold in her breast. She knew he liked to play cards, but never knew it as a problem that Mr. Gold had so candidly revealed. Of course, she was puzzled by why she was summoned here in the first place. If
her Uncle was in debt like Mr. Gold claimed, then what did it mean for her?

“Yes, Miss French, I’m sorry to be the bearer of such unfortunate news, but alas, your Uncle did offer collateral in exchange for the wiping of his debt.”

“I don’t understand,” Belle said, looking at both men with confusion. “What collateral? Why was I called here?”

Mr. Gold paused to let her Uncle respond, but the older man continued his refusal to look at his niece. Taking a deep breath, Mr. Gold looked at her squarely in the eyes. “You’re the collateral, dearie,” he informed her.

“What?”

“It was you or dear old Uncle Vivian had to pay the Piper some other way.”

She whipped her head at her Uncle, and this time the old coward finally looked at her… his guilt was clear as day. “I’m sorry Belle. I had no choice. I’m—“

“Well, now that the nasty part of our business has been conducted,” Mr. Gold went on, never skipping a beat in his indifferent inflection. “The final transaction needs to be concluded. We will leave tomorrow at sunrise—“

“Who says I will go with you?” Belle demanded, jumping to her feet immediately. She was petite in stature and only met Mr. Gold at mid-chest, but the infuriating spark in her blue eyes gave her a great height as she glared hard at this fiend. “How dare you treat me like some piece of property! You don’t make this kind of decision without consulting the person first! Am I not a human being capable of feeling? For you to be so presumptuous to make such a deal, to take advantage of a poor man’s folly, is absolutely atrocious sir! It’s criminal! It’s monstrous! It’s—!”

“Hold your tongue niece!” Her Uncle snapped, slamming his fist on the desk. “It has been decided.”

“No.” She refused to accept it. “You’re selling your flesh and blood Uncle for your convenience. This is not my sin I have committed. I should not be subjected to your impulsive nature! How can you be so cruel Uncle?”

“Girl,” her Uncle barked, shakily rising to his feet. “This is the last time you will be defiant! The contract has been signed and you will leave with Mr. Gold tomorrow morning at sunrise. Go pack your belongings. Now!”

Standing resolutely, Belle didn’t budge at the command. Not until she had the last words on the matter. Levelling her Uncle with an icy glare, she clenched her jaw. “No one decides my fate but me. As of right now, I am not leaving this manor and no one can make me. Good day gentleman!”

She turned sharply on her heels, the skirt of her dress swishing at her ankles. Belle tossed a similar glare of rage at the stranger before striding out of the room without another sound, leaving the two men alone.

Mr. Gold pressed his lips together to keep them from splitting into a smile. This niece of Vivian’s… this Arabelle French had spirit, a heart of fire, and a bold tongue that knew how to slice a man in half. She was certainly… intriguing.

“Mr. Gold, you must forgive my niece’s outburst. She always been strong willed… a fatal mistake on my sister and brother-in-law’s part. She will learn her place, I assure you. She will not be any
trouble.”

“I’ve been thinking, Mr. Vivian,” Mr. Gold said slowly, tapping his chin in thought. “I’ve never been the sort to force a woman into compliance. There is something rather discomfiting about the business.”

“What do you mean? You agreed to take her!”

“Indeed. But I’ve a change in heart, Mr. Vivian. I will have your niece as payment, make no mistake about it, but I think I shall extend my visit for the time being. I certainly wish to make more of her acquaintance.”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Tempus Gold stays at the manor and as he gets to know Belle… he offers her a deal she can’t refuse. (Rated T)

A Long Fatal Love Chase

Sunlight started to trickle through the window and Belle stubbornly watched the sun rise. She hadn’t slept a wink all night long nor did she pack her belongings like her Uncle Vivian ordered her to do. She wasn’t going and no one could make her leave not unless they had to drag her out. Even then she wouldn’t go without a fight; she’d kick and bite if she must.

To her surprise, no one came to her room to retrieve her.

She waited a couple of hours more before venturing to the sun room for breakfast. She was astonished to find Mr. Gold sitting at the table already with a newspaper in hand and a simple meal of toast and fruit lay out along with a pot of tea. He looked mighty cozy, as if he was at home, and the sight of his familiarity ignited her ire. Who was this man? What gave him the right to waltz into her Uncle’s home, demand her as payment, and now eat their food and enjoy the comforts? Well… she had something to say about that. Once she was through with him, he will have no choice but to cut off his ears to keep her voice from ringing in them.

Belle was prepared to speak—her chin drooping for the first syllable—but before she could make a sound… her foot stepped on a creak in the floor, immediately alerting Mr. Gold of the intruder. He lifted his gaze and grinned when he saw it was her. Swiftly, her jaw snapped shut and every vehement and insulting word she wanted to say vanished once his face was fully revealed to her. She didn’t realize how handsome he was— the light must have been harsh that she imagined the horrible, hideous smile. Now, he was smiling broadly at her and it seemed to light up his features in a warm, friendly way. Not an ounce of deceit or trouble marked his countenance, but only openness and sincerity that Belle had to rethink if what she witnessed last night was real or a nightmare.

Her confusion clearly visible, she wasn’t sure what to do or what to say to this strange man. Sensing her internal conflict, Mr. Gold folded his paper in half and set it on the table and motioned for her to sit down. “Good morning Miss French. Or is it all right for me to call you Belle? You may call me Tempus if you like. Please… do sit down and help yourself. The fruit is extra ripe and sweet.”

“Mr. Gold,” Belle emphasized. “What are you doing?”

“I’m having breakfast,” he answered evidently. “Do sit. You must be hungry after that emotional evening.”

So it had been real. She hadn’t dreamt it at all. Yet, she wouldn’t give him the satisfaction in following his wishes and stubbornly remained standing. “Mr. Gold, I was very clear about my position about this sordid deal of yours with my Uncle. I am not going with you and I want you to leave these premises at once. Your stay is no longer welcome regardless what my Uncle has promised you.”
He chuckled. “My… You are quite forward. It’s refreshing to say the least.”

“Do not tempt me sir!” Belle scowled. “I shall call Archibald and have you removed forcibly if I must.”

“I have no doubt you will,” he replied with an amused curl of his lip. “Fear not dearie. The deal is off. I will not be collecting you as collateral after all.”

That took her aback. The… deal was off? She wasn’t going with him?

“I see you’re confused, understandably so, and I do apologize about my beastly behavior. I hope you accept it for it was never my intention to force you to my will or anything. I was under the impression that such a deal was known to you beforehand and that you were willing to leave this place. Your Uncle has expressed it several times how you have told him you wanted to be gone from here. Forgive my impertinence.”

“I-I don’t understand,” she faltered. “I mean, yes, I have and I do want to leave, but not in the context that you were suggesting.”

He nodded solemnly. “A misunderstanding. It is all right, my dear. No harm done.”

“But didn’t hear her and had his paper opened again and was silently reading that Belle backed out of the room and retreated to her bedroom. Little did she know he was smirking behind the paper.

xxx

The next couple of days were spent in wary caution as Belle was not sure what to make of this Tempus Gold. She could not identify his intentions or why his prolonged presence in her Uncle’s home. It was obvious that her Uncle did not want him here, but he did not make any attempts to have Mr. Gold leave. Maybe he was too afraid of him? Maybe his hospitality was at the expense for ensuring the deal was off. But what sway did this man have over her Uncle? What about him was so frightening?

The more she saw of Mr. Gold, the more her curiosity grew. He could be quite an imposing figure and those unworldly eyes of his certainly helped the image, yet everything else about his demeanor and manners have been cordial. She wasn’t sure what to make of his character—for he seemed to be contradictory ever since that first night—so when she found herself whenever in his company, she was willful and uncivil towards him. She expected her rudeness would have him respond accordingly (a true look into his nature), but he kept a calm and polite exterior.

He was an enigma that puzzled her exceedingly.

Then one day he told her about his yacht (The Dark One) and his many travels he had on it. It was the very same yacht she saw anchored outside the library window and right before Archibald informed her of her summoning to Uncle’s study. However, she focused on his stories and the wondrous descriptions of the countries and people he had visited and met. It was like reading from one of her books and she let it slipped her curiosity about the yacht. She had never been on one before or any other boat that Mr. Gold suggested a tour.

Her heart leapt at the opportunity but her head was suspicious. Could it be a ploy to get her aboard so he could steal her away? Mr. Gold had assured her the deal was over and even her Uncle confirmed it… but Belle couldn’t help her guarded doubts. She didn’t know him that well and he could very well possess a double nature.
Her hesitance seemed to have wounded him, and he sincerely looked hurt when she voiced her concern.

“I know I haven’t given you good reason to trust me, but I hoped that our time spent together (as short as it were) would have at least provided some insight to my character. I have no intentions of kidnapping you Belle. You have my word as a gentleman. All I wish is to show you *The Dark One* and perhaps take a spin around the harbor. I will return you but if you have reservations… then you’re welcome to bring a servant along.”

Belle did feel guilty after the honesty in his diction, but it was true. She did not trust him, especially when he continued to ignore her wishes for formalities.

She did take him on his offer for the tour, and to be on the safe side, she did bring a servant with her. Her maid and friend, a mere slip of a girl and mousy-like, Ashley Boyd trailed behind her and Mr. Gold as they boarded *The Dark One*. Upon seeing the nervous maid, Mr. Gold wasn’t as upset as she thought he might be given his little speech. He shook his head, muttering some nonsense to himself, and gave Belle a tiny smirk.

Whatever the meaning was for the smirk she could not fathom but she refused to let it bother her. If bringing Ashley was a sign of her lack of trust and faith in him—so be it. She will not perjure herself for the sake of his feelings.

The tour had been wonderful and the yacht was certainly luxurious. Belle could picture herself living on one like this, sailing across Europe, without a worry or a care. She could see the places she had read about and come back with her own tales of adventures to regale. The fantasy was aided when Mr. Gold instructed his man, Dove, to set the sail and they moved through the harbor—just like he promised. The wind ruffled her hair, the spray of the water felt like magic upon her skin… she wanted to keep sailing forever.

Sadly, the trip ended too soon and she quickly masked her disappointment so not to give Mr. Gold the wrong impression. The last thing she wanted was for him to pursue her and use this as a form of blackmail to convince her to go away with him.

xxx

A month had passed. Was it possible for such a thing to happen so quickly? Belle couldn’t count the last time that a phenomenon like time moving too fast in her Uncle’s home happened. And it was all thanks to Tempus Gold.

He was still staying with her and her Uncle; an occurrence she was becoming used to. When he will leave (for he had to, he couldn’t stay forever), Belle was at a loss for what will happen next. She was growing fond of him in a way she hadn’t anticipated and to even think about his departure was disheartening.

When did this happen? How could she let such a man worm his way into her heart and kind thoughts?

Belle had figured it had to have been that afternoon spent on *The Dark One* that began the change of heart. She saw Mr. Gold as he was—raw and uncensored—a man free in his life when the yacht coursed through the water. He was at his element as he ordered Dove about the premises and he handled the wheel like an expert, almost becoming one with the ship. Then he handed the steer to her and Belle closed her eyes… recalling the surge of power as she gripped the handle, being the Master as she commanded the direction to head in. It was intoxicating… this feeling. Her spirit was roaring in pleasure as she steered the yacht through the waves and Mr. Gold! Mr. Gold was there, behind
her, supporting her, his chest pressing into her, the heat radiating from him with his breath in her ear, his Scottish bur vibrating her senses…

“Gulliver’s Travels? An excellent book I must say.”

Belle snapped out of her daydream, quite flushed, when the man she was thinking so strongly about was now standing in front of her. She couldn’t help the slight thrill that ran through her veins while the same time she feared her heart pounding wildly would somehow be overheard.

“I like it so far,” she said smoothly, a contrast to her jumbled nerves.

“Aye. One of my favorites I must admit.” Mr. Gold’s piercing eyes were on her and Belle did her best to quell her features lest she betray herself. “Of course, I cannot figure out why you are still here in this dreary place.”

“Sir?”

“It’s obvious you’re unhappy here, dearie. My suspicions were confirmed on The Dark One, but I did not want to mention it to you in case I was wrong and it was my overactive imagination thinking it was so.”

Her breath was stuck in her throat at his words. “O-Oh?”

He sighed. “Belle, I’m not very good at this. Even at my age you would think a man would find the right words to speak his heart’s desires, but I’m afraid that is false.”

She watched as he came to stand in front of her, his hands clasped behind him. His countenance was open for her to read and she was stunned to find insecurity lurking within his eyes. This could not be the same man she had met a month ago! Mr. Gold was usually confident and arrogant at times, but she never seen him look so vulnerable. Then there was his last statement about heart’s desires… surely he could not be referring to her!

“I have a confession I must confess and afterwards… it’s up to you to decide what happens here and out. You once accused me of making a deal for a stranger, a person I have never met, as payment to wipe away a debt. While I am guilty for making the deal, it’s not true that I did it for a stranger. We met once… or I should say it was I who saw you. It was at a ball and you were on the dance floor with some strapping young man. What caught my attention about you was the look of utter misery. No one else seemed to notice it, but I did and for the life of me… I wanted to know what in the world could have put such agony on a lovely palate. I did not approach you; I could not, not with all those suitors vying for your dance card. I made some inquiries and discovered you were Vivian’s niece. I have known the man for some time in our circle and I did remember he had adopted his niece after her parents had died.

“I found him at the cards table and after a couple of hours… his tongue became loose from the spirits he was drinking and told me a lot about you. He told me how you vexed him so much with your impertinent opinions and unladylike behaviors and pursuits. He had expressed his discontent at your unwillingness for courtship and how you were refusing any man who dared to show interest. However, despite your obstinacy, he told me how you long to leave his home for adventure. Getting married, unfortunately, takes away from that wish since you have no choice but to settle and start a home and family. And since you do not share the same ideas as society does… I found it rather refreshing for another to think as I do. I sensed we were kindred souls Belle, which was why I was drawn to you immediately. I knew your sadness because it was the same sadness I felt as a young lad.
“Instead of coming forward as an interested paramour, I decided to pursue you in secret and with cunning. I figured you would respond with interest as opposed to those unimaginative fools. Whenever I could… I gambled alongside your Uncle. I knew his weaknesses and exploited them for my devising. When he racked up too much debt it was only a matter of time before I could convince him to give you up. I didn’t have to hint too much for he automatically suggested taking you from him. He knew he couldn’t make you happy and if he could get you married to someone… then you will no longer be a burden to him. Of course, once he realized what that meant… he did become remorseful and wanted to change the deal. Confronting you about it was no easy task for him but your Uncle was a coward and he could not handle the pressure.”

“Yet you changed your mind…”

“I did,” he admitted. “When we spoke face-to-face, I realized I was the fool. I could not continue this farce and told your Uncle that his debt would be forgiven as long as I could stay here and court you on my terms. He accepted wholeheartedly and here we are now.”

“You orchestrated this whole ordeal just to court me?” Belle said incredulously.

“Aye.”

She didn’t know what to think. It was cruel and mean and at the same time… she was awed by this man’s humility to admit the faults in his plan and be contrite. Yet the lengths he took all because of her… to get to know her… Belle was oddly flattered. It was true she did refuse many a suitor mainly because they were dull and boring and did not understand her wishes. Then this man comes in and turned her world upside down. He courted her in a way she never saw coming and instead of feeling upset about it… she was touched.

“I understand if my ploy disgusts you,” Mr. Gold said when the silence stretched on. “I do feel horrible about it. But I cannot regret that it bought me time to spend with you and get to know you Belle. If you wish, I would still love to take you on The Dark One and see the world. I can arrange it with your Uncle so I would be your chaperone and guardian on this journey to avoid any ill words against your reputation. However, my wish is that you will join me as my wife. But you do not wish it… then I will not pressure you. I can be your friend and confidante if you rather I am not your lover. All I ask is that you reconsider.”

Belle was flabbergasted with Mr. Gold’s heart on his sleeve. He… wanted to marry her? And he was still willing to take her away even if she does not accept to be his wife? She wasn’t sure what to make of this apparent news, but it was so heartfelt and it was the chance she always wanted… However, she could not concede just yet. With all the trouble he took to get to this point… well, it was clearly an unconventional type of courting. They might as well continue this path.

“Do you play chess Mr. Gold?”

“Excuse me?” His eyebrows raised indicated that was not what he expected her to say.

Belle couldn’t help but smirk. “I asked if you play chess.”

“I do.”

“I propose a deal then,” she said. “We will play a game of chess and that will determine our fates. If I win, then I will go with you but we will travel like brother and sister for a year. Afterwards, you will restore me to my Uncle’s keeping.”

“Aye,” he said, nodding. “And what do I get if I win?”
“I will go with you as your wife,” she replied. “Do you agree with those terms?”

Mr. Gold grinned. “Aye.”

“Very well,” Belle said. “Let’s play, shall we?”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: A year has gone by and Belle and Gold are happily married, living on his yacht in the Mediterranean until Belle uncovers a dark secret of her husband’s… (Rated T)

A Long Fatal Love Chase

It had been a year of bliss since Belle married Tempus Gold. She would never admit it aloud but she was always grateful that he had won the game of chess. And how grand life has been on aboard Tempus’ yacht, The Dark One, and travelling to so many places in a short time. Belle had never been this happier in her life and she had her husband to thank for freeing her from her drab existence.

However, all that happiness didn’t eclipse the sinking feeling in her chest when the night before revealed something terrible about her husband. Even now, Belle was in a state of disbelief, but she replayed the conversation over and over in her head and each time she realized how little she really knew him.

It had been late… close to midnight when Belle was awakened by a sobbing woman. Her husband was not in bed and curiosity got the best of her as she wrapped herself in her robe and tiptoed onto the deck. She didn’t make her presence known, keeping to the shadows, and what she heard had horrified and stunned her.

The woman… she was pleading to Tempus to see her son—*their son*—and she would not be silent anymore if he refused. At first, Belle wondered if this was the delusion of a madwoman, but Tempus’ swift refusal and his anger that she invaded his privacy when the terms of their agreement was quite specific, led Belle to believe that what she spoken was true. Tempus had been married once and he never told her. He had a son and never told her.

Belle wasn’t naïve to think she was Tempus’ first and only, but why would he keep his previous marriage a secret? Even though she barely knew the history with this other woman, there was something in her tone that gave Belle pause. Desperation. That woman acted like she hadn’t seen her son in years, and how he laughed at her! That hideous, horrid laughter that sent shivers down Belle’s spine.

That hadn’t been her loving husband. That had been a beast, a monster savoring the anguished sobs of a mother longing for a glimpse of her child.

Other questions sprung to her mind: who was this woman? What happened between her and Tempus? Where was the son? Why did Tempus keep them separated in the first place?

Her heart reasoned her husband must have had justification for such drastic actions, but her mind could not wrap around the cruelty of the predicament. It did not seem like him, however, why else was this woman here in the middle of the night?

Belle had to see who her former rival was and under the cover of darkness… she was able to peek at the two. The woman was disguised in a long cloak but there was no denying her husband standing in front of her. Belle watched in hushed fascination as the woman once more tried to placate his good
“Please! I beg of you… one look is all I ask and I’ll be gone. Haven’t I upheld our deal all these years? I never once told anyone about your dealings or about Hordor. I held my tongue as you went about with your life as I have done with mine. He is my son too and I wish to see him.”

“Is that so, dearie?” Then to Belle’s abject horror, Tempus grasped the woman by the throat. At once, the woman began to claw at his arm and reach for his face, but he kept her at bay to avoid any injury to his visage. “Listen to me carefully you little bitch. I married you to salvage what little reputation you had left. I gave you a comfortable home but you couldn’t help yourself, could you? You had to let that insufferable curiosity get the best of you and I granted you release from our vows as long as I keep the boy. You had your freedom and your life. Now you come back and demand to see him?!”

He flung her to the ground as she gasped for air. “Well, dearie, I’m afraid that is impossible.”

“What do you mean? Tempus! What do you mean?” she asked frantically and hysterically as she struggled to her feet.

“Good evening Madam. I want you off my yacht and never to come back again or show your face in this village ever again. If you do… I won’t hesitate in killing you.”

That seemed to do the trick as the woman, still in a fit of despair, ran off into the night. Belle, fearing what her husband might do if he caught her eavesdropping on this personal affair, fled back into the cabin and into the bedroom. She kept her body relaxed as she feigned sleep when he crawled in beside her.

Feeling ill to her stomach, Belle ran over the edge and let out several dry heaves. Her head was spinning as she pressed her forehead to the cool metal of the railing. None of this made sense, and yet… and yet…

So far Belle kept silent all morning long and forced pretty smiles and clever puns to distract Tempus from ever discovering she had overheard his late-night conversation. Part of her was trying to convince herself she misunderstood the whole situation, but the truth was… she couldn’t bring herself to shatter her paradise just yet. She longed to live in the bliss that ignorance provided, though for how long could she keep up the charade until her conscience got the best of her?

Tempus’ valet and manservant, Dove, found her draped over the rail and cleared his throat. “Mrs. Gold? Are you well?”

Belle choked back a derisive snort. Standing up, she put on what she hoped was a convincing smile. “Quite well Dove. I saw some gorgeous fish swimming that’s all.”

He gave a short nod. Always a man of little words but his stoic expression did not betray his thoughts. Whether or not he believed her was difficult to discern, but she hoped he did and would not report to his Master about the Mistress being ill.

“They’re gone now. A predator must have chased them off.” Stepping away from the railing, Belle laced her fingers together. “I think I shall go into town. Dove, could you fetch Ignatius for me?”

“I’m afraid I cannot,” Dove replied softly in his deep timber. “Ignatius has disappeared.”

“Dis-disappeared?” she repeated. “When? Why?” Ignatius was a dear boy of fourteen years and Tempus’ servant. Of course, the boy was treated far more kindly and practically like family with fine clothes and a decent education. He was a fine companion for the young Mrs. Gold and both she and
her husband were very fond of him. For Ignatius to have disappeared… it was heart-wrenching and difficult to bear.

“I don’t know why milady. Master is beside himself.”

Indeed, Tempus must be. Pushing aside her earlier musings about his secrets, Belle went in search of her husband. He was nowhere on the yacht and just as she donned her shawl and hat to look for him, Tempus returned. His clothes were disheveled and hair was in wild disarray as he walked past his wife and into the cabin.

His countenance had a queer expression on and Belle frowned. Following him inside, she watched as he stood in front of the window and gazed out at the sea. “Tempus… Dove told me—is it true? Has Ignatius disappeared?”

“Run off is more like it,” he replied emotionlessly. “Ungrateful child. He must have snuck off in the early hours. I should have known something was wrong when he didn’t come for breakfast. I tried looking… no one has seen him.”

“But—the police. We should call them; alert them that he is missing. And the three of us should go out and keep searching—“

“No, my love. It would be pointless,” he sighed in resignation.

“What do you mean Tempus?”

“Before we were married, Ignatius used to run away on a daily basis. He always returned, mind you, but I thought those days were behind us after all these months.” Shaking his head in defeat, Tempus went on. “Alas, I was wrong. Ignatius is back to his old tricks. Fear not my love. He will return when he’s ready.”

“But… why would he do this? We have never given him reason to be unhappy.”

“No but he is a teenage boy. He probably seen some girl in town and took a fancy towards her and is playing Romeo. I would not worry. Ignatius will be back before dinnertime and he will have some grand tale to share with us. You’ll see.”

But he didn’t.

Nor did he show up the next day.

Dove and Tempus were nonplussed over the ordeal and kept insisting that Ignatius was having his fun and will come back once he’s ready. The two men were quite confident on the matter, but Belle felt otherwise. Something didn’t sit right with her and it was too coincidental that Ignatius ran away after the mysterious late-night visitor came aboard *The Dark One*.

Were the two connected in some way? If so… did that mean Ignatius was Tempus and this woman’s son?

None of it made sense to her. Why would her husband assign his son as a servant, instead of acknowledging him? Grant it, their treatment towards Ignatius wasn’t common for most servants and Tempus always had an affectionate glint in his eye for the boy. But why the secrecy? Was Ignatius’ birth a scandal or did his mother have an ill-reputed life? Tempus did allude to her unsavory lifestyle and was it a cover-up to protect his reputation and the boy’s? Or just Tempus?

He never cared much for society’s good opinion so why would he bother to hide the boy’s paternity?
The whole ordeal was driving her insane and Belle couldn’t remain silent for long. She had to know the truth.

Finding her courage, Belle was prepared to confront the man she loved until she overheard him speaking to Dove. It was obvious both men believed her to be asleep and her husband’s distinctive voice asked Dove if his request had been fulfilled.

“Yes Master. No one will find him. I made certain of it.”

“Good. We must be quick. I do not want my wife to fret if she wakes to find her husband missing.”

There was no doubt left in her mind who the “him” Dove was referring to and feared it was truly Ignatius.

There was little choice left but to confirm if her suspicions were accurate. So she waited until both men departed before she took off and followed their tracks. There was no denying the sense of danger in the air as she followed her husband and his servant into a field of overgrowth where she hid among the bushes and tall grass.

The moon provided little light but just enough that Belle could make out the shape of both men as Dove led Tempus to a particular spot. She saw her husband nod his approval and turned around, giving Belle the space she needed to see exactly what it was.

What she saw was a sight so terrifying that she clasped her hand over her mouth to keep from crying out. In the midst of the field was a fresh mound of dirt that looked very much like a grave!
A Long Fatal Love Chase

Chapter Summary

Prompt: After finding the grave, Belle runs away from her husband in fear. Four months have passed and Belle has started a new life for herself, but she makes another startlingly discovery about Tempus Gold. (Rated M)

A Long Fatal Love Chase

She had been on the run for several months from her husband. It was hard to believe (and accept) that Tempus was a murderer and that he killed his own son, but witnessing his acts of cruelty to the boy’s mother… she dared not risk her life if ever found out that she knew the truth.

She took whatever little money she had and found refuge in Paris. Belle longed to return to England to her uncle, but there was no way she could endanger him if Tempus found her. A new life was her only solution.

Now, Belle was called Rose and she worked as a seamstress assistant. It wasn’t much but she had wages and a roof over her head until she could decide her next move. However, Belle grew to love the quaint lifestyle and meager salary just as she grown to adore the Widow Lucas and her granddaughter, Ruby.

She felt no danger and she felt confident that her tracks were covered so Tempus would never find her.

One evening, Belle returned from an errand. She was alone in the apartment above the shop with Mrs. Lucas away volunteering at the church and Ruby having dinner with a nice young man. Her friend had been waiting for him to court her and Belle was anxious to hear how it went, knowing how happy it made Ruby.

Going to her room (which she shared with Ruby), Belle removed her shawl and tossed it on the foot of her bed. Grabbing a matchstick, she struck it and lit the candle on the vanity. As she glanced to look at her reflection she saw a figure behind her, lounging in the rocking chair.

Spinning around, Belle was ready to scream but the figure was no other than Tempus Gold himself!

“My Belle,” he purred, standing up. “I finally found you! Gave me quite a fright when you took off—almost gave up hope in finding you. Look at you… still as lovely as ever.”

“How?” she stammered. “How did you find me?”

“Ah, dearie… did you not know that I have friends everywhere? All I had to do was spread the word and it wasn’t long before someone found a girl matching your description. Of course, not to say I had my share of false tips. This one was quite convincing so I personally had to come to see for myself. And here you are…”

“Tempus,” Belle whispered. “I had no choice! You gave me no choice! I know what you did to Ignatius and I know about the woman who came to you late at night. You tossed her out and then you killed her son, your son!”
“Ah, yes. Milah. I thought by changing Bae’s name and keeping him as one of my servants would do the trick and prevent her from finding him. Alas I was wrong.”

“Do you deny it?” she demanded. “That you murdered your flesh and blood?”

“Did I?” he asked. “Did you see the body?”

“I didn’t have to! I saw the grave!”

“Indeed. Quite tragic is it not?”

Her jaw dropped. How could he be so blasé when there was an innocent dead and buried? For no purpose whatsoever, except to spite a former lover? Worse of all… he wasn’t defending himself! It only confirmed her suspicions and that she was in the right to leave him like she did. But now that she confessed to knowing his crime… what was he going to do to her?

“I’m not going back,” she told him. “There is nothing you can do or say that will change my mind. If you leave now, then I won’t alert the gendarme and I’ll forget this ever happened. You have my word I will not reveal your sins as long as you leave me in peace.”

“Now, why in the world would I want to do that?” he questioned. “Not when this little chase was so thrilling.” His lips curled as his eyes bore into hers and for the first time… Belle was struck by how sinister her husband truly was in his nature and how everything she thought she knew was a lie. He really was the devil incarnate. “You forget my love. You promised me forever and we will have forever.”

“No! I promised that to the man I loved! The man I was tricked into knowing so well! I do not know you sir. Not this fiend!”

He chuckled darkly. “Belle, my sweet, innocent and pure Belle… You forget I was a fiend when we first met or have you already forgotten how I coerced your uncle into giving me you?”

She shook her head as he began to move closer to her. “Go away! I’ll scream!”

“No you won’t,” he told her. “Despite what you say, you love me as I love you. You cannot stand to see me hurt or arrested.”

Digging her nails into the vanity, Belle kept herself stiff as he reached for her and placed a tender palm against her cheek. Damn him! He was right and she knew it. She could not bear to see him incarcerated, but if only he would show some repentance for his crime!

Bringing his face closer to hers, he inhaled deeply her scent as his brown eyes darkened in lust. “God!” he said hoarsely. “I forgot how delicious you smell!”

He dipped his nose back to the juncture of her neck and shoulder, his hot breath tickling her flesh as he placed a kiss in that sensitive spot of hers. Belle shook uncontrollably, squeezing her eyes shut as her body reacted on impulse. This could not happen! He was evil and she should scream now with his unwanted advances… but as he pressed his body ever more closer to her... the familiarity of his heat and masculine scent made her knees weaken and her lower belly coiling with need. Damn him! He knew! The bastard knew how he could affect her with nary a touch.

She tensed even more so as his fingers trailed up along her side, past her breast, until he cupped her face with both hands. She felt his lips inches away now, his ragged breathing a promise that his kiss will devour her. Yet, he had not moved to claim her while the anticipation had her heart pounding so loudly in her ears that she was certain he could hear it.
In her mind’s eye, she could see Tempus smiling in that slow, languid way of his; the tips of his white teeth baring in that wolfish glint of his, knowing he could make her come undone with a searing look. Compelled to look, her lashes flickered and she gasped when her vision proved to be true. He was grinning all right in that arrogant twist of his and the golden specks in his irises were more pronounced, practically hypnotizing the girl on the spot.

Tempus Gold wasn’t just a man—there was something supernatural about him and those large, luminous eyes…

Lightly, gently, he caressed her lips; a slow coaxing that gradually became playful as he sucked her bottom lip into his mouth, and then released it through his teeth. Over and over he continued his slow simmering seduction, bringing her guard down bit by bit with each nip and tug. Finally, her body sagged against his; a defeat that he victoriously declared by adding more pressure to her mouth, then with his tongue as he expertly traced and licked before sliding in and tangling with hers.

His fingers were full with her breasts, his thumbs rubbing circles against the material in that same maddening caress as his kisses, but never giving her what she craved as she felt her nipples hardened. Instead, he trailed further down until he could grab the ends of her dress and began pulling it up.

As soon as the air hit her bare legs it was enough to wake Belle from her trance. There was no doubt in her mind what he was intending to do now, and her head rebel the idea of coupling with this beast. But she was trapped against him and the bureau behind her. There was nowhere for her to go as she push her legs together, in hopes of preventing him from continuing this path.

He seemed to expect it but he did not let go of her as his kisses became demanding and intense, selfishly taking and plundering her mouth with all the mastery he possessed. It wasn’t long that she unconsciously parted her legs and his hand dove underneath, his fingers brushing the undergarment aside to rub her mound.

“Aha,” Tempus said, gloating as he slid his fingers back and forth between her nether lips before withdrawing and showing them in front of her. The candlelight revealed her shame as her arousal glistened on those sinful digits making her face flush with humiliation. “Despite what you proclaim, my love, this contradicts all. You love the sinner even though you despised the sin. You crave me as I crave you. Does that make you depraved like me? Wanting when there is so much ugliness between us?”

Belle trembled underneath his raspy voice, his brogue becoming heavier with each word spoken. If she were to speak in reply… she knew her voice would be just as rough as his and she would have little choice but to capitulate. She had to be strong, hang onto her resolve. She could not let him win.

When she failed to respond a flicker of disappointment flashed in his eyes. “Well, dearie,” he started, plopping his fingers in his mouth and moaning at the ambrosia touching his tongue. Belle felt herself turned scarlet but did not avert her gaze as he pulled them out and braced himself on either side of her. “This certainly has been a night of revelations. I bid you adieu.”

He moved away from her, turning to walk towards the door. Belle stared at his back in gaping disbelief as her chest heaved with each breath she took. “Y-y-you’re leaving?” she sputtered, inwardly cursing at how breathless and desperate she sounded.

Tempus paused and looked over his shoulder. “Isn’t it obvious my Belle? This chase… we can quite agree was very exciting. You were waiting for me to capture you and you cannot deny that you enjoyed it. As I see it, there is something to be said about this situation. So, yes, I am leaving you—for now. We both know you won’t stay here any longer. You will run and I will pursue you. And I
promise the reward of finding you again will certainly be as delicious as this.”

He winked at her and closed the door, leaving Belle alone and cold and very, very aroused.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: After the revealing and arousing last visit from her husband, Belle packs up and leaves Paris. She finds herself in a convent but the devil lurks at every corner, especially when she befriends a handsome thief. (Rated M)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

A Long Fatal Love Chase

It was wrong! It was oh so wrong! How she could have let him get to her in such a way? She should have screamed! She should have called for help and the fiend would have been arrested and she could safely return home to her uncle…

But she didn’t and Belle only had herself to blame. That and her betraying body. Oh… he knew exactly how to wrap her around his finger and she played for him just the way he wanted. And to add to her greater shame and regret… Belle had to seek her own relief. It was deplorable and sinful, and with reddened cheeks she used her fingers to find that delicious release. However, such pleasure could not be enjoyed or savored as Belle quickly plotted her new escape.

Despite what Tempus thought, this wasn’t a game she was playing. She really wanted to stay away from him. She only prayed that the next time he wouldn’t find her and expose her as a fraud to her feelings. Regardless of how her body ached for him… Belle reminded herself that her “husband” was an adulterer, a bigamist, a murderer, and Gods know what else! He was a bad man. Evil. The devil incarnate. She could not fall prey to his salacious charms.

Packing her belongings as few as they were, Belle grabbed her cloak and suitcase and left the room. She didn’t leave a note to the Lucas’s, partially out of fear that it would somehow wind up in Tempus’ grasp. She just prayed that they would understand her abrupt absence.

Now, under the guise of midnight, Belle was able to steal quietly away. She did not know where she was heading, but she kept her chin up and her eyes ahead. Wherever the winds take her, Belle hoped it would keep her husband at bay.

xxxxxx

It took her a couple months and a few missed close calls with Tempus that Belle eventually found her way in the good graces of the sisters at St. Meissa. She owed many thanks to her friend Mulan, a talented actress she had met on the road, who disguised her as a boy. It was this clever and ingenious costume that Belle was able to slip under the nose of her vigilant husband and his manservant. Although, the disguise was too good that Mother Superior nearly turned her away until Belle removed her cap and shook her curls loose to prove she was indeed a girl. As soon as the misunderstanding was cleared up, Belle was immediately welcomed into the fold as a poor soul in need of sanctuary.

Her first night spent in the convent was the first night of uninterrupted slumber she had since her
journey. Nightmares dared not plague her in this place of tranquility and Belle believed she at last found the freedom she had been searching.

Upon the next morning, Mother Superior brought her new clothes and she soon joined the rest of the other sisters in their gowns of black. At first, some of the older sisters were not as welcoming towards the newcomer. Arriving in the dead of night in boy clothing did not bode well; however, Belle did not let their intolerance bother her. Instead, she allowed her character to speak on her behalf and focused on her prayers and meditation along with any chores assigned to her. It did not take long for the sisters to realize that Belle had a heart of compassion and kindness, and her dedication to the rules and lifestyle of the sisterhood proved she was one of them.

To them, she was Sister May and even though her appearance was shrouded in mystery… there was no question or doubt that God sent her there for a reason. The only ones who knew enough of the truth were Mother Superior and Sister Astrid. The latter was a young nun like she with a soul as pure as gold. She had been the first to befriend Belle her first day and since then they became inseparable companions.

The next six months were spent in bliss as Belle engaged in various charitable works among the poor and the sick in the nearby villages. She was recognized and beloved by the people for she knew them by name and cared for their sorrows and miseries. She provided comfort and laughter and listened to those who needed it most. She was a good girl, and if one were to ask them… they would say she was an angel Heaven sent.

Of course, no one knew about the darkness that lurked in her heart or the way her soul seemed to ache for something she dared not give voice to. For months she did not have to worry about Tempus finding her; yet, a part of her secretly wished he would find her and—

No!

She could not think of him. She won’t! He had blood on his hands and if she willingly returned to him… Ignatius’ blood would be on hers too. To accept her husband was to accept his sins, and despite his other grievances, she could not forgive the taking of an innocent life. Dear, sweet Ignatius… Just the thought of the kind boy would bring tears to her eyes and she would have little choice but to flee to her room to hide her distress from the sisters.

However, whenever her traitorous mind would turn to Tempus and their last parting, her body would respond… calling, wailing for its master and Belle would wake feverish and unsatisfied. Such lustful feelings were unacceptable and she would repent vigorously with prayer and her work. When Belle was not in the village tending the ailing, she would embroider to help the nuns earn money (and those days of repentance she would double her quota) and clean (and those days of repentance she would have the floors resplendent). Throwing herself into her chores and errands enabled Belle to forget her husband and put herself at God’s mercy to forgive her for her wayward (and unintentional) thoughts.

“My Sister May,” Astrid would say. “You must stop working yourself to the bone! I am certain God is grateful for your contributions already. Why must you wear yourself to the brink of exhaustion?”

“Oh Astrid,” Belle would reply. “You do not know the devils I carry on my shoulders. I have to do this. I need to.”

Naïve, innocent Astrid… Belle loved her so but she could not confide her whole story to her. Belle led her to believe she was there at the convent thanks to a broken heart—and while that was true, Belle could not shatter that innocence with her wretched and conflicted heart. Astrid was so fresh and pure… she would never understand the dangerous emotions and turmoil Belle endured.
Furthermore, Belle felt she ought to protect the younger woman from the cruelty of the world. The less she knew about Belle, the more Astrid would be safe from the spitefulness of mankind. In part, Belle saw herself in Astrid as she once was and preserving that saintly goodness was her mission besides seeking forgiveness.

As for Mother Superior, she knew the man involved was guilty of some sin to drive someone as lovely as Belle to flee in the night. Unfortunately, she had interrogated Belle severely on whether or not she could be with child. Much to her embarrassment and relief, Belle assured her she was not pregnant and that seemed to pacify the stern matriarchal. Although, it did not prevent her from stealing peeks at Belle’s stomach time and time again to ensure she was being honest. At least she kept her word and none of the sisters suspected Belle’s past. Or if they did, then they kept their theories to themselves lest they face Mother Superior’s wrath.

Even though Belle’s confidants were not truly informed, they were informed enough. They knew when she needed her space and privacy and it was more than what Belle could ask for with these reprieves.

Indeed, Belle knew she was very blessed to have found these sisters.

In addition, there was one other being that proved to be as helpful. Were it not for him, Belle feared she would always see men as manipulators and beasts with no conscience or morals. Ironically, this man turned out to be a thief.

It had been her third week at St. Meissa’s and she was taking a leisurely stroll through the gardens. Once supper was finished it became her new custom to walk among the blossoms before retiring for the night. The gardens reminded her of those from her uncle’s manor and it helped ease the bouts of homesickness that would now and then come to her. It happened to be one of those nights that she was longing for her old home and Belle wondered how well her uncle was and if he knew what became of his niece. She prayed he did not continue his gambling ways after what happened with Tempus.

It was during her silent musings and contemplations that she heard him.

Startled, Belle leapt from the bench she was sitting and hurried in the direction of the commotion. Much to her astonishment (and later amusement) she found a young man with short, brown hair and ears that stuck out from his face mumbling to himself as he moved around in a tiny circle trying to shake off whatever injury had befallen him.

“Bloody hell!” he exclaimed as he put his weight on his left side, which was the wrong thing to do. As soon as he did he was back hopping about in the hope the pain would fade. “I just had to land on that foot, didn’t I? Couldn’t have been a bloody bush in this bloody garden to catch me! Oy! These sisters know how to keep out the unwanted!”

He was trying to keep his voice quiet, but there was no point in denying that his intentions were not to seek asylum. Clearly from what Belle deduced… he had climbed over the stone wall with the motive to steal. And he was doing a marvelous job in maintaining his anonymity.

“Bloody good job Will. The sisters’ silver is in your reach and you had to bollocks it up!”

“Thought thieves were meant to be graceful and silent?”

Her query had him off-kilter as he spun around to look at her. Losing his balance, he put more force on his left foot and let out a yowl. He, indeed, sounded like a dying cat.
“I’m so happy that my misery is giving you a thrill,” he retorted as Belle couldn’t help chuckling at his expense. “I thought nuns were supposed to be merciful and compassionate.”

“We are but when it comes to a thief sabotaging himself; well, I daresay, this is a first.” Wiping a stray tear from her eye, Belle decided to show him some pity (and he was certainly pathetic) and offered her arm to help him to the bench she had occupied not long ago. As soon as he slid into it, he exhaled deeply.

“Much appreciated, luv,” he thanked her.

Belle remained standing with her hands clasped in front of her. She knew she should report this to Mother Superior so the proper authorities could be notified, but she was reluctant to do so. There was something about this young man that had her feeling sorry for and perhaps it had to do with his bungling. Of course, he was fortunate that there was no else in the garden and Belle prayed it would stay that way for a while. The last thing she wanted was someone else alerting the police. However, that did leave her with the question: how was she going to get him out of here?

This was the conundrum she had unwittingly made herself a part of and her sudden responsibility. Oh, why didn’t she get help when she had the chance?

She, then, noticed he was looking at her and Belle could feel her temper getting the best of her. It was his fault she was now in this predicament and if they were both caught… then she would have no choice but be dismissed and be thrown back into her husband’s throes if his path crossed hers. And she could not let that come to pass.

She was preparing to give him an earful but before she could utter a single reprimand… Belle was rendered silent as the would-be thief spoke softly.

“I understand if you want me to be thrown in jail. I probably scared you half to death with my—uh —foul… my apologies,” he continued sheepishly, wringing his hands nervously. “I hadn’t expected to run into anyone. I figured you would all be napping or praying or doing God’s work.”

She arched her brow. “What were you hoping to do if we were all engaged?”

He shrugged. “I thought I would help myself to the silver. A bloke’s got to eat and I was certain you had lots to spare what with the donations and tributes and the like.”

“I’m afraid you were misinformed. We do not have any silver here. Not ever. Not even with the donations and tributes and the like.”

The expression on his countenance was comical but Belle could not laugh at his plight now. The poor soul climbed that wall for nothing, except the pain in his foot.

“That gave him pause as he let out a bereft sigh. “Bloody hell.” Realizing what he said, the thief blushed and stammered out another apology.

“It’s all right. My… you are certainly an apologetic thief.” She regarded him closely, her scrutinizing eyes scouring his visage for any possible hints to his wicked nature. As a thief, surely he must have committed other sins, and yet… what was reflecting back to her was exceedingly puzzling. On first glance, she supposed, he was average-looking, perhaps even handsome to some ladies. He did have
good manners to balance out the bad ones, even though he couldn’t seem to help his cursing. His eyes, which Belle always felt was a true mirror to a person’s character, were a deep shade of brown very much like a deer’s. Even the size of his pupils were large and wide like the docile creature and extremely alert—constantly taking quick looks around to make sure no one else discovered them.

Yes… for a common thief he had a very open, honest face. Quite the contradiction to his craft and occupation, which lying and false pretenses must be requirements. At least he didn’t appear to be a threat or someone to fear. On the contrary, Belle felt oddly safe being around him and strangely enough… she felt like she could trust him. So far in their very short acquaintance he hadn’t bother to hide who or what he was, and if he was a dangerous man—well, he had ample opportunity to hurt her. Even with his injured foot, he could still overpower Belle but he had not attempted to do so. Nor had he plans to hurt anyone since he was not armed. He truly believed the nuns would have been busy elsewhere to pay any attention to their “silver” while he helped himself.

Indeed, this thief seemed harmless; an oxymoron unlike Belle had ever encountered in her life. However, despite her instincts leading her to the conclusion she may not worry about him… She could not help but think of supernatural dark eyes with golden specks and a smile both endearing and evil.

Closing her eyes briefly in pain, Belle knew she had been right in her initial assessment of Tempus. He was not a man to be trifled with and she allowed her own desires to be free from her uncle’s thumb to overpower her sense and reason. If she had not allowed herself to succumb to his charming, beguiling tongue, then she wouldn’t be in this state as of now. She could not allow a man to trick her thusly like Tempus had and this thief could very well be toying with her.

Nevertheless, she did not receive that impression he was trying to manipulate her. Rather, he was gazing at her as if awaiting his final Judgment since Belle was now the judge, jury, and executioner. She held his fate in her petite hands and she could easily strike him down if she so willed it.

Instead, Belle decided that was not her decision to make in the end.

“You will need help climbing back over that wall if you wish to return home,” she said. “Unless you don’t have a—“

“I have a place,” he interjected. Lifting his brow, he looked at her in stunned bafflement. “You will help me?” he asked, uncertain if that was her intention.

“It would seem like it,” she replied. “Come now. Let’s get you to where you were and I’ll see if I can find a ladder.”

He got to his feet easily this time and stepping on his left foot did not give him as much grief as it had before. However, he accepted Belle’s help as they walked to the spot where she had found him. Leaving him so he was leaning against the pillar, Belle went off in search of a ladder or a tall stool that could give him enough purchase to get over on the other side.

She had to be sneaky, which thanked God, no one else was around. Perhaps there was a reason for no interference. Although, Belle did not stop to count her blessings as she grabbed the ladder and hurried back to the young man. Fortunately, he was still waiting for her, but he was getting restless and nervous. As soon as he saw her, his face lit up with a bright smile.

“Thank God! I was afraid you wouldn’t come back,” he admitted.

“Sorry it took me so long. I had to make sure we were still alone,” Belle told him. “It would seem God is on your side tonight.”
“Aye. I think you might be right,” he replied softly.

She perched the ladder just so and stepped back to give him room. Placing his hand on the wooden step, he turned his head. “Thank you again. I know my hide would probably be in a cold cell by now if I hadn’t met you. So… I’m much obliged,” he said.

“You’re welcome. But you must go. Now!” she insisted in a hush whisper.

“At least tell me the name of my savior. I do admit I will probably be more thankful now.”

“It’s—” To her surprise, she almost said Belle but coughed to correct herself. “May. Sister May.”


“It’s a pleasure to meet you Will,” she said. “Now go.”

“Bossy,” he teased. “All right milady. Until we meet again!” Then he was climbing up and disappeared over the edge.

Of course, Belle had hoped that would have been the last she had seen of Will, but fate had other plans when several days later she had met him again in the village. She was feeding the poor when he had appeared in front of her, an empty plate in his hands.

“Hullo, Sister,” he greeted casually with a boyish grin. “Fancy seeing you here.”

Belle nearly dropped her ladle into the soup as she stared at him in shock. “What are you doing?” she hissed, praying none of the other sisters were seeing this.

“Seeing how I’m poor and hungry, I thought it was high time I do the right thing and get my meals in the proper place. I have converted you see. I’m done being a thief.”

“Oh?” Her tone was in disbelief and that only served him to grin wider.

“Okay… perhaps not entirely,” he said. “But I have changed where I go to acquire certain items of interest.”

“That’s… good,” she finished, not sure how else to respond.

“Even thought I look into a job. I happen to know a thing or two about gardening thanks to my mum.”

Belle wasn’t sure where he was leading into this conversation, but he sent her a sly wink before reaching over to take her ladle and scooped some soup for himself before moving down the line. Eventually, she would realize he had gone to Mother Superior to look for employment since he was down in his luck. Normally she would have refused such an offer (especially to a man with his youthful looks), but he managed to charm her into giving him the position as the head gardener. Maybe his earnest demeanor convinced her he wanted to work for the Lord in whatever capacity she would allow. Either way, Will was now living in the convent in his own little shack on the property. It was close to the garden and he received two warm meals as part of his wages.

Belle thought for sure he would use his position to his advantage. After all, the other young nuns couldn’t help whispering and chattering about the new gardener. He knew how to captivate their attention with his polite nods and waves, which would be suspicious if he hadn’t worked so hard at his job. Yes, Will Scarlet (she learned his full name from Sister Mabel) did possess a green thumb and he did his best to make the humble buds and blossoms grow to their full potential. The gardens
hadn’t looked better than when he was hired and Belle had to admit she was impressed with this talent of his.

Of course, she had to be mindful when she took her nightly strolls after dinner. It wouldn’t look proper or decent if she was caught being alone with Will. It would seem he felt the same as he never sought her out when she was alone; instead, he kept his distance and offered a friendly wave of acknowledgment before tending to his next shrub.

She also noticed he planted bushes alongside the stone wall, which she couldn’t help but grin.

For a month, they kept their space as their friendship grew within that span. Despite the lack of conversation, they both seemed to know what was on the other’s mind and he knew how to make her smile and laugh. It felt good to be able to laugh again. But then there were days when Belle would find herself trapped in her own dark musings and not even Will Scarlet could cheer her up.

It wasn’t until the third month came along that he breeched the unspeakable agreement and approached her one late night in the garden. Belle had trouble sleeping, her nightmares were returning, and this time… she dreamt of Tempus catching her as she slept. He hadn’t been kind dragging her from the bed as she kicked and screamed with no one coming to her aid.

She was too shook up to even flinch when Will gingerly touched her shoulder.

“Hey,” he murmured. “What’s wrong Sister?”

“It’s nothing,” she answered. Too quickly to his liking as he rolled his eyes.

“Doesn’t seem like it. This isn’t your usual strolling time and it’s late if you haven’t noticed. Seems to me that something is indeed troubling you and good ol’ Will here is offering his services. Whatever it is that put a frown on your pretty face, I will make certain it doesn’t happen again.”

His felicitous offer did put a smile on Belle’s lips. “I thank you Will, but unless you know a way to chase away nightmares from coming to pass… I’m afraid there isn’t much your services can do for me.”

“Well, you’re in luck Sister,” he told her. “It happens to be an old family secret of mine. We Scarlets know how to give those nasty nightmares a run for their money! Now, don’t laugh. It’s the God’s honest truth it is.”

“I’m sorry,” she said, trying to swallow her laughter. “It’s… Never mind. This right here is helping.”

“Oh. Good.” He took a deep breath. “Sister? If I may ask… Why do you insist on everyone calling you a different name?”

At his seemingly innocent question, Belle’s heart froze. There was no way he could have known… Gazing at him sharply, she fought to keep her composure lest she should betray herself. “What are you talking about? May is my name.”

“I don’t know. I’m pretty good at names and you do not look like a May.”

“Oh? And what do I look like?”

He shrugged. “I don’t know. I just know it can’t be May.”

“I will suggest you keep such thoughts to yourself,” Belle said archly.
“Hit a sore spot I see,” he muttered. “Apologies. I didn’t mean to offend—“

“No you didn’t but you did,” she interjected. Standing up, she pulled her cloak closer together. “Good night Mr. Scarlet.”

“No. Wait!” He scrambled to his feet and came in front of her. “I messed up. It’s just… you’re different than the other nuns. Had me thinking that’s all and how someone like you ended up in a place like this. Can’t help but think you’re hiding from someone and if you’re in trouble… I do want to help. You have done so much for me already that I want to return the favor.”

Belle sighed. If Will was working for Tempus, then he was doing a poor job at it. Her husband would not tolerate any errors or raise her suspicions if he wanted to make a move. However, one glance into Will’s countenance and Belle knew he was telling the truth. He was apparently more perceptive than she had thought and maybe having an ally wouldn’t be such a bad idea. But how much should she share if she wanted to share at all? Could this be another ploy of Tempus?

It was dreadful that her experience with her husband had left Belle in this paranoia, but she could not take any chances or risks if Tempus was near. Instead, she asked, “Why? Why do you want to help me?”

“I guess it’s because you could have locked me up and you didn’t. You mustn’t look like I’m going to hurt you. I might have been a thief and a liar from time to time, but I never laid a hand on a woman. Never.” He paused and continued, “I know what it feels, okay? I know hiding when I see it and I thought I might be able to help. If not, I get it. I won’t disturb you no more.”

Slowly, he turned on his heel to walk away but Belle found herself reaching for him and brushing her fingertips on his jacket. “Will. I’m sorry but it’s not easy for me… to trust. I’ve been tricked before and—“

“You don’t have to say it,” he told her. “I know too. I’ve been tricked once. It bleeding smarts it does.”

She smiled tearfully. “Yes it does. So you must understand this delicate situation I am in. If I’m not careful then I will have to leave. I don’t want to, mind you, but if I must… I must.”

He nodded. “I see. I hope that day never comes.”

“Me too,” she echoed softly as she padded away to her room.

After that night, their friendship shifted and Belle had plenty of time to reflect on what Will had said. She knew he was ready to do whatever she needed and it made her happy to know she could have someone else to turn to for help. Of course, she couldn’t help but wonder what happened to him that had him feel like he had to hide as well. Yes, she concluded, Will Scarlet was hiding from someone too and it appeared his thieving friend had his heart under lock and key. She didn’t know why she hadn’t seen it before, but it was there one afternoon when the rose bush was blooming and he had this queer look on his countenance as he gazed at the soft, red petals opening.

Actually, it was anything red that seemed to stop him in his tracks and he would stand there and stare at it with this haunting, despairing look that Belle knew all too well.

She longed to ask him what had happened to the woman that broke his heart, but with Mother Superior always lurking… she didn’t know when she would have a moment to speak to Will alone again. After a couple of weeks, Belle had her opportunity in the oddest of ways… a cold.

Many of the sisters, including Mother Superior, were sick in bed and that left Belle to her own
devices without having to worry about someone reporting her. Of course, she performed her duties and looked after the ill, but as soon as night came she was able to sneak away and meet up with Will in the garden. She found him sitting on the bench, looking up at the stars. So lost he was in his pensive state that he hadn’t heard Belle coming or noticed her when she sat next to him.

“Tell me about her Will,” she bid him quietly.

She hadn’t expected him to tell her all at once, but his mind must have been burdened with thoughts of this woman that the dam broke and it all came flooding out. Belle listened patiently as he told her about Ana and how they were going to run away and elope. Her mother had hopes Ana would marry someone with a title and Will was certainly not what she had hoped for her daughter.

“We fled one late night. Left with nothing but the clothes on our backs we did. We spent the night under the stars like this one and spoke of our dreams and our hopes for the future with our new life together. Of course, it wasn’t all happily ever after like it is in the books. We had nothing to our names. Not a penny. We begged, we stole. We found shelter wherever we could in a stable or a shed. It wasn’t perfect and I wanted to give Ana the moon, but I thought our life wasn’t so bad. We were together. That was all that mattered. At least... I thought she felt the same.”

Unfortunately, Ana was miserable with this lifestyle on the road. She wanted stability and a home to call her own. Will would have done anything to make her happy and if she wanted a home... then he will give her a home she always wanted.

He had left to see what he could find with the little scraps of money he had saved from some charitable “donors.” It took several days but eventually he found a quaint cottage and knew it was perfect for them. He didn’t tell Ana straight away. He wanted to surprise her so he spent the next couple of weeks furnishing it as best as he could. He knew over time it would be just like the home they had spoken about the very first night they ran away. At last he finished his surprise and was so excited to show Ana that he ran back to the abandoned cover wagon they were using as shelter. Calling her name, he frowned. She wasn’t there.

Figuring she went to the closest village, he went there. However, what he found... He couldn’t free himself from the image that haunted him.

Ana. His beautiful, precious Ana was adorned in the finest gown of silk he had ever seen—a vibrant red that brought out the crimson hue of her lips. She was smiling and looking up at a man beside her with adoration in her blue eyes. He was dressed in the fashionable clothing of a gentleman and he was all smiles too as he bent down to kiss Ana on the cheek. The villagers were stopping to bow before the elegant couple and Will overheard them say their congratulations to the happy nuptials. Ana... Getting married?

He could not believe what he was seeing or hearing. He stood there in paralyzed shock until Ana noticed him. Her face had paled at the sight of him until her countenance suddenly cooled and she was gazing upon him with disdain.

“She went to me and told me it was over between us. She decided that her mother had been right all along. She was better off marrying someone with a title and wealth, not some poor pauper like me. ‘Thank you for the adventure Will Scarlet,’ she told me. ‘But life isn’t a fairy tale and we are too different.’

“I couldn’t stay as you can imagine,” he continued. “I left that cottage and everything behind. I couldn’t live in a place where I was close to Ana and not be with her. And as much as it killed me... I knew I would never be able to give her everything she deserved. And she knew that. She knew the only thing I was good for was to get her out of her mother’s house and I did. What use was I to her...
“But you still love her,” Belle pointed out.

“But you still love her,” he confessed. “I know she is happy so that makes me happy in a way. But I can’t forget the way she looked at me in the village. I saw the remorse and the guilt… She could have been much more crueler but she said what she said very quickly. Yet, I can’t help but wonder… Did she ever love me the way I loved her?”

“I’m sure she did,” Belle assured him. “You two were making plans for a future together. A person doesn’t do that unless they are planning to stay.” Or if the person knowingly planned to marry illegally for his personal gain—another possession to flaunt. “Maybe something else happened that you were not aware of.”

“Maybe. I don’t know.”

“So why are you hiding then?”

It took Will a moment to collect himself. Revealing his heartbreak brought back those awful memories and he had been lost swimming through them. Once he had control of his faculties, he continued. “Her husband died two months after they were wed. I heard she took his death hard and that the funeral she spared no expense. There were some rumors that Ana might have poisoned him. She’s no killer I can say for sure. Besides, the authorities investigated and found nothing on her. The doctor came forward and admitted he had been ill for some time but kept it a secret from everyone, including his young bride. Sickness of the heart I believe it was. After that the rumors stopped. Like I said, I knew it wasn’t true.”

“She was free. You knew this but it doesn’t explain why you’re here and not with her,” Belle persisted.

“Sister, my heart felt like it had been literally torn from my chest when Ana made it clear she didn’t want me anymore. Even with her hubby dead and buried—what more does she need? She has the beautiful large houses, the horses and carriages, the fancy clothes, and jewels and riches… Where do I fit in? I don’t. I can’t go through that again so I keep my distance.”

“But you still listen for news on her.”

He exhaled. “Aye. Silly, right? I should move on but I can’t. A part of me is still in that village with her and no matter how far I travel—I live with that pain. It never goes away.”

“I’m sorry Will. Really I am,” she said.

“Aye… I wish I could get rid of this.” He placed the palm of his hand over his heart. “It would make the pain bearable. But there’s nothing I can do.” Tilting his head, he eyed her closely. “How do you do it? How did you cope?”

“Me?”

“Aye,” he said eagerly, bobbing his head. “I know something happened between you and a man. Go on Sister. Tell me your story and how did you manage?”

“Oh Will—it’s nothing like what you experienced. My story is far far worse and certainly terrifying.”

This piqued his interest. “Well, then, you must tell me. I told you once I am willing to help you. My word still stands.”
“I know and it’s kind of you to offer, but I fear that will do me no good. This isn’t something that can be easily fixed or shared with another. This is my burden to carry and I must weather through it regardless if it kills me or not. But I shall take comfort that I can call you my friend if that is all right with you.”

“Of course, aye,” Will told her. “But you must promise me that you will tell me your dark secret that you’re harboring one day. And… if you must leave, then give me a fair warning will you?”

Belle smiled. “Very well. I can promise that.”

Though, she never said what she promised exactly, but it mollified him. However, part of her felt she should have confided something to him since he confided something so intimate and personal to her. Yet, if she told him about her husband and his deeds, then she feared Will might do something impulsive and foolish. No… she was doing the right thing in keeping Tempus hidden from Will.

Presently, Belle was quite relieved she was successful in alluding her husband and Dove, his manservant. To continue in peace for this period of time was something akin to a miracle considering how it didn’t take long for Tempus to find her the first time. Then again she didn’t make the grievous mistake in being herself, or more importantly looking like herself. Mulan had given her a useful lesson about acting and encompassing a role so much so that Belle as a nun would have been the last person for Tempus to consider!

Her husband may have been clever, but Belle had come on top with her guise.

Indeed, she was quite pleased with herself. At least she wouldn’t have to worry about leaving any time soon and she could enjoy the convent and her fellow sisters, especially Will’s company.

Speaking of which…

Supper was concluded and Belle prepared herself for her constitutional evening walk. She murmured her good-nights to Astrid and a few others before she entered the garden. Will would be finishing his meal shortly and he would meet her at their bench once the sun set. Until then, Belle had time to amuse herself with the flowers and butterflies.

Finally, the sun had disappeared for the moon to take over its watchful duty. Belle was already awaiting him as she sat patiently, her lips curving upward as her eyes twinkled with delight upon seeing Will. Rising from her spot, her hand was held out to greet him, which he accepted with a chaste and friendly kiss on her knuckles.

She giggled as she sat down and patted the empty spot next to her. He took his seat and launched into a story about his trip to the village. She knew he was looking for new seeds to plant, and as he regaled his humorous attempts at haggling, Belle couldn’t help but wonder how differently her life might have been if she had met Will instead of Tempus. Maybe if he hadn’t met Ana, then the two of them wouldn’t have known the pain and suffering of heartache. Of course, if Will was still a thief… her uncle would not have permitted a courtship between them. Yet, in Belle’s little fantasy, Will would have been accepted by her uncle and they would have had the happiness they both longed to have. She felt safe with Will and protected, and she knew he didn’t have a secret wife or a child he was hiding. She also knew he didn’t coerce people to do his bidding by exploiting their weaknesses. She also knew he had never taken a life before.

While her mind was telling her that Will would make a fine husband, her heart was conflicted. She knew regardless of how happy she and Will might have been in this scenario—the passion would have been lacking. What she and Tempus shared had transcended the romances she had read about in her books. There was something wild, unbridled in the way they touched and kissed. It was
something good, Christian girls did not think about. And she knew why now… Tempus was a seductive serpent and he claimed a part of her soul to the darkness. Belle pondered if she would ever retain that part of herself again. Would she return to being that once innocent girl?

Indeed, Will was the better choice. He was kinder and honest and did not have to lie about himself. He took ownership of his character, something Belle strongly admired. And he made her smile… more now than ever.

Without giving thought to consequence, Belle leaned over and pressed her lips to his cheek. The soft caress took him by surprise as he ceased speaking to stare wide, brown eyes at her.

Blushing furiously, Belle stammered an apology. “I-I’m s-s-sorry Will. I-I don’t know what came over m-me.”

Then to her surprise, he leaned over and gently kissed her mouth. It was short and quick, but it was very nice. He pulled back with his eyes downcast, the tips of his ears reddened.

“I’ve always wanted to do that,” he admitted softly. “Forgive me Sister.”

Placing her hand in his lap, she gripped his fingers and squeezed reassuringly. “There is nothing to forgive. I did assault you first.”

He chuckled. “I still think it’s probably a sin for me to kiss a nun in the first place.”

“I’m not a nun,” she replied.

“I know,” he whispered.

They didn’t breathe a word afterwards and wisely decided to retreat to their respective rooms for the evening. Belle’s head was dizzy with thoughts about what had happened and what did this mean this moment onward. Were they still friends? Or did this mean something else? Was she ready to move on?

She hastily donned her nightgown and slipped under the bedcovers. So befuddled she was, she hadn’t checked to make sure her window was locked before blowing her candle out.

xxXxxx

The prickling sensation of awareness began to slowly come to Belle.

It started off as a heightened sense that she wasn’t alone, and as her mind fully became conscious, she realized her arms were suspended above her head.

Frantically she tried to move them but her hands were bound around the wooden frame, the cloth digging into her delicate wrists. Hard as she might, Belle pulled and fought to loosen her bonds to no avail. She was trapped.

In hindsight, she knew eventually this day would have to come. She couldn’t have been safe forever but she had hoped this was different. However, her husband did not give up that easily and she was a fool to think she could have ever truly tricked him at his game.

“Ah, you’re awake my dear,” he purred, his voice penetrating the darkness of the small room. It was then she felt the cool breeze coming from the window and she closed her eyes as she remembered she had not checked the locks. Tears clung to her lashes, stinging her eyes but Belle refused to give him the satisfaction she was frightened.
Finding her courage, she defiantly glared at him as the moonlight filtered in ominously revealing the imposing figure. The irony did not go unnoticed by her that she had caught him in her room on a night like this, but at least she hadn’t been tied down helplessly in her bed. Now… she was vulnerable to his whims, for him to do whatever he wished.

“Now, now,” he scolded, his tone scathing with condescension. “You do not have any right to be crossed with me. I was being fair in allowing you your fun playing dress up and pretending to be one of these sisters. I thought it was quite generous of me, as your husband, to give his young wife the chance to think about her actions with the intent she will return to her rightful place. After all, our last visit had been so fruitful with revelations and I know your soul was calling out to mine for me to claim you. Yet your stubborn and willful spirit refused to obey its master and carry on this charade. Naughty, naughty girl.”

“What?” she whispered, her chest tightening at his words.

He chuckled throatily. “Did you think you could have fooled me, my pet? Belle, I know you. I will recognize you anywhere you go. I was merely stepping aside to give you the space you so desperately wanted. You thought you were being so clever, so cunning… How could I not resist in playing along to make you happy?”

“You... you knew?”

“Aye. You forget, my sweet wife, you are one of the most beautiful creatures to ever grace this mortal world. Even dressed as a boy there is no mistake with your sparkling eyes and those luscious lips that you are more than what you appear. So impressed with your tricks you were that you failed to discover that Dove has such talents as well. You have seen him many times as you walked into the village to do your good works, and yet, you did not recognize him. He kept me well-informed about your goings on that I figured there was no harm in allowing this pretense to continue. I had some other business dealings to attend to so I left you under his watchful gaze while I returned to England. I assumed living with the good sisters you would be unable to get into any mischief. Unfortunately, I was gravely mistaken.”

His voice took on a harsher quality as he practically growled his last sentence. There was no denying the spark of anger that blazed in his eyes that Belle subconsciously flinched, trying to move her body away from him. However, she could only move a couple of inches until the position began to feel uncomfortable and she had little choice to move back so she was somewhat closer to him.

Immediately, her thoughts were drawn to Will: was he safe? Was he hurt? Dear God! Tempus didn’t —

“Your young man is safe. For now,” Tempus told her, reading her distress on her countenance. His lip curled with indignation that she was concerned for him, not her loving husband. “Dove warned me but I failed to heed him. I refused to believe my little wife had found herself a paramour. I considered it unfathomable for we had pledged ourselves to be with each other forever. We made a vow and sealed it with our lips and bodies on our wedding night or have you so quickly forgotten what that means?”

“No! Never! I—“ He silenced her with a single, piercing look. Belle couldn’t help it as she bit her lower lip, sucking the pink flesh into her mouth, lest she incriminate herself further. Mercy seemed to be the last thing on his mind and as long as Will was safe and unharmed… Belle will happily take whatever punishment her husband seemed fit to give. However, that one innocent move on her part caused a shift in the air, a crackling fire bursting to life in his darkened irises, as they roamed over her petite figure concealed by the covers as though he could see through the material to her naked curves.
“I believe a lesson needs to be taught my dear, loving wife. You need to remember your place and who owns you. Ah yes…” he hissed, gathering the bedclothes with his fingers and ripping them off to expose her to his hungry gaze as she trembled in her dainty nightgown. “It would be wise if you keep quiet wife,” he ordered, seizing her chin so she had to look at him. “I’d hate to see what might happen if one of your sisters catches you in the throes of ecstasy as the devil ravages you. No doubt they will throw you out afterwards—a helpless lamb among a pack of ferocious wolves; no friend in sight to help you…”

As he spoke, he dragged his hand down her swanlike throat and over the swells of her breasts, down her side all the way to the edge of her gown. Fisting the flimsy material, Tempus pulled it up hastily to expose her pale, slender legs. He did not stop until her pantaloons were on display, and she squeezed her legs together to keep him from further perusal. Yet that did not sway him as that insufferable smirk widened. He saw it as a challenge to her chagrin, and Belle knew she could not let her resolve weaken. Last time… she nearly gave in to his touch. This time… she won’t.

“I see my lamb has found her fiery spirit! Has the time spent with the sisters made you renew your virtue? Could this be a sin now in your eyes? Or… is someone else far worthier than I to know such delights?” The same rage from earlier glowed in his eyes as he pressed his face closer to hers. “Those lips… with their petal-like softness… I was the first to know them—to know their shape, their taste. These lips are rightfully mine dearie and you willingly offered them to that boy. Like he deserves to feel those lips against his! No…”

Before Belle could defend herself, Tempus claimed her mouth in a controlling, possessive kiss, seizing the very breath from her lungs. There was nothing gentle about the way he nipped at her, eliciting a gasp so he could plunge his tongue inside to tangle and brand her with his ardent jealousy. And yes it was jealousy that stirred him thusly as he reminded her who he was and what he can do to make her knees weak…

Her kiss with Will didn’t mean anything. It had been a spur of the moment, inspired by her impulsivity with the chaste kiss on his cheek. However, Will didn’t inspire anything else within her; although, perhaps, it would have been better if he had. She could have used him as her anchor to prevent herself from being swept up into the familiar passions as Tempus continued to stoke the fire that was ignited, and as much as she was tempted to give in, Belle chastised herself. Tempus was a murderer, a vile man with no consideration of others, and she was allowing him to take certain liberties which he no longer had a right to do. She had to focus on the knowledge of his crimes to keep him at bay so she couldn’t forget herself.

He pulled back to fill his lungs with air as well as Belle, but she forced herself to remain rigid on the bed as she stared venomously at him.

“You, sir, had no right to claim what was never yours!” she spat. “These lips are mine, and mine alone! If I wish to grant favor towards any young man, than I shall! You have no say on the matter!”

His nostrils flared, those black eyes with their sparks of gold spoke volumes as his ire grew. “So you intend on kissing more young men?”

She nodded. “If I desire it, yes! You forfeited your claim on me the night you murdered poor, sweet Ignatius! You, sir, are presumptuous to think I will allow some blackheart to touch me!”

Her comment seemed to spur him on as Tempus snarled, “Is that what you think? Well, allow this murderer show you what truly lurks in that so-called innocent and pure heart of yours. Your soul calls out to mine and if I’m the Devil, then you’re my Eve fallen from grace.”

He climbed over her, pressing his lean frame against hers as his kissed her again with bruising force.
His slender fingers cupped and palmed her breasts, slipping within the nightgown so he could roll and pinch the little buds. To her dismay, Belle arched her back and let out a muffled groan as her body responded and sang for him. *Traitors*, she thought viciously, but that only encouraged him in his assault of her person as he released her succulent lips with a tortured hiss.

She should have screamed for help. The nuns wouldn’t fault her if she was discovered in this compromising position. Yet, his earlier words haunted her and one look at her exposed chest and her flushed and rosy complexion would tell a different story. Damn him! Damn him to Hell!

“Remember…” he taunted as his brogue thickened with his desire and lust burning in the depths of his eyes. “Do not make a sound.”

Crawling down her length, Belle lifted her head as high as she could with her suspended arms to watch as Tempus pulled her undergarment down and his face disappeared, his wicked tongue performing its dark magic, bringing her ever closer to turning away from God for good…

xxxxxx

By the time dawn appeared, Belle woke to find herself tucked in bed—the same way she had fallen asleep before… before…

Eyes flying opened, Belle looked around to see if husbands and dastardly villains still lingered, only to find an empty room and the window opened just a crack. Nothing seemed to be misplaced or out of order that Belle contemplated if Tempus last night was nothing more than a vivid dream. Her nightgown was in place as well as her bloomers, which she blushed recalling how… Well, that thought did not belong in the House of the Lord.

Letting out a nervous twitter to soothe the fluttering butterflies in her belly, Belle got out of bed to prepare her toilet and dress for the day. She even checked her wrists to be certain that that had been a dream too and she found smooth, unmarred skin. She really did throw her head back and laughed some more as she tidied her room before heading down to her morning prayers.

However, it was the sight of a lone crimson rose she found under her pillow that had her blood run cold.

Chapter End Notes

Uh-oh. I guess that wasn’t a dream Belle. What to do now, hmm? For those of you who have read the novel, I did derive from it quite a bit. I couldn’t picture Will as a priest so I thought this was a better substitute.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Two strangers, both suffering and experiencing loneliness in their way, meet in a bar and agree to one night where they can feel something other than pain. (Rated M)

Chapter Notes

Like the Broadway verse, this is completely original and a different aspect of the Rumbelle relationship to explore. For the most part, this one is pretty angsty. Don’t forget any prompts you like to see for this verse or any other one I have written… feel free to leave those ideas in your comments.

One Night Stand

The rules were simple: no real names and no personal information. This was strictly a no strings attached-no emotions-just the physicality of two people coming together for comfort and release from the hell of their lonely lives.

It started in the bar—he was drinking Jack Daniels, she was drinking beer. They were seated side by side, having one drink after the other. Then someone (not sure who) started talking to the other and the million dollar question for both were:

What brought you here?

“An unforeseeable event happened,” he said pathetically, the pain still fresh in his large, coffee brown eyes. “Let’s leave it at that.”

“Same here,” she replied. Throwing back a shot (she switched drinks) she fiddled with the empty glass between her fingers. “Life’s a bitch, isn’t it?”

“I’ll drink to that,” he answered, lifting his bottle in the air in a mock toast. Swallowing the burning elixir, he’s a bit surprised with himself at how easy conversation has been flowing with this attractive woman. No doubt it was the liquid courage that was helping, but even then… he was never this chatty with another person. Not even after drinking a couple glasses. Not that he was a heavy drinker… God no, he wasn’t his father, but lately he’s been partaking too much of his scotch collection at home and decided it was best to do it outside of his house so he wouldn’t see. He wasn’t ready to talk about it just yet and the last thing he wanted was for Bae to ask questions.

But this woman… with her undeniably crystalline blue eyes, the cascading chestnut curls, and those full cherry lips… he felt oddly comfortable around her. Usually he was slack jaw and heavy tongue around beautiful women, but this one was different. He couldn’t place his finger on why that was and it was a little disconcerting since it was not in his character to speak at ease with attractive people and in a seedy place like this.
Okay, so it wasn’t “seedy” but it was a bar and he never stepped into one his whole life (he had his father to thank for that one), but this called for an exception. In addition, thanks to his father… he knew the types of people that frequent places like this. For all he knew, this woman could be a drug addict, a gambler, or a prostitute. She didn’t look like she fell in either of those labels and she certainly didn’t dress like a lady of the night, but that didn’t mean she wasn’t one. It could be her ploy. Dress in unassuming clothes and play the sympathizer until the John makes a move or (if she was desperate) suggest it.

However, he didn’t get that impression from her and she, like him, was obviously hurt by something (or someone) and was finding solace in a drink. Even beautiful people had their problems too. Cheers.

Flash forward twenty minutes and his tongue was getting loose and rather daring. Gone were his past misgivings about her and the bar and only focused on that she was the most pleasant thing to look at in this hellhole and as they were both hurting…

“Since we’re having a shitty day… we might as well cheer each other up,” he hinted. Where in the world this idea came from he didn’t know, but he was feeling pretty adventurous in the first time in his forty-four years. Even as a young man he never had the urges like most young men do, although this was far from a middle age crisis. He wasn’t trying to relive those wild days (not like he had any), yet it was the appeal of this woman and the alcohol that had him opened to the possibilities.

While part of him was actually serious, he also knew she was half his age. He was really throwing himself out there for rejection and probably a good slap for measure, not to mention he could be thrown out of the bar for propositioning her. It screamed bad idea from the moment he uttered those words, but he was too far gone to consider the consequences, only that he wondered what that mouth tasted like and if she actually smelled like roses or was that all in his head?

He took a deep breath, catching the wafting scent of something floral, and knew it was roses. Or it could be he had roses on the mind since she had a rose hairpin sticking out from her mass of curls that held it pinned up. Either way, she smelled nice and her hair looked very soft and inviting for him to bury his face.

Nevertheless, the seconds ticked away and he realized she had not responded to his proposal. Even in his inebriated state, he knew he wasn’t much to look at and certainly wouldn’t fall under her “type” of man she would be interested in if he was to be honest. He shouldn’t be surprised but her silence still stung him. She could have had the decency to say no.

However, those dark, thick lashes blinked languidly and she tilted her face so she could pierce him with those midnight blues and answered: “Yes.”

One word.

The deal was sealed.

But she had some ground rules first. Once she finished her terms it seemed to him that this wasn’t the first time for her to do something like this. Maybe she was a hooker after all… Funny, he wasn’t disgusted like he thought he would be.

Well, this was a night of new experiences and first times… so why the Hell not?

Yet, he had to ask… he had to know for sure what he was getting himself into. He might have suggested this but he wanted to make sure. So he told her he was clean and hoped she would be honest about herself too.
She seemed to understand him and nodded, a soft blush blossoming on her cheek. “I never done this before,” she admitted. “But I think this would be for the best if we don’t reveal anything personal.”

He had to concede and he relaxed at her admission. She seemed earnest and he wouldn’t have to be worried about her taking advantage of him. Perhaps, he should apologize for his earlier scrutiny in thinking she was a prostitute. Obviously, she wasn’t one but she agreed to this… he couldn’t ruin the moment with apologies.

Instead, he offered his arm to her (it was the least gentlemanly thing to do), and together, they staggered out of the bar and hailed a taxi to take them to the closest motel.

The rest was a blur up until the moment the room door shut and she turned around to kiss him on the lips.

The motion momentarily startled him, and for a second, he forgot what to do… It wasn’t every day he had a woman in his arms, willing to kiss him like she was doing. He closed his eyes and wrapped his arms around her waist, remembering to return the kiss lest she thought he was having second doubts… which he did not. Yes it had been some time since he had sex (years in fact) and he vaguely recalled how it was done, but it had been too long he had a partner interested and willing.

Then when she slipped her tongue in to tangle with his… the primal instincts took over.

Clothes were ripped off their bodies and tossed haphazardly all over the room. He trailed his blazing mouth down her swanlike throat as she yanked on his belt to loosen his pants. He bit the flesh at the juncture of her shoulder and neck, earning himself a moan in pleasure, which reverberated over his body.

He never made a woman make that sound! Not even…

“Ryan, I want a divorce.”

The declaration came from nowhere and all he could do was look at her in disbelief. “What?”

Sighing, his wife of ten years shook her head. “I’m sorry Ryan but I can’t be married to you anymore. There’s someone else… has been for some time. I’m sorry but I can’t do this. Let’s face it… you and I were never going to work. So this is a blessing in disguise. You’ll see. It’s for the best for you and me and Bae.”

They fell on the bed, he on top, and he was bruising her mouth with his as the ugly memory had to pop up in his head. It was hard to believe that he had been blissfully unaware of his wife’s unhappiness for years. She needed excitement and their routine lives were too predictable and boring for her. Even the celibacy of their marriage was depressing her, but he was working and they had a child… most marriages sacrificed sex when a child was present, especially an energetic one like Bae. But not even their son was a good enough reason to make it work.

Fingernails dug into her side and she retaliated with her own nails scratching down his back, and then gripping his ass as her life depended on it. The pain and pleasure exploded in his head and he flung it back to roar his approval. This was exactly what he needed… no tender caresses or soft spoken words. Just the raw and primal urges that were bordering near brutality as they stroked, clutched, and bit one another. This was feeling. This was where the hurt disappeared. This was where they could forget the problems in their lives and focused on this very moment in reality. Because right now… he wasn’t a failure with a crippled leg that held him back. No, the alcohol had numbed the pain and he was giving it his all… something he hadn’t been able to since before the accident. Perhaps, in the back of his mind, he knew he would pay for it later, but with this gorgeous
siren lying on her back and beckoning him with a crook of her finger and that bloody red mouth all puffy and swollen from his kisses… he was invincible.

One deep staggering breath and he was back to claiming her lips as his, nipping and tugging, while she did the same until she somehow flipped them over and she was now on top. But he didn’t give a fuck. He reached for her, cupping and squeezing her bare breasts, sliding his hands into her hair and goddamn it was as soft as he imagined! Twisting and pulling each curl, he grinned at the whimper that he elicited from her until she was doing the same, but she was scraping the nape of his neck causing him to shudder. He never knew that was an erogenous zone for him and he found that he really liked it if his growl was anything to go by. That seemed to please her as those blue eyes sparkled mischievously.

But play time was over.

He had her on her back again and the remaining obstacles of underwear and boxers were gone in a flash and he was sliding home in that scorching bliss, her ankles hitching over his hips, pulling him closer and deeper as he moved frantically against her.

Fuck it had been too long…

He had no trace of thought running through his mind other than to pound into her mercilessly. It was selfish the way he was using her but then again… she was using him too. Her fingers dove between them so she could pinch and rubbed her clit and then she stopped as she rode out his punishing thrusts.

“I’m sorry Miss French but I’m afraid your mother didn’t make it.”

Tears choked Belle as the doctor continued his well-rehearsed speech about his condolences and so on so forth. It was supposed to be a routine procedure. Everyone gets this done all the time and her mother should have been no exception. The droning voice went on to say that everything started off well and normal—no complications until something happened. Something changed and now she was dead when she should be alive.

Falling… they were falling, together, as the last pinnacle was reached and their minds faded into the sweet, dark oblivion where nothing could touch them.
2 One Night Stand Rated M

Chapter Summary

Prompt: The morning after Ryan finds evidence that last night wasn’t a dream, and wants to find the mystery woman. (Rated M)

One Night Stand

When morning broke Ryan woke with a smile on his face. He couldn’t remember a time when he even felt like smiling this early in the day, despite the soon to be proceedings for his divorce. He seriously shouldn’t be this happy but he was. As odd it was… he was happy in a way he never thought possible.

As the light slowly filtered in, bits and pieces of the activities of last night began to return to him. His smile grew wider as he reached for her—

--and met nothing.

He rolled to his side, and sure enough, she was gone. But as he stared at the empty spot he frowned at the lack of folds and indents that should have been present. Yet it was smooth and flat… like no one was ever there.

He could have sworn he met someone. He recalled the faint scent of roses in her hair, the sweetened flavor of her lips, not to mention the cloying heat that surrounded his cock…

There was no way that could have been a dream. And yet…

His ankle protested quite strongly and he remembered moving in a way that he could have been done years ago, but he was all alone in an empty bed. Was it possible his mind so desperate for human contact that he conjured this incredible woman? He doubted if his drunken state of mind could produce such vivid visions, but with nothing to prove, he had to wonder if it had been a fantasy from the start.

Somehow that realization was more painful than when Milah told him she wanted that divorce.

He covered his face, the light now hurting his eyes and head, and his heart ached in such a way that he felt like an utter fool for wanting it to be real. After all, why would a younger and beautiful woman want to go to bed with a middle-aged man with a limp? He really was riding on that fantasy all right and—

There was something that caught his attention. Peeking through his fingers, Ryan squinted (then winced) as something shiny glinted from the light on the floor. Being mindful of his leg, he inched across the bed until he sat at the edge and tentatively looked over to see what it was. He blinked once and then again, not sure if it was still part of the hangover or if it was real. But something gnawed at him and he had to investigate it.

Shoving off the sheets, he carefully lowered his feet to the questionable carpet and used the nightstand as leverage so he could limp a little closer. Still blinking in disbelief, Ryan’s jaw dropped a bit as he stared at the rose-shaped hairpin. Bending down, he delicately picked it up as another
memory was woken.

“That’s a lovely decoration in your hair,” he said, lightly tapping the rose that held her tresses up. “A rose. Rose… Can I call you that?”

Blue eyes twinkled. “Rose is fine. But what should I call you?”

Even though real names were out she should be able to call him something. Feeling a little silly, he quirked an eyebrow in a challenge. “Name me.”

She smirked as she pursed her lips and clicked her tongue in concentration. “Rrr… that’s a fun letter to say. And you look like you could be an ‘R’. Hmm…” At last her gaze settled on one of the bottles behind the bar. “Rum,” she said decisively.

“Then Rum is what I am,” he said with a sweep of his arms.

Giggling, she hopped off the stool and levelled him a look that sent his blood boiling. “Then… let’s go Rum.”

During their haste to get to bed, he or she must have flung the pin and she forgot to get it in her hasty exit. Of course all that mattered now was that Ryan had tangible proof that the woman he slept with was real. It hadn’t been a dream.

But… she was gone.

Perhaps she regretted what they’ve done. Or maybe there was an emergency or an appointment… but he was leaning towards the former with her obvious intent on making it appear she was never there in the first place. It was still a bit foggy but he remembered how she admitted she never done this thing before. She could be ashamed that she had sex with a total stranger and an older one to boot.

However, there was that niggling feeling in the back of his head that made him wonder if it was something else.

Looking back at the rumpled sheets and Ryan shivered at how their encounter didn’t stop at the one time. They fell asleep after and after sometime he woke up to find her at the foot of the bed with one hand wrapped around his hardening cock and her tongue teasing the flesh. She rode him hard and after another satisfying and explosive orgasm, they had fallen asleep in each other’s arms.

Was it possible to feel a spark so quickly with someone you barely met? Was it possible to have meaningless sex and for it to change into something meaningful after all?

That morning Ryan felt lighter and happier than he ever had his whole life and he believed that this woman had something to do with it. Somehow, she bewitched him and he found himself wanting to know more about her.

The deal was over.

He had to know her name. First things first, he had to find her.
One Night Stand

He went back to the bar every night for a week. He hoped she would come back but with every passing night turning into a bust… Ryan Gold was losing hope.

He couldn’t stop thinking about her. He dreamt of ocean blue eyes and an accent he could hardly forget. She haunted him and he was desperate to seek her out and get to know her—the real her.

So the following week he started asking questions and it seemed no one knew who she was let alone recognize her description. Clearly, she wasn’t a regular, which backed up her admittance of never getting together with a stranger. Dejected, he was about to give up until he came across one bar crawler who did remember her. Unfortunately, he was a piece of filth that spent more time making insinuating innuendos about her and what he bet she might like under the sheets.

It took all his willpower not to punch the man in the face, but then again, Ryan was never a violent person. So when the urge came from out of nowhere it took him by surprise at how quick he was to want to defend her honor. Releasing his clenched fist was a difficult task and he quickly made his excuses to leave before he really did act on his desire until he heard a familiar chuckle.

Immediately, his body was frozen over as he glanced to the side at the bar counter.

There she was! There was the woman with the enchanting blue eyes and that warm, buttery accent that could melt a man’s heart. She was there and she was more beautiful than he could remember—his drunken memories doing little justice in her appearance.

For a moment, he stood there and watched her in complete and utter amazement and bewilderment. For two weeks he was coming to this bar in hopes he would find her… and now… here she was at last. His mouth was dry as parchment, swallowing did little to change that, and his cane quivered beneath his touch.

He had known she was real but seeing her again was surreal. She wasn’t alone but it was another female and he didn’t know if he was relieved or not. Her friend was also young and pretty with flaming red hair and it only served to remind him that he was old and ridiculous for thinking she could be interested after their intense, passionate night together.

His free hand touched the tiny lump inside his jacket—the rose hairpin—and feeling the shape gave him a dose of courage. There was only one way of finding out if she was interested and he had to do the brave thing otherwise he will his lose his chances forever.

Straightening his posture, Ryan began to move towards her, his eyes fixated on the brunette. He could feel all the words he wanted to say were stuck in a jumble, but with each passing step his confidence didn’t waver and the lump in his throat dissipated. He was a new man with a new purpose in his life and this was his destiny calling him. He believed they had met for a reason with
them both suffering as deeply as they were.

Almost there…

A stumble and a drink splashed upon his jacket as a distracted patron bumped into him. In a snap, the world shifted and Ryan was aware that he was wet and trying to brush the person away, but the infernal idiot was babbling “I’m sorry” and offering to buy him a drink as an apology, yet it was that loss of time that cost him. For as soon as he looked up at the bar, she was gone.

“No!” Ryan exclaimed and he was rushing to the door. Maybe… just maybe he could still catch her.

But once he ran out to the sidewalk she and her friend had disappeared. It was too late.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle doesn’t feel well. (Rated T)

One Night Stand

She was late.

Belle was a punctual person and her monthly courses were no exception. But she was late.

She didn’t read too much into it at first. After all, she was under a lot of stress of arranging her mother’s funeral and dealing with the expenses she never realized she would have to take care of. Her father was useless—still shellshock over his wife’s loss but not shellshock enough to keep himself from grabbing a bottle of whiskey. So Belle had a lot on her mind than to concern herself with the lateness.

Then it came. She bled little and it was done. That was great though she was more upset that she wouldn’t ever hear her mother’s laugh again or hear her tell stories. Even as an adult, Belle loved listening to her mother tell all sorts of stories and within a blink of an eye… it was over.

No more.

A few days later Belle threw up. And again the next day. All in the morning.

Then her breasts began to ache even with the barest of touches when she dressed.

That was the last straw. Something was wrong and Belle had an idea, but it couldn’t be. She was on the pill and they used a condom so the chances were practically zilch. Even so… her rational mind told her there was no 100-percent full-proof protection with these things, regardless how careful they were.

Two minutes…

Two minutes and she’ll know.

God, this cannot be happening, she thought. I’m not ready. My Mom… I only wanted to feel. Was that so wrong?

One minute.

Belle bit her nail and held it there as she stared at the mocking white device. The seconds were agonizingly slow and in that time Belle thought about him and that night. That surprisingly wonderful night.

Despite her initial motive, Belle couldn’t ignore that something did occur between them. Something she never felt before about anyone. Not even her boyfriend Gary.

She wanted to forget. She wanted to block out the world and her pain and he—Rum—did that and
more. Then morning came and she was terrified. Terrified about this man she knew absolutely
nothing about and terrified by how easy it felt to feel something towards him. So she took the easy
way out: she left.

It was cowardly, yes, but they had agreed upon no real names and no personal information. No
attachment of any kind. It was impossible to feel this way about a person you just met and yet she
did.

So she left.

And now here she was taking a pregnancy test.

Ten seconds.

Nine.

Eight.

Seven.

Six.

Five.

Four.

Three.

Two.

One.

Belle grabbed the stick and watched as two pink lines stared right back at her.
The Daughter of Santan, Ms. French, prompted: Belle as Sherlock and Rumple as Watson. In this tale, Mr. Gold recounts the latest case that he and Ms. French solved in The Case of the Missing Storybook. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

This prompt was certainly a challenge for me. If anything, I’m hoping I captured the spirit of the genre and that you like it.
unacceptable. No one should control her fate but her; however, Lady Shalott concedes defeat without so much a struggle! Now, Proserpine, here at first glance, seems to have done the same. Yet, as you look deeper, she actually welcomes her title as Queen of the Underworld in her dark regal robes. See the light in the background? Even in the darkest depths of Hell... light finds a way and Proserpine takes comfort that not everything must be dour."

“She had no choice. She was forced to marry a monster.”

“Forgive me, Mr. Gold, but I respectfully disagree—“

The chiming of the door’s bells interrupted what Ms. French was going to say, and I couldn’t help the slight peevsed sigh from escaping. I had the “Closed” sign on the door for a reason, yet there are quite a few inhabitants here who think the idea is suggested. I rose steadily on my feet, gripping the handle of my cane, as I was prepared to give the intruder a lecture on reading comprehension when the high-pitch tone of a child hesitantly called out:

“Ms. French? Mr. Gold? Are you here?”

I instantly recognized the voice of one Mr. Henry Mills, a bright lad of ten years, who had the unfortunate circumstances of being adopted by Mayor Regina Mills. How a ruthless, manipulative woman like she raise a boy full of earnest and kindness is beyond me. Then again, I suppose, not being blood-related played a factor in the opposite temperaments.

“I know you have the closed sign up but Mrs. Beaumont told me that Ms. French came here and I could really use her help—Hello Mr. Gold! Is Ms.—?”

“Hello Henry. I’m here.” Ms. French appeared at my side, stepping forward to greet the boy. She gave him a cheerful smile, delighted to see him, and why shouldn’t she? Ms. French has a magical way with children, animals, and people, even cankerous old ones. Despite Henry’s initial look of urgency, it melted away as he returned her grin and I was once again in awe over Ms. French’s calming influence with something so trifle as a smile. Lord knows, if I attempted such a thing, then people would run screaming for the hills or accuse me of some sinister plot afoot.

“What seems to be the problem?” she asked and he immediately launched into his unfortunate tale.

“Remember how I told you I haven’t been getting along with my mother? Well, it seems to be getting worse. She doesn’t understand why I don’t have that many friends and why I don’t seem to fit in as much. I’ve tried. Honestly, I have. The other kids... they don’t like me. And I haven’t been doing well in school either. My teacher, Ms. Blanchard, she noticed this and we talked about it and she insists my Mom loves me (which I still have my doubts. I’m sorry Ms. French, I do). Then she told me how this one morning she was cleaning out her closet and she found this book—“


He nodded. “Yes a book. It wasn’t some ordinary book either. It was a collection of fairy tales called Once Upon a Time. Ms. Blanchard said it appeared like magic and she believed it was meant for me. So she lent it to me saying I might find what I’m looking for, and this is my problem Ms. French.”

“What’s that Henry?” Ms. French asked.

“It disappeared! I had it in a hiding spot so no one would find it and when I went to get it this morning... it was gone!” He was getting excited again and his pitch was getting louder. “I looked everywhere and I couldn’t find it. And... I know you’re good at finding things and figuring out who took them and I was hoping you might help me.”
I seized this moment to show Ms. French at how adept I’ve become working next to her with her deductive logic. I knew I had this case figured out and could have easily told Mr. Mills where his book was so he would not have to fret anymore.

“It seems obvious to me what has happened,” I said.

Ms. French arched her brow in my direction. “Oh? Well, go on Mr. Gold.”

“Henry,” I began, leaning on my cane in front of me. “When was the last time you saw your book?”

“Um, a few days ago I think.”

“And this thing with Regina… it’s been quite stressful am I correct?”

“Yes. That was why Ms. Blanchard spoke to me in the first place. After I would have a fight with my mom, I would sometimes forget to do my homework.”

Ah-ha! “I see. Well, since I was your age once, I know how young boys like to hide things they don’t want anyone else to find. And even in our anger or our forgetfulness, we fail to see what’s in front of us. While I’m certain you think your hiding spot is clever, I have no doubt it’s not as secretive as you may think it is. Therefore, your book is safely where it has always been—in your room. As to the actual location of your hiding spot, I can only surmise it being in a couple of places. One, the book is in your closet where you have your clothes and shoes covering it; or two, between your bedframe and mattress.”

So proud I was with my conclusion that I missed the crestfallen countenance of young Henry.

“I never hid the book in my bedroom. I knew it would be too obvious of a place to keep.”

Very well. Henry Mills was indeed far cleverer than most boys. Something I hadn’t taken into account but Ms. French was too kind to say I was entirely wrong.

“Mr. Gold may have been incorrect about your hiding spot Henry, but I do believe he was right about your book being safe. If you like, could you take us to your hiding spot so we can see for ourselves?” she asked politely.

Henry bit his lower lip as if mulling it over. Then, he exhaled. “Okay. But you promise you won’t tell anyone?”

“I swear,” Ms. French vowed solemnly, placing her hand over her heart. Sneaking a peek in my direction, her eyes told me to do the same.

Feeling slightly ridiculous, I repeated the same motions. “I promise Mr. Mills.”

“Good. Before I take you there, I know there has to be a cost and I don’t have much, but…” Henry reached into his pocket and pulled out a couple of crumbled dollar bills and some change. “Is this okay for payment?”

I counted no more than five dollars and thirty-three cents. Obviously, Regina doesn’t believe much in the allowance system.

“Keep your money Henry,” Ms. French said gently. “The use of our services is free.”

“It’s no problem Ms. French. I can pay you more once I get my allowance.”

I chuckled. Indeed, this boy was nothing like his adopted mother. “Like Ms. French said, we don’t
require payment for our services.”

Henry’s face did brighten up. “Gee, thanks!” Returning the meager amount into his pocket, Henry turned around. “Follow me.”

xxXXxx

Due to our sacred promise to the boy, I cannot disclose the exact location of the said hiding spot. For if it was known... Well, in the words of Henry Mills: “Bad things will happen.”

The only tidbit I can share with you, humble readers, is that I was quite astounded by Mr. Mills’ resourcefulness. He is without a doubt a very unique child. I cannot think of anyone else his age to come up with such a place to keep his most treasured items. I must add that even Ms. French was surprised as well, and she complimented Henry for his selection. She did, however, expressed her concern for the welfare of the book and if this place was ideal after all.

“It is. I assure you Ms. French. I love books as much as you and I would make sure nothing happens to it.”

“That’s a relief to hear. Now, where do you normally hide it?”

Henry took us to the area where he kept the book, and sure enough, the book was missing. I was quite certain it would have been where he had it, and the question that was echoing in my mind was what was so important about this book that it would disappear into thin air?

“Now, here’s the tricky part,” Henry said. “As you can see, it looks like it hasn’t been disturbed, but it was because—” He paused to lift up his safeguard (again, I’m under oath not to mention exactly what it is). “—this wasn’t where it was supposed to be. And since I know it wasn’t me who did it… then that could mean that someone found my book and they have it.”

“That is peculiar,” Ms. French commented and I had to agree. This remarkable boy was so clever and sly that he had the hindsight to booby-trap his hiding spot. “Are you absolutely certain Henry? May I take a closer look?”

He nodded. Ms. French approached the spot and got down to her legs and knees so she could give it a proper inspection. As for myself, I would, but my knee wouldn’t allow such movement so I was restricted to observe from behind with Henry next to me. We stood silently as she conducted her meticulous survey of the grounds, and after five minutes, she stood up with a satisfied glint in her eye.

“I must commend you Henry for the brilliant setup you have,” she started off saying. “And I believe you are right—someone does have your book. For what possible motive or purpose has not been made clear to me yet... However, I do have my suspicions. Now, you said you don’t get along with the other kids and that they don’t like you. Do they tease you Henry?”

He lowered his head and kick at some imaginary dirt. “A little. It’s nothing, honestly. They think I’m odd that’s all.”

“Why do you think that?”

“I’m not—Well, I’m adopted for one.”

“That doesn’t make you odd.”

“No... that’s what Ms. Blanchard said. But I don’t feel like I belong here. And the others...
know this.”

I cannot explain it but hearing Henry speak like this did fill me with anger. What right did anyone have to call him odd or make him feel he didn’t belong in Storybrooke? Maybe Regina should get off her high horse and look into this matter. If her son was being bullied, then she should take action against them. I know if my child was in this situation… I would find out who was responsible, track down their parents, and remind them why I can be the town’s monster. Such behavior is uncalled for and I would do my best to make certain it never happens again.

“Let me share you a secret,” Ms. French told him. “You’re not odd. You’re special. Don’t ever forget that Henry. Being adopted doesn’t change anything. I mean, take a look at myself and Mr. Gold for example. I’m from Australia and Mr. Gold is from Scotland. And Sheriff Graham is from Ireland. We weren’t born here but we belong to Storybrooke nevertheless. It’s our home as much as it is yours.”

“I guess…” his voice trailed off. “Although, I think you’re all a lot closer than you think.”

That statement did perplex me but there wasn’t much time to ponder over it as Ms. French was holding up what appeared to be a cigar butt. Now, why in the world would a cigar be here of all places, and even Henry seemed confused by its appearance.

“I found this while sifting through the —— (again, I’m under oath to avoid any details) and knowing you’re not a smoker or a secret one… the culprit left this behind. I do not believe it was intentional since the person made certain to cover up their tracks apart from discovering your failsafe. This was accidentally dropped and concealed, but look closely: it’s thin and the end is completely black. And if I touch it…”

Ms. French cringed for a second and nodded to herself. “As I suspected—it’s still warm so it’s not that old.” Sniffing it, she continued nodding. “It has a slight odor of tobacco—not very strong—but then again, the person who smoked this is using this more for show than the strength of the actual cigar.”

She bent her finger so we could follow her, and so followed her we did. It didn’t take long for us to return to town and Ms. French, walking in those infamous heels of hers, hadn’t missed a beat in her brisk pace. Henry and I were quite at a loss to what she was doing or thinking as she continued to carry the used cigar butt with her fingertips. Eventually, she led us down the side street to the back entrance to The Rabbit Hole, a dingy hole in the wall that was literally a hole in the wall.

She came to a halt and looked over her shoulder at us. “As you can see, our culprits are no other than Mr. Jack Dawkins and his buddy Mr. Charley Bates.”

Speaking of the two heathen devils, they were leaning against the brick wall—Mr. Dawkins had another stogie in his mouth as he had the book opened in his hands with Mr. Bates having his hands in his pocket and keeping an eye on the door for any unfortunate drunk to come stumbling out to pick his (or her) pocket.

I clenched my jaw. These boys were no more than a couple years older than Henry, but I’ve been living here long enough to know that they had a reputation. In fact, Mr. Dawkins once tried shoplifting some valuable jewelry I had in my shop. I put a right stop to it and never once did he or his associate try my place again. However, I cannot say the other stores in Storybrooke were as lucky as me.

Ms. French marched up to them and cleared her throat. Immediately, they looked up and saw her, then Henry and me, but before they could make a run for it… Ms. French held up her free hand and
firmly requested for the book to be handed over to her.

“Hiya Ms. French. Sorry… didn’t know this was yours…” Mr. Dawkins started saying.


The thief looked to where Henry stood and back to Ms. French. “I was wondering what was so fascinating about this but it’s nothing but stupid fairy tales. He can have it.”

Walking up to Henry, Mr. Dawkins shoved the book into Henry’s hands. “Sorry,” he mumbled with a quick peek at Ms. French before waving his friend to follow him. The two rascals fled without another glance, but Ms. French and I exchanged a look knowing this would not be the last we will hear from them.

“There you go Henry,” Ms. French said. “I trust it’s still good as new?”

“It is! Thanks Ms. French, Mr. Gold,” Henry exclaimed, his eyes shining happily. “This means so much to me! How did you know Jack took it?”

“Well,” Ms. French teased, her blue eyes twinkling mirthfully. “It was quite simple once you showed me your hiding spot. Of course, I had my suspicions from the start but finding the cigar butt was the confirmation I needed. I know that Mr. Dawkins and his friend are notorious for stealing and can be bullies. I’ve stopped them enough times in the library from ganging up on someone, even you Henry. Unfortunately, Mr. Dawkins likes to think he is an adult already when he is far from it. Finding this cigar meant it had to be him and finding him here was the logical conclusion. With any inebriated person coming out, his friend can rob them of their wallets. It’s the perfect setup for these pickpockets.”

“Again, thank you for finding this. I don’t know what would happen if I couldn’t—“

“Not to worry. I’m relieved to have a book reunited with its owner. Now, you make sure you keep it in a safe place. And somewhere new.”

“I will!” Henry beamed at us and took off running in the direction of his house.

Gazing at Ms. French, I said, “That was something. I never would have figured it was Mr. Dawkins.”

“That’s because you don’t work with children as often as I do,” Ms. French rejoined, sending a wink at me. “I believe we were in the middle of discussing how Proserpine is indeed the superior oil painting from the Pre-Raphaelite period.”

“Ah, ah, Ms. French,” I scolded her. “I do believe I was winning that debate.”

“You might want to recheck the facts again, my dear Mr. Gold. I was winning that one.”

Looping her arm with mine, we began to head back towards my shop. Not that I will ever admit to her out loud, but Ms. French is right. Proserpine is the best painting from the Pre-Raphaelites. However, I couldn’t stop thinking about Henry Mills and his book. There was something about it, something important that I couldn’t place my finger on it.

Now, if you forgive me, it’s Rent Day and my first stop is Granny’s Bed and Breakfast.
CocoRocks prompted: Rumbelle North and South. It was dangerous for her brother, Will French, to be here but Belle was taking a greater risk in escorting him to the train. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own North and South and I’m borrowing certain lines of the dialogue from the film because they are amazing and I couldn’t say it better. Thankfully, I do own the novel and just recently acquired the movie with Richard Armitage… So life is very good!

North and South

It was dark out, nearly close to midnight, but the wandering couple needed the shield of darkness to complete this hallow mission. The lady, donning a black cloak and hood, kept her face hidden; keeping her eyes to the ground while scanning the area out of the corners to make sure this clandestine appearance continues to be thus so. The gentleman, indeed young and handsome, patted the lady’s arm hooked with his own with reassurance. His countenance, however, was stoic yet wary as he moved with determination and purpose. He was as anxious as his companion, yet schooled his features so not to alarm her any further. They knew how dangerous this was for the two of them—an unattached young woman, respectable and congenial, out alone in the middle of the night with a man, a stranger practically with little connections to her family or her.

Or so one would believe…

They were actually siblings and it had been quite some time since the two had last seen each other. Unfortunately, for the brother, he was mixed up in a terrible situation involving a mutiny when he was part of Her Majesty’s Navy. There was a heavy price on his head if he was caught; although, the risk was worth taking when he received word that his mother was dying. Now… she was at peace with God and he had to leave Milton at once lest he should be captured and imprisoned. Of course, no one knew of his existence; a matter that was decided by the family to protect him from being arrested. And he knew he owed his sister many thanks for her indiscretion while he hid in her home. He knew the arrangement wasn’t easy for her or his father, but what choice did they have? At least he was able to say goodbye one more time…

Their pace hurried until they approached his train to London. The lady pulled down her hood, the soft light from the lanterns in the station highlighting the auburn top of her brown curls secured tightly in a fashionable bun. Her blue eyes were bright as sapphires and deep as the ocean, glowing with love and concern for her brother, but also with relief. As soon as Will arrives in London, her friend, Jefferson Madden, will smuggle him into a ship bound back to Spain so Will could be safe again. She had to keep faith that everything will end well. They had evaded the authorities for this
“Oh Will… I wish you didn’t have to leave.”

“I know little sis,” he murmured, resting his hand against her cheek. “I hate to go and not be there for the funeral.” Looking up at the clock, he sighed. “We only a few minutes more. Belle… I don’t know when I’ll see you or Papa again.”

The despair in his hazel eyes only made this separation all the more painful. It had been too long, years to be exact, since they had seen each other after the incident. Even letter writing was a risk factor and the contact between the Frenches and their son had been so scarce to the point where nothing would be exchanged upon months on end. It wasn’t until Mama was struck ill that Belle felt Will deserved to know what was happening so he could return for one last visit. She had been delighted to see him on their doorstep; she couldn’t contain her joy! Now, those new memories were bittersweet and there was so much she wanted to share with him about Milton and its people that Time proved to be the enemy.

Not wanting to make this goodbye a tearful one, Belle pushed aside her sadness and smiled warmly at him. “You will take care, won’t you?”

“Of course. It grieves me that you are alone and Papa… He won’t be the same.”

“I know. But I am not completely alone. I have friends here and I take comfort in that knowing you are safe and sound out there in the world.

He grinned. “That I am.”

Time was slipping away from them as the train huffed and puffed in its impatience to begin its journey. Belle, on her part, wanted to take in every moment spent with her beloved brother, and since he had to board soon, she opened her arms and embraced him for the last time for God knows how long it would be the next time.

Holding her tight, Will inhaled deeply, pressing his nose into her hair as he whispered, “You are a saint Belle. I don’t know what I would have done if I couldn’t be here for you.”

“Nor I,” she confessed, squeezing him back and fighting back the tears at bay. She wanted to commit these final moments to her memory, and she didn’t want them spent with tears and sobs. Placing her chin on his shoulder, she continued to hug her brother when she glanced past him and caught sight of a familiar figure by a lamp post not too far from the platform. Dressed in his usual fine tailored suit, top hat, and cane—Mr. Gold’s visage was locked on hers; although his expression was difficult to discern, there was no denying the simmering anger that lurked in his coal-black eyes.

Her heart skipped a beat. What was there about this man that had the ability to unnerve her so? His unexpected (and unwanted, she had to remind herself) proposal had been shocking enough, even insulting, since he clearly felt he needed to protect her reputation after the rock thrown meant for him had struck her when she placed herself between him and the strikers. His impertinence to assume she needed saving did stir her ire, but she remained calm as she rejected him, and even now, she couldn’t stop thinking about that unfortunate confrontation or the way his countenance crumbled when she insisted she would not be some kind of possession for him.

Of course, why would he be here at the train station at this late hour confounded her…? Unless he was awaiting the arrival for more Irish workers… and Will!

Her thoughts immediately turned to the concern of her brother’s welfare as her lips parted in an
inaudible gasp, her body turning suddenly cold. Noticing the shift in his sister’s mood, Will pulled back and was astonished by the pale complexion growing on Belle’s normal rosy cheeks. To soothe her worries, his thumb gently rubbed her arm and he was about to offer more consoling and reassuring words when he took notice of the way her irises widened and were staring out as if she saw some kind of ghost.

Fearing it was an officer of the law, Will turned sharply around. To his growing confusion, he saw only a gentleman with a cane whose gaze was fixated on him. There was no trace of recognition to even hint the man knew who he was or his crime, yet the gentleman’s frigid glare was enough to put Will on edge before he walked away, the sound of his cane echoing on the silent platform. With the gent gone, Will couldn’t shake away the feeling that the man believed him to be some kind of usurper…

“Who was that man?” he asked at once, returning his attention to his sister whose complexion was returning to its normal hue.

“Mr. Gold,” she answered softly. Was there a hint of wistfulness in her voice?

Shaking his head, he knew his sister well enough not to involve herself with unhappy gentlemen with sour countenances. “What a scowl that man has. Cuts into one’s soul does it not? No doubt he is a very disagreeable fellow.”

Belle sighed wearily. “As with most men, something happened to make him scowl, Will. Don’t judge him harshly.”

It was a difficult task to charge him with, but Will, for her sake, consented and he pressed a kiss to her forehead. “I’ll write soon and… perhaps you can come visit? I know Ana is eager to meet you.”

Covering his hand with hers, Belle grinned. “I would love to. Now, hurry. You must go before—“

“French?”

A third voice interjected the farewell as the two turned in the direction of a man stumbling from the shadows. He looked ragged and his eyes were bloodshot, but there was no mistaken the slurring in his diction or the putrid scent of alcohol on his breath as he lifted a finger to Will.

“It is you, isn’t it? I thought I recognized you French.”

Will hardened his features. “I’m not French. You have me confused with someone—“

“No!” the drunk bellowed, getting closer. “I know you! You are French, you are!”

“Please, sir, don’t—“ Belle started to say, trying to intervene, but the man pushed her out of his way. Her startled scream angered her brother as both men laid both their hands on the other: Will to get him away from Belle, the stranger to bring trouble.

“Get off! I said get off!” Will ordered but the drunk seized his lapels and with a force he hadn’t seen coming… he was shoved against the wall as he heard Belle’s frantic shout. Struggling against his captor, Will looked away as the man sneered, “Where you been hiding French?”

Belle continued to watch in horror and fear as the drunk pinned her brother, but somehow… Will managed to get the upper hand as he heartily pushed the drunk away from him. However, the blow took the inebriated fellow by surprise… and he fell and rolled down the stairs that led up to the platform. At once, he got to his feet and staggered away without another glance to the frightened French siblings.
Belle, to her credit, found her voice and grabbed Will’s arm. “You must go now, Will. Go! Before he gets the police.”

She tugged on his arm disturbing him from his reverie. Knowing she was right, Will quickly boarded the train as the conductor blew his whistle. Shutting the door, Will looked out the window and reached for Belle one last time.

“Farewell little sis,” he said. “Until we meet again!”

The train heaved and chugged before it finally withdrew from the station, leaving Belle alone.

A few days later Mr. Gold was walking through town when he heard his name being called. Stopping, he used his cane to help himself turn as he recognized Inspector Graham approaching.

“Mr. Gold, I’m glad I caught you. There’s something I need to tell you.”

“What is it?” Gold inquired.

“That man we saw at the mortuary…”

“Oh, yes,” Gold said, nodding to himself. “I believe the man’s name is Smee. A drunk, obviously, but he met his death by violence almost certainly. One of my mother’s servants was engaged to him. She’s in great distress as you can imagine.”

Graham could indeed. “Yes, well, am I right to presume you are acquainted with a Miss French?”

“I am, yes. Why?” After the funeral for the late Mrs. French, Gold was doing his best not to put too much thought towards the daughter. Of course, as Fate would have it, Miss French was all he could think about. His proposal was a blow to his esteem, especially when he thought… The way she had threw herself at him, shielding him with her body… He thought she might have had feelings for him; even just a smidgen would have sufficed. And then there was that night at the station when he saw her and that boy… The way he held her and tenderly caressed her as if he had some right…

Gold had to promptly leave lest the temptation to cane the boy grew too much. He had been seething that the fool had such nerve to touch his Miss French!

But she’s not your Miss French. Or have you forgotten the conversation you had with her in her parlor?

Indeed, how he could forget her cruel rejection and her excuse that she had not learned how to properly turn down a gentleman’s offer… Her tone brook no argument that he was not the first to propose marriage, and that someone else had tried before him filled Gold with dread and jealousy. To think she hadn’t had other suitors was ridiculous. She was a beautiful woman with wits to match made her all the more desirable and he would be a fool to think another would feel otherwise. However, it grieved him that he was not the one she chosen. Of course, apart from his wealth and standing, he lacked other attractive qualities with his limp and cane in addition to his graying hair. Regardless what his mother said how handsome he was, Gold knew he was much older than Miss French and there were other finer men in their prime that would be worthier…

Like the one at the station.

“The thing is, sir, Smee’s death is mixed up with Miss French, sir. I have secured a chain of evidence that links a gentleman walking with Miss French at the station as the very same man that fought with
Smee and may have caused his death. But the young lady denies she was there.”

Gold took in a sharp intake of breath. “Are you sure? I mean, are you sure the man she was with is connected to Smee’s death? What evening had this occurred? The time?” It couldn’t be…

“Between 11 and 12 on the date of—” Graham answered, frowning at the queer expression on Gold’s face. “Sir? Is something—?”

Yet, Gold couldn’t shake what this revelation entailed. Putting on his stern façade, he added, “And Miss French denies she was there?”

“Indeed. I have a witness who swears he saw Miss French, even though I’ve told him of her denial. However, as town magistrate, you must know there must be an inquest. So it does put us in a difficult situation where you have a witness who insists he saw her, but at the same time, you do not want to doubt the word of a respectable young woman.”

Gold nodded wordlessly. It was a peculiar situation to be in that was for certain. And for Miss French… a single young woman with small prospects could not risk putting her reputation at stake, and yet… He had seen her that night with a man. A man who embraced her, a man who touched her with familiarity. He saw them and he knew they saw him too. However, Miss French perjured herself to the good inspector and the obvious purpose was to protect her lover and her reputation. However, he had been in Miss French’s acquaintance long enough to know she was adamant about honesty, even being brutally honest at times. Lord knows she had an opinion about everything. So why would she lie?

“You’re absolutely certain the young lady denies being at the station?”

“Emphatically, sir. I asked her directly twice and both times she claimed she was not there.”

None of it made sense but at the same time it did. Perhaps she was really in love with this young man and if she was willing to risk everything to protect him… Gold briefly closed his eyes as the pain rippled through his heart. Despite how distant and cold things had become between them, Gold loved her. The realization was sobering and that it only proved his earlier sentiments made it all the more heartbreaking. Miss French did not believe he loved her. All he had to do was prove his feelings were real and true and… what? It would not change anything, not when she clearly had feelings for someone else. Someone who was decidedly not him. But he could do something for her and if she never knew… Well, it would be his secret to covet.

“Let’s keep this between us. I will look into it but do not do anything without my say so. Is that clear?”

“Yes sir.” The two men shook on it, and with a tap to his hat, Graham took his leave.

Gold continued his walk with much to consider now. You might have thought me as heartless, Miss French. But I know your secret now and I will do everything in my power to make sure you are safe. Even though I have no chance in changing in your eyes… At least I can do this for you.
Chapter Summary

C.R. Carlyle Prompted: The infamous proposal scene. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

North and South

It had been a long night but Belle woke refreshed and clear-headed after that unfortunate incident at Mr. Gold’s mill. Tried as she might, she had hoped that violence would not have resulted in the matter over his Irish workers; however, the stone was cast and she felt its impact. She was grateful that the injury no longer bothered her and she could focus on other important and delicate matters. Joanna would need help with Mrs. French and once her mother was dressed… Belle could pen her letter to her brother about their mother’s condition and perhaps visit her dear friend, Bessy Higgins, after supper. She wanted to discuss the strike some more with her father and see if it was possible for a peaceful solution.

She firmly believed there was a way. The workers were displeased and angry that their employer was willing to replace them… but if both sides could talk, work together, then perhaps they could reach an agreement that would be agreeable to both. Of course, convincing Mr. Gold to behave civilly was another manner since the man was vain and proud. He saw his workers not as men and women but the tools and gears to his machines, and if he was a better master, kinder, then there would be no need for unrest or strikes.

Yet, her mind could not help but reflect to that day… He had gone out to confront the mob (at her insistence), and instead he only inspired their ire rather than peace. And she—well, she couldn’t bear the thought that she sent him by himself to confront the mob so she had to go to him to help. Of course, she hadn’t expected the rock…

Touching her forehead, Belle did not remember what happened much, but when she woke from her unconsciousness, she was greeted with the disapproving countenance of Mr. Gold’s mother. That woman certainly was the most uncongenial and haughty person in all her acquaintance! Even Mr. Gold’s pride was not as awful as his mother’s; however, Belle believed she had been born with a permanent scowl. Furthermore, she was not sympathetic to Belle’s plight regardless of her insistence she see a doctor. It was a protocol of social convention, nothing more.

And Mr. Gold…

There was the brief alarming panic that settled in his eyes before everything went black. No doubt she must have fallen into his embrace, which Belle blushed thinking that a part of her had touched him. What must have been running through his mind…?

“No,” she muttered to herself. “I will not think of him. I will not think about that family.”

It did not matter that Mr. Gold was dear friends with her father. Belle refused to spare another thought to the arrogant and cruel man. If he could not see the error of his ways concerning his
employees and their families, then he never will.

After completing her toilet, Belle went into her mother’s room to assist Joanna. The sickly Mrs. French was dressed and ate her breakfast as Belle read to her. When her mother felt some strength returning, Belle fetched her sewing so her mother could occupy her time with some kind of menial labor. Then, the beauty dismissed herself so she could answer any mail and take calls from any visitors. It was that time she used to her benefit to write her letter to Will and tell him about Mama’s condition.

Belle was finishing her post-script when Joanna knocked on the door.

"Forgive me, miss, but you have a visitor. Mr. Gold wishes to speak to you in the drawing-room."

An ink blot appeared next to her neat script. "Wh-what was that Joanna?" she asked, not sure if she heard correctly.

“Mr. Gold,” the servant repeated. “He is requesting your audience miss.”

“My—?” Belle frowned. Why would he come?

Her finger reached to brush against her forehead. Perhaps it was to see how she was faring, maybe even lecture her on how it was not a proper for a lady to do what she had done. If he came expecting her to snivel and apologize for her actions, then he was bound for disappointment. She would not apologize for what she believed was right and that was that.

“Thank you Joanna. Tell him I will be there shortly,” she said.

“Very good miss.” Joanna did a quick bow and left, leaving Belle a moment to collect her thoughts. Even when she was determined not to think about him and his family, Mr. Gold found a way to infuriate her with his invading presence. Must he be everywhere?

When Belle finally went into the drawing-room, she found Mr. Gold staring out the window as if something captured his attention. He was dressed well and impeccable as was his wont with a suit of black and his cravat sticking out nice and neat. His cane with its golden head was clenched tightly with one hand, not for support she noted, but something else. Despite his clean-shaven appearance, Mr. Gold seemed somewhat apprehensive and… was that a quiver of his arm and shoulder?

She took a step further into the room, nearly flinching, when he whirled around as if startled by her entrance. It took him a second to recognize it was she and he visibly relaxed, although inside he was anything but calm.

She stood by the table, boldly meeting his gaze, her lips pressed firmly together into an unreadable expression. Even her eyes did not betray what she was thinking. The only indication he had that she might be affected by his visit was the slight flare of her nostrils with each breath she drew, and the short rise and fall of her chest.

He hastily coughed, looking away, lest she saw his rising blush. This jerking movement set a quizzical look on her lovely features and he feared he was doing a poor job in what he came to do. The last thing she would want is for him to stare at her person without so much a word and he desperately longed to have her, to call her as his own wife and worship her for the rest of his days. She did not know the power she had over him or how she could destroy him with one word of rejection if he did not do this right.

Wetting his lips, Mr. Gold inhaled. “Miss French, let me begin by saying, how ungrateful I was yesterday—“
This caught her attention as her confusion melted away her indecipherable countenance. Yet, her scrutiny was piercing as she interjected, “You had nothing to be grateful for Mr. Gold. Of course, that is, if you are referring that you believe you should thank me for what I had done. Rest assured, it was only natural for me to do such a thing and I do not regret it. The only regret I have is that I said what I said to convince you to go out to them. I see it was futile now, although I had hoped…” Her voice trailed off as she shook her head and whatever she was going to say. “Regardless, it has been done. We cannot change that.”

“No. We cannot,” he agreed. “Yet that’s not what I mean Miss French. You see…it was not your words that had me go but the truth in them and how you borne the fact that it was my duty as a man, not a master.” No! You’re getting off track Gold. Return to why you came. Tell her! Swallowing thickly, he tried again. “Forgive me. This is not what I meant to say—it is but not this and I am grateful to you—“

“There is no need to thank me or express your gratitude Mr. Gold,” Miss French said. “I do not deserve it, especially when the workers did intend to commit violence. Had I known what they were going to do I wouldn’t have put you in harm’s way. However, if you are inclined to this fancied obligation to express your gratitude that would make you feel better, then you may do so.”

“I am not here because of some ‘fancied obligation’ you think I might have. On the contrary, I do not see this as an obligation of any sort. For you must know… I feel that I owe you my life. Yes that is true. I owe you my very life, and I trust, that it has added some value to it in your eyes as well.”

He promised himself he would not allow his emotions get the best of him. How many times had his temper gotten away and Miss French witnessed it and spoken out about his passions? She was a woman from the South and was not used to such ways or his frankness towards his common man. She often preached the behavior of a gentleman and made it clear on more than one occasion that he often lacked the skills or the ability to behave as one. He was determined to prove her wrong in that aspect. He was a gentleman and he could do this in a gentlemanlike way; however, seeing her in this light as the sun danced around her dark hair, teasing the curls, and illuminating her porcelain features and her azure eyes, making them stand out even more so than natural; he could not help himself as he cave into the temptation and reached for her hand as he spoke, his accent growing heavier:

“Miss French, I have never been in this position before, but to know that what you have given me is more than I could ever give you. So I will try by giving you freely what has been offered to me.” He clasped her hand to his heart, stepping forward with more determination than ever for what he was going to say next. “I am now and for all the future yours. I love you Miss French more than a man has ever loved a woman. And if you have me, then I would gladly lay all that I am at your feet if you accept to be my wife.”

He paused, waiting fervently for what she will say, the anticipation making his heart beat even faster and his knees weaker that he could hear the cane rattling on the floor. Such sweet, agonizing torture it was to at last hear her response and have her say…

“This is shocking Mr. Gold. What you are saying shocks me, and forgive my bluntness, but that is the first feeling I have after listening to your speech. I wish I could say the same but what you have described—these feelings—that you so have—I do not understand. It offends me.”

The icy tone that penetrated her usual warm voice rendered him speechless and frozen him as she ripped her hand away from his. Quickly, she moved away from him, walking around him to put some distance from this situation that had swiftly become uncomfortable and unbearable to hear.

“It—offends you?” he whispered in a state of shock and partially in disbelief.
“Yes. Indeed it does quite offend me,” she replied earnestly. “Furthermore, I feel my response is justified. After all, you come here telling me that my conduct yesterday was a personal act between you and me, and that you may come and thank me for it, instead of perceiving, as a gentleman would, that a woman would step forward to help a man in danger.” Her cheeks were becoming flushed and rosy with her growing indignation that he saw her actions lending to something else entirely. How dare he think or even imply such a feeling existed!

“And I am what? Forbidden to speak on my behalf my thanks to you? I believe I am just to do so.” He could not help the bitter retort or the way his tone became rougher with the insolence she was showing him.

“And I did yield to your gratefulness but you seem to be under the impression that I was not guided by some natural instinct; rather, it must be because I felt something for you. I would have done the same for any man. I daresay, Mr. Gold, believe me when I say there was not a man—not a poor desperate soul in that crowd—for whom I had not more sympathy—for whom I should not have done what little I could more heartily.”

“Any man…?” Forget anger. He could feel his heart lodged in his throat at what Miss French’s words revealed. Indeed, he was foolish to think that he was special to be protected, saved by her. But his mother, the servants—they seemed so adamant that it was more than that. Yet, it was her last slight, the insult, which inspired his renewed ire. “Do go on Miss French. I am fully aware of your misplaced sympathies. I know you imagine them to be your friends. No doubt you approve of their violence. You believe I got what I deserved.”

“No! Of course not!” she exclaimed. “They were desperate. Can you not see that?”

“Oh, desperation is a fine excuse for violence,” he growled.

“If you would just speak to them—talk to them—be reasonable…”

“You believe I am unreasonable?”

“All I am saying is that if you talk to them and not set the soldiers on them; then, you might reach an agreement or form of understanding.”

“They will get what they deserve.” The sentence seemed to reverberate in the small room and it left a dreadful feeling within the pair. Yet, he could not help but add, “I know you do not see me as a gentleman, but it is because you do not understand me or my reasons.”

“I do not care to understand nor do I wish to,” she replied. “In your eyes, you feel it is your duty to save my reputation. That because you are rich and my father is in reduced circumstances that you can have me for your possession.”

“I do not want to possess you! I love you!”

“It was the final blow that had him faltering in his stance. Even she seemed to be surprise by her outburst as she turned her face away from him so he would not see her. After such a declaration he should take his leave. Take the rest of his dignity with him. Instead, he found himself staring at her back and wondering how in the world it came to this. He had been so confident, so certain of her feelings after what happened yesterday. How could he have been so wrong?

“I’m sorry.” It came out so quietly, so softly that Mr. Gold almost did not believe his ears. “I’ve not
learned how to—how to refuse when a man has talked to me the way you have.”

The dagger in his heart began to slowly twist as she finally looked at him and the meaning of her words hit him.

“There were others?” he asked. It was a stupid question to ask because Miss French was young and beautiful. Of course she had her fair share of suitors. Why shouldn’t he think there wasn’t? However to hear it from her own lips—to admit that there have been other men in his position as of now was more than he could possibly bear. “This happens every day to you? You must have to disappoint so many men that offer you their hearts.”

It was cruel and malicious to say, but according to her, was he not supposed to be cruel and malicious? His employees attacked him and he was supposed to accept it? His feelings for her were offensive and disgusting, and he was supposed to take comfort that he was not the first to be turned down?

Belle watched the conflicting battle of emotions in his visage and she knew she crossed the line when she mentioned her flaw. Though, how could she make him understand that this was not easy for her? That she was never taught how to respond properly to a man’s proposal. That this was still a new experience for her and she… Closing her eyes, Belle exhaled deeply.

“Please understand Mr. Gold—“

“I understand.”

She opened her eyes and trembled at the uncensored glare of his eyes, the way his brows knitted together, glowering at her with its intensity as he uttered his last words to her before taking his leave.

“I understand you completely.”

Chapter End Notes

For this proposal, I combined the dialogue elements of the book, movie, and Rumple’s proposal from the show. Kind of all meshes well, don’t you think? This is also another fantastic moment in the movie with Richard Armitage. If you haven’t seen it, then you must do so now.
Chapter Summary

C.R. Carlyle Prompted: The final train scene—Belle French has finished her business in Milton and is waiting at the train station with good friend, Jefferson Madden, to return to London when she finds an unexpected surprise. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

Once again, this part is inspired by the film and so is most of the dialogue. Honestly, this can’t get any better than it already is.

North and South

Looking out the window, Belle watched as the bustling and busy crowds of men and women briskly moving on the platform to their appointed destinations. She was bereft to leave it all behind, remembering the very same busy crowds on the streets of Milton. Everyone was always in a hurry, always rushing to conduct their business. It was a fast-paced way of life that had been assault to the senses, and one that she held such disdain for since there was little to no time to enjoy the sights (as bleak as they were). Amazing at how she had acclimated to something she was strongly against, even determined to detest with all her might. Now, she longed for the days when she once had been part of that hectic life.

Sighing, she turned towards to her companion who was returning to his seat. Jefferson Madden, a dear family friend and a potential suitor (although, Belle knew how happy it would make her cousin Alice happy to wed him; she was fond of him but not in a romantic sense; besides, he was an ideal financial adviser and someone she could trust with her business matters), offered her a small smile as he made himself comfortable once more in his seat.

“There appears to be a ten-minute stop here. I know how anxious you are to return to London and we will be leaving shortly as soon as a northbound train passes.”

He was handsome and kind, an excellent choice of a husband if she must admit, but Jefferson wasn’t the man that Belle had been thinking about more and more. Her mind had been plagued with thoughts and dreams of him and her entire time spent in Milton was one full of anticipated anxiety to see him. However, to her chagrin, he was not at home or even in Milton. She should have been relieved but instead she was feeling the opposite. Mr. Gold was not an easy man to care for, let alone consider a friend, but she was beginning to see a new side to him, a side that she never considered or allowed herself to see since she had been set in her ways to despise him and all that he represented.

And now…

“I believe I might go out and stretch my legs for a bit,” she said to Jefferson.

He nodded. “Very well. I’ll be right here.”
Of course, he would. Loyal and faithful to a fault. Even after she had turned down his proposal about a couple of years ago before her move to Milton, Belle thought any chance of friendship with him would also be gone. On the contrary, he had been anxious to renew their acquaintance when she came to London after her Papa’s death. While part of her was grateful for his kindness and honesty, especially after she inherited a hefty fortune from her godfather, Mr. Lumiere, Belle knew the right thing to do… the grateful thing would be open to the possibility of courtship. Jefferson didn’t have to help her, he didn’t have to accompany her, but he did when anyone else could have taken advantage of her newfound wealth.

She supposed she was grateful but not in the way she wished she ought to feel.

Opening the door, Belle stepped out of the train, a smile stretching across her lips as a cool breeze wafted past her. It might not have been her beloved countryside at Helstone, but the air seemed fresher than ever before. She inhaled deeply as she took a couple steps forward. The northbound train that Jefferson had mentioned was coming through and she couldn’t help but watch as it moved and slowly came to a halt.

It was then she noticed a very familiar passenger on board. Her eyes widened as her lips parted in a soft gasp, her hands clenching the folds of her dress. It couldn’t be… He wasn’t…

Sitting by the window, she watched as Mr. Gold leaned forward to open his compartment. It was at that moment that his countenance was looking in her direction, the recognition quite palpable between them. Belle’s legs were suddenly useless as she remained in her spot, her teeth worrying her lower lip as Mr. Gold stepped out. There was something different about him. He seemed relaxed, pleasant almost, without a trace or air of formality. In fact, this was the first time she had seen him in attire that was practically informal. Gone was his suit jacket and hat—he wore a white shirt and black vest, the collar loose and the first two buttons undone to show his throat and upper chest. Even his hair—usually slicked back and in place—was free to be ruffled by the wind. Only his cane, the needed accessory, was in his grasp as he limped his way in her direction.

A timid, very small-like smile was painted on his mouth, his brown eyes softer and gentler than she had ever seen gazed back with the similar disbelief and happiness that mirrored hers.

She was finding it difficult to breathe.

“Where are you going?” he asked, his Scottish brogue that had haunted her so now a tender caress to her ears. Gods… Hearing him after all these months had her knees almost buckled underneath her.

“To London. I…I’ve been to Milton.” She couldn’t believe she was stammering like some meek girl. She was never shy in his presence before so why couldn’t she stop the slight tremor running down her spine?

That smile again. Dear Lord, there was something about his smile and the delicate curve of his brow as he arched it playfully—playfully—as those eyes twinkled. “You’ll not guess where I’ve been.” He was right. She didn’t but there was something fascinating about the teasing lilt in his voice as he reached into his vest pocket and pulled out a brightly yellow rose bud.

Her gasp was audible as her blue eyes sparkled at the familiar flower. “You’ve been to Helstone?” He nodded and she tentatively reached to hold the fragile object in her palm. Stroking its velvet petals softly, Belle couldn’t stop looking at it as she murmured, “I thought these were all gone!”

“I found it in the hedgerow. You have to look hard.”

In awe, she looked up at him. “W-why were you there?”
The corner of his mouth lifted. “I wanted to see where Belle French grew into the woman she was.”

She blushed a rosy shade of pink as she quickly looked down at the rose. “A-and?”

“I can see why you were so enchanted by it. I must admit it was hard for me to leave as well. Milton was indeed quite a shock to the system for you. Right now, I don’t know how I’m going to face it.”

She grinned, holding the bud to her nose so she could inhale its floral perfume. “I missed this. Thank you.”

“Why…why were you in Milton?” he inquired.

“On business. Well, that is, I have a business proposition.” This had his attention as everything Belle had rehearsed previously suddenly vanished from her head. What was that deal again? Her features flushed once more as she rushed, “I-I need Jefferson to help me explain.”

His hand upon her arm stopped her from turning around as Belle found herself once more enthralled by his penetrating stare.

“You don’t need Jefferson to explain,” he replied huskily. You can tell me were the unspoken words that had Belle swallowing hard as she allowed him to guide her over to a bench so they could sit. He didn’t break his concentration on her, even when she glanced over her shoulder at Jefferson. Her friend was watching them both, rather intently, and there was a queer expression on his face as he boldly looked at Gold. She knew that Jefferson didn’t like him and the feeling was mutual, but she couldn’t help but be torn at how this must look to him. Or even what he must be thinking and feeling…

However, there was no point in thinking about Jefferson as Mr. Gold was waiting for her to explain her proposition. Taking a deep breath, she said:

“Let me see if I can get this right. It’s a business proposition as I said. I have some £15,000 sitting in the bank and earning very little interest. Now, my financial advisors told me that if I were to give you this money to run Marlborough Mills then you could give me a much better rate of interest.”

As she spoke, Mr. Gold continued to lean forward, his finger touching a loose curl that escaped her bun. Belle found her voice wavering but press on she did, determined to finish this without error.

“So, you see, it is only a business matter. You’d not be obliged to me in any way. It is you who would be doing… me the service.”

There. Her breath caught again as Mr. Gold was now closer. The hand that captured her wild tendril fell to his side, only to take her hand and squeeze it reassuringly and affectionately. Belle’s heart was now palpitating erratically, the close proximity making her dizzy, but she followed what her heart was longing to do and she brought his hand to her lips so she could kiss the flesh adoringly. This seemed to be very much a dream and she didn’t want to wake from it. Not when she could pretend that Mr. Gold was her Mr. Gold. But that couldn’t be… Not after how she cruelly rejected him when he offered his heart and soul to her.

She expected him to pull back from her in disgust or with the very same revulsion she showed him. Yet, to her growing astonishment, he did not. Instead, he did not say a word.

This couldn’t be right. He had all the right to throw everything she had said back at her. She was being offensive now by taking the liberty to accost his hand and—and—

He kept his cane resting on his leg so he could use his other hand to cup her cheek, his fingertips
brushing her temple and moving through her hair. She should say something, anything as she already breached propriety, but she was at a loss and her voice would not work as Mr. Gold brought his face closer so he could kiss her tenderly. Her eyelids fluttered closed at the feather-light touches against her upper lip. Then, without thinking, she parted her mouth with a shuddery intake, and taking it as invitation, Mr. Gold tilted her chin so he could kiss her fully and properly.

His hand joined its twin, holding her captive but willingly, as each kiss melted into another and another until…

“London train about to depart! London train is about to depart!”

The announcer’s whistle broke the spell as Belle, remembering her place and where they were, pulled away hastily. She could only imagine the sight she was in as her lips tingled with the memory of his against them. Blushing violently, Belle rose from her spot and mumbled a quick apology as she hurried away from him, from his warm presence, from his tempting mouth and those wonderful kisses…

She was a lady. She was in public. He wasn’t her husband and such displays were… What? How could it be wrong when everything seemed so right?

Belle reached her train and lifted her head to enter her car when she saw it was already opened and Jefferson was blocking the entrance, her suitcase in his hand.

“What…?” she began to question but Jefferson shook his head.

“I think we both know where you really want to go,” he said. “Here. Take it.”

“Jefferson, I—“

“It’s all right Belle. I—I had a feeling you would never come to love me as you do him. I understand, I do. I’ll be fine. Really. Besides, I think we are better suited as brother and sister do you not agree?”

“Jefferson, you’re a good man,” she said. “And one day you will find a woman lucky enough who would be happy to call you her husband. I’m sorry that the woman wasn’t me. I do love you—but as you said, we are better suited as siblings.”

“Thought so.” He smirked. “Go. Go to him. Just don’t forget me at the wedding.”

Belle laughed. “I won’t.”

Armed with her suitcase, Belle turned back around and found her pace lighthearted and eager as she approached Mr. Gold. Forget the past. Forget what was deemed proper and right. It was time to follow her heart and Belle couldn’t be happier.

Mr. Gold couldn’t help the boyish grin as he saw her reflection behind him as he faced her, his voice breathless as he asked, “You’re coming home with me?”

“I believe I am,” Belle answered with a grin to match his. “That is… if you will have me?”

“It’s forever dearie,” he told her.

“Then forever it shall be,” she responded cheekily.

“You know… the deal is struck.”
“Good.”
Chapter Summary

nine-orchids Prompted: Labyrinth Rumbelle. Belle French has had a rough life—always working, and no time for herself. One day she escapes to the library where she finds an interesting book that she has to read. Little does she know… she is being watched. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

When I got this prompt… I will admit I saw Labyrinth once and that was years ago. So to prepare for this, I re-watched the movie just so I could have an idea where I wanted to take this story. While I did enjoy it, I’m not going to follow the film for this because I doubt Belle would wish for a child to be taken away, even in anger. This will be a prompt based verse so after the end of this… if there’s something you want to happen, then feel free to prompt me!

Labyrinth

Belle French led an extraordinary and exciting life: fluent in half a dozen languages, traveled across four continents, and even spent many nights dining with the nobility in exotic lands.

Of course, she did these things in her imagination and from reading her books.

The truth was… Belle French really had an ordinary and dull life. In fact, she was even losing her time and opportunity to do the things she enjoyed doing. Lately, she’s been putting long hours in at her father’s florist shop—Game of Thorns. The business had been struggling over the years, but more so recently. It was actually an interesting case for the shop to be losing money when they were really the only florist shop around Storybrooke.

Business was so bad that she even had to drop out of college to help her father out. He assured her that once the money began flowing in again, then she could return and finish her degree.

That had been a year ago.

Now, Belle doubted if she would even have the chance to finish school. The last thing she wanted was to be stuck in her father’s store for the rest of her life, but the way things have been going (and that was the only source of income they had) it was looking like that would be her reality. Already Moe French invested too much into Game of Thorns to even sell it and be done with it. So it was her duty as his only child and family to help out until the business was secure once more.

Her only mode of escape was through her books. At least she could forget and pretend for a while that she was the protagonist in all the adventures she read. However, even those idle times were becoming slimmer and slimmer with the way her father was demanding her attention all the time. Fleeing to the library had become her only way to read in private and without her father’s frowning
disapproval.

How she wish she didn’t have so many responsibilities and could read whenever she felt like it…

But alas, such was, the way of life for Belle French.

This was why she was secreted away in the library while it stormed outside. She should have been making deliveries, but due to budget costs they had to get rid of the delivery truck. Her only mode of transportation was her bike and she wasn’t going to ride in that downpour. Figuring she had an hour to kill, Belle roamed the shelves in the hopes of finding something to read. Today she felt like reading something different from her romances and adventures, but she didn’t know what yet.

As she walked around, she didn’t realize she had entered a section of the library that was left forgotten. It was where the older texts resided and was sadly outdated compared to the rest of the selections.

“There must be some kind of treasure in here,” she murmured to herself, getting that anticipating thrill of uncovering something wild and fascinating.

And sure luck… she did find something that was worth taking a look.

The book was covered with dust at least a couple of inches thick. Wiping her hand across the front, she revealed the title written in old English lettering called Labyrinth. Peculiarly, there was no author listed and the back didn’t give any insight to what it was about.

Frowning, Belle scrutinized the book closely. The jacket was made of some kind of leather, smooth to the touch once the grime was gone, and the pages were strangely white—not at all yellowed with age considering the dust blanket.

Whatever the reason for the good condition, she decided to give it a go. The title certainly grabbed her attention and the word certainly evoked mystery and adventure.

Making herself comfortable in a chair (after checking to make sure there wasn’t any dust), Belle opened the book and began reading.

The story was… intriguing if not just weird.

It was about this King of the Underworld called the Dark One and he was a mischievous imp that went around making deals that typically revolved around children being the price. Why… the story didn’t seem to explain other than the Dark One enjoyed it at the people’s expense. Yet they continued to make deals with him.

“You get to the point where they do deserve it,” she remarked.

It wasn’t the best written story obviously, not when the other characters never seemed to learn their lesson once they beseeched the Dark One. Over and over again this went on, but Belle couldn’t seem to bring herself to put it down. Eventually, she got to a new chapter that started to explain the origins of the Dark One when her cell phone came to life buzzing with urgency.

The storm had stopped and her father demanded to know where she was and why weren’t those flowers delivered.

Sure… he was more upset with the orders not being on time than the health of his only child.

“I had to get out of the rain. I’m going now,” she promised and hung up before Moe could get the
She was disappointed she wasn’t able to finish the book, but she knew she couldn’t part with it yet. So when she took the book to get it checked out, even the librarian was surprised to see this.

“I don’t remember seeing this here ever before. Then again, there is an awful lot of books!” the older gentleman laughed.

Belle politely smiled and nodded in agreement. He stamped the book for her and she quickly slipped it into her purse. Her bike and orders were thankfully dried and she hopped on and began pedaling to her destination.

Little did she know, she was being watched. An owl with feathers as black as midnight was perched above the clock tower on the library, looking below from where she had parked her bike. Its huge, amber eyes glowed with anticipation that he’ll be soon free from this birdlike prison.

_And, he inwardly trilled, _she’ll make a lovely addition to my collection._
5 One Night Stand Rated M

Chapter Summary

Twyla Mercedes prompted: The morning after in Belle’s POV. (Rated M)

One Night Stand

It was nature calling and a pounding headache that woke her up. Then the prickling sensations of awareness: the dizzying disorientation of an unfamiliar bed and the pressing of another body against her back—hot and flushed—when the initial panic took place.

She remembered the bar, the drinks (oh, the drinks!), and the lonely man next to her also partaking in the miseries of life. She remembered the flirting and oh-dear-lord the proposition.

Her eyes widened in the dark.

Did she really make that suggestion to a stranger? Well, if that very obvious and clearly masculine body wasn’t a strong indicator, then she didn’t know what was.

The panic fell away as she tried to focus on the memory of the man’s face. He didn’t seem like the worryingly type you might expect to find in a bar, not with those homely brown eyes and sad disposition. He was handsome in his own way with the chin length dark hair and streaks of gray. Older… yes but not too old despite the cane. She recalled he did have a slight limp when he walked, actually, more like staggered but it had to be an injury nevertheless. Overall, he didn’t seem dangerous.

He was nice, gentle. Until they fell into bed when the animal was unleashed.

Belle blushed hotly at what he had done to her, what she did to him. Of course, there was no room for regrets—not in that moment. She went to that bar to forget and talking to this man… hearing the anguish and pain in his voice—he was like her. He was lost in the sea of misfortune and bad things and wanted comfort—just some kind words from a stranger to brighten the mood.

But the kind words became something else.

Slowly, carefully, not to wake her sleeping partner, Belle lifted his arm off her waist and quickly slipped away from the bed.

Naked, her bare feet padded across the carpet to the bathroom. She closed the door and flicked on the light. The instant that bright white fluorescent was on, her retinas were burning with the intensity that too much alcohol can bring. She managed to find the toilet and sat down while covering her face as the throbbing in her head grew louder.

The pain was welcomed. Anything was better than the heart heavy feeling of having no control.

As soon as her bladder was relieved, Belle dragged herself to the sink to wash her hands and splash the cold water on her face. The longer she remained under the light—the more aware she became of her actions.
The carpe diem was fading into the sober world where regret was starting to take root.

Fucking hell.

Belle was not that girl.

She never had a one night stand. The whole notion was icky and risky. Good girls don’t do this. Good girls wouldn’t take the chance that something potentially could go wrong. She wasn’t a thrill-seeker or living on the edge type of gal.

She preferred safety, security, love…

What seemed like a great idea in her drunken mind was now turning into a giant mistake.

She had to leave.

But could she do that to him? The man with no name (no… he has a name. Rum? Rum that’s what she called him) came to that bar for a reason. Could she abandon him when he did something she wanted in that moment? So desperate for a distraction Belle had what she craved, and while it did feel good, she knew it was the wrong thing to do. And her guilty thoughts were set on repeat: you used the poor guy.

So… how could she face him? What would she say? Or should say?

She had never been in this position before. What do other people do?

She scanned her memory bank from the books she read, the movies she watched. How did those characters react after a one night stand?

Sadly, many were romantic comedies and right now her life was anything but one.

But Belle had to do something. The question remained: should she stay and face the music? Or should she flee to keep her dignity somewhat intact?

Turning the light off, Belle crept out of the bathroom and took one look at the oblivious man and her heart clenched. Perhaps another time and place he could have been someone worth getting to know, but she made her bed (literally) and couldn’t stomach the fact she was one of the worst people ever in this world.

Without making any noise, she dressed quickly and in the shadows lest he should wake up. To her relief, he continued sleeping the night away and didn’t notice that she had even left the bed.

Once her shoes were laced up and she found her purse, Belle knew there was one last thing she had to do. It was cowardly, yes, and a cruel joke she would later recall but all she could think about was the sin and how she wanted to cover it up. Smoothing down the sheets where she slept was no easy task, but it helped that he rolled on his back and had the covers already pulled up. She only prayed that her indents on the mattress and pillow will be gone by the time he woke.

The deed was finished and Belle threw him one last lingering gaze before sneaking out. It wasn’t until she returned home that she noticed the tearstains on her face.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle is in denial. She has to make a choice. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

One Night Stand

The two pink lines were glaringly obvious. It was clear what the box said on how to read the results, but Belle couldn’t believe it. *It couldn’t be.*

She heard of false positives before and all she could think about was that this was one of *those.* Yes… A false positive. That was it.

Thankfully, she had the foresight to buy a second test.

To her chagrin that test turned out positive too.

Okay… Well, a false positive can still happen. Besides, she bought the same exact test twice. She should have bought two different brands. However, the best way to determine if she was what those tests said she was would be to go to the doctor’s. It was unfortunate that Storybrooke was a small town and if word got out… No point in stirring the rumor mill if she can help it.

The appointment was made in Boston where she would be another face in the crowd of the big city. Her excuse for leaving for the weekend to her friends was about this rare book fair being held there, which coincidentally was really happening. No one bothered to question it and they all wished her to have fun and to call them once she arrived.

It wasn’t long before Belle arrived and found herself in the doctor’s office, waiting for the test results. The ticking of the clock did little to calm her nerves as she tried to distract her mind from whatever the doctor would have to say. It wasn’t long before she returned and Belle knew exactly what the results were going to be.

The doctor’s beaming smile did little to ease the grave reality and in that silent room was the resounding echo:

“Congratulations! You’re pregnant.”

xxx

*Pregnant. You’re pregnant. You’re PREGNANT.*

No matter how times Belle repeated that in her mind it still sounded like it wasn’t real. After all, she was the shy librarian who was often told she was too good to get into trouble. Hell, her best friend Ruby pretty much slept with most of Maine and had never once had a scare with all the partners she had.
So… how was it fair that Belle had only *ONE* night with a man and she was the one to end up knocked up?

Then it begged the question: did they use a condom?

She couldn’t remember and the more she thought about it… the chances were zilch. They were both too drunk to even think about the precautions. All that mattered was skin and the all-consuming heat growing between them…

Belle closed her eyes as she wiped away a stray tear.

As much as she could spend a long time wallowing in self-pity, she knew it wasn’t going to change the facts. She was pregnant. She was having a child. A child from a man she had dubbed Rum because she was too inebriated to really care about doing the *right* thing and just wanted to *fucking forget the pain*.

It was that moment that she longed for her Mom to come back. She would have known what to do or say to help Belle out.

But Mom was dead and Belle was alone.

Well, not *alone*. She had the little one growing in her belly as Belle rested her hand on her lower abdomen.

This little guy or lady was her responsibility now. Belle knew it wasn’t going to be easy, but she knew she had to come to a decision.

Option 1: She could forget this thing ever happened and make sure it was taken care of before anyone questions it.

Option 2: Put the baby up for adoption.

Option 3: Raise the baby by herself.

Option 4: Find the man.

Option 1 was a huge *N-O*. As much as Belle wanted to deny the truth in the beginning, she didn’t have it in her to really abort the child. After all, it wasn’t his or her fault that its mother decided to sleep with some random person.

Option 2 could mean the child would have both a mommy and a daddy to raise him or her. They could be the greatest parents in the world or they could be the worse.

Option 3 meant a lot of sacrificing. It also meant she would have to face this small town with their pitying looks and whispers. Eventually, they would get over it but Belle hated being the center of attention.

Option 4 had its pros and cons. The man could either help her or he could claim he never knew her and kick her out. He might force her to get an abortion or give up the child when she didn’t want to. He might even try and take the child away from her.

Belle shivered at that idea that this guy might end up being an asshole instead of the sweet, lonely man she had met.

But what could she do?
She didn’t know his real name. She didn’t know where he lived or what he did for a living. Hell, he could be married for all she knew!

Thinking long and hard, Belle knew the only solution was the right one.

Her mother, a long time ago, once had to do the same thing. So Belle was going to follow her footsteps and do exactly what she had. She was going to raise this baby on her own.

Chapter End Notes

The next four series of prompts will be based on the movie version of Let Me In. Feel free to give me any prompts!
Chapter Summary

C.R. Carlyle prompted: Lieutenant Robert Gold aka Spinner is a very talented and instinctive fighter pilot for the Navy, but tends to live on the reckless side of the danger zone. Civilian instructor and astrophysicist Belle French is a no-nonsense teacher who can’t seem to fight her growing attraction for Spinner. After a very intense and explosive argument, these two learn the meaning of taking one’s breath away. (Rated M)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own anything of Top Gun. I’m borrowing a lot of the dialogue because I do not know anything about airplanes or flying.

Happy Fourth of July to everyone! I thought this would be quite fitting for me to include this prompt. This was one of the first requests that were made and I know it’s late getting to it, but the Muse finally cooperated. Hope this was worth the wait!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Top Gun

It was going bad, Belle could tell. Of course, it would. Spinner made some bad choices up there in the sky and it was her duty to break it down, and unfortunately, put him on the spot.

The chief instructor and commander Midas was angry, almost livid, over how that flight simulation went and now Belle was placed in that situation where she would have to bring attention to Spinner.

Standing in front of the best pilots in the country, she proceeded to point out on the screen with the frozen images about what happened.

“As you can see, Aircraft 1 did a split S and the MiG was on his tail.” Looking directly at the cocky Scotsman, Belle levelly questioned: “What were you thinking? That MiG had you in its gun sight.”

“Sometimes up there, there isn’t time to think. You’re dead if you hesitate,” replied the pilot with his usual confident smirk and challenging eyes.

“That’s a serious gamble there with a $30 million aircraft,” she deadpanned. In that moment, the expression on his face was wiped off and was replaced with a solemnness that seemed to say she was out of line with that comment. However, she wasn’t done as she straightened her posture and continued to speak to the class.

“Unfortunately, the gamble paid off. The shot from the MiG wasn’t clear. Spinner makes an aggressive vertical move here, comes over the top of the bandit with a missile shot. The encounter was a victory but I think that we’ve shown this example as what not to do.”
The look on his face at that moment was pure rage. She could only imagine how this criticism was killing him. He was a damn good pilot despite his arrogance in the sky and on the ground. Yet the truth of the matter remained: alone he was at his element, but as a team player? Spinner had a lot to learn when it came to working with his wingman.

Belle hoped that the silent message in her eyes told him that. She hadn’t meant this as a personal attack, but mainly to remind him that he wasn’t the only fighter pilot up there. In fact, all these men needed to learn that message if they wanted to get the top honors here at Top Gun. It was all about teamwork and not who was individually the greatest pilot ever to grace the tarmac.

As the rest of her assessment of each pilot commenced, Belle couldn’t help stealing glances over at Spinner. He was refusing to look at her. Instead, he kept a steely glare at the screen as if mentally seeing the situation and choosing a different form of attack. She had no doubt that he would find a new risk to take, something daring (and probably stupid) that no one else would consider. Then again, no one else had the same guts as Spinner.

And that was the other problem.

Spinner was unlike her other students. Saying he was tenacious was an understatement. He was relentless when he had something in his sights that he wanted. After all, how could she forget their meeting at the bar? He had been staring at her the moment she entered the place and while she had to admit she was flattered… she had one rule: no dating the students. She figured if she appeared uninterested then he would take a hint and move on to the next willing woman.

Oh no…

No, he had to drag his friend, Mad Hatter, up to the counter and began singing “You’ve Lost that Lovin’ Feeling” by the Righteous Brothers. Eventually, every single navy personnel and patron chimed in and that was it. That was the point where Belle believed she started developing feelings for him. It only grew worse when she saw him every day in class and he continuously sought her out wherever she was on base. Even her admittance about her one rule didn’t deter him from asking her out to dinner. In the end, she caved and had him meet her at her house where she made dinner for them.

The date had gone really well and he was a complete gentleman. And it turned out Spinner was more than a pilot. He was also a reader (like her) and an intellectual who was pretty knowledgeable about a lot of things. This was a side of him that he didn’t let the boys know or he would never live it down. Only Mad Hatter knew and that was because they’ve known each other for a decade.

Yes Belle was falling in too deep if she wasn’t careful. She could risk her job if her superiors ever found out and it could also affect Spinner if anyone felt she was playing favorites. She couldn’t risk damaging his reputation if it was known that he was sleeping with the teacher. So, really, she was doing him a favor by singling him out and bringing it to light about his unnecessary gamble.

Of course, it seemed like a good idea at the time.

As soon as review was over, Belle knew she had to speak to Spinner. She had to make him understand her actions and her reasons for what she did. He would understand, right? She hoped he would.

However, he didn’t stick around after the men were dismissed. He booked it out of there as quickly as he could that even Mad Hatter was stunned by his abrupt exit.

It’s my fault, she wanted to tell him. I should have also added that it was one of the most damn
impressive flying I saw up there in all my years here.

Another part of her was also worried that she ruined whatever it was that was happening between them. Could she have inadvertently ended his pursuit and attraction towards her?

The thought made her sick to her stomach. She had to go after him, but she couldn’t be too obvious or else suspicions would be raise.

Damn it all!

Teeth digging into her lower lip, Belle went after him. He was already a good fifteen feet ahead of her and if she were to run then everyone would know that something was there. She kept up a brisk pace and never once let her gaze break away from his back. She couldn’t lose him.

Eventually, Spinner was outside and moving towards his motorcycle. Belle did a quick survey and noticed they were alone. Running now, she caught up to him as he began revving up the bike.

“Lieutenant! Spinner! I needed to tell you this—“ Belle started to say, but the engine roared, drowning the rest of her words.

“Spinner!” she exclaimed, getting frustrated as he continued his immature behavior by revving the bike each time she spoke.

“I can’t hear you!” he shouted over the bike and before she could say anything else… he was gone.

“Oh hell no,” she mumbled, turning and running to her car as fast as she could. This had to be said and she couldn’t wait for him and his temper to calm down.

Racing after him was probably the worst idea ever. But her heart took over the steering wheel and she pushed the accelerator down harder so she wouldn’t lose him. She passed a red light and a stop sign, nearly missing a collision with a couple of other cars along the way, but all she saw was Spinner and the look of betrayal on his face.

His motorcycle pulled over to the side of a residential road and Belle hit the brakes so she could stop and park behind him. In her haste to catch him, she forgot to put on her seatbelt and had her car door yanked from her grasp as Spinner stood there, his eyes ablaze with fury. Grabbing her arm, he hauled her out of her seat and slammed her against the door.

“And you think I’m reckless!? What the Hell were you thinking?” he exclaimed, giving her a slight shake before letting his arms drop to his side. “You almost crashed!”

“I had to talk to you. You wouldn’t let me finish,” Belle explained. It didn’t make any sense and if she had been pulled over by a cop, then they wouldn’t buy it either. Even right now Spinner was looking at her as if she grew a second head.

“Seriously? You couldn’t wait until tomorrow?”

“No.”

“Well, I have something to say to you,” he added. “When I fly, I’ll have you know that my crew and my plane come first! The way you talked about me… it was like I didn’t give two shits about anything!”

“You know I don’t think that.”
“Do I? Because you and Midas seemed to be under the impression that I’m too much of a risk-taker. I do what I do and decide what fits best when I’m up there. It can’t always be a textbook maneuver when you’re facing the enemy. You have to be ready to make the hard decisions and that’s what I do.”

“If you let me finish, lieutenant, I will tell you that my review of your flight performance was right on.”

“That so?”

“Yes.” Belle’s voice grew softer. “But I held something back. I saw some genius flying up there; however, I can’t say that. I was afraid that everyone in that TACTS trailer could see right through me. And I just don’t want anyone to know that I’ve fallen for you.”

There. She said it.

Spinner’s jaw dropped as his anger suddenly vanished. “You—you…” He couldn’t get the words out, struggling himself.

“You heard me,” she said, challenging him. “I’ve fallen for you Robert ‘Spinner’ Gold. Despite my best judgments and what might happen if my boss finds out, I fell in love with you. You are the best pilot to ever come to Top Gun and I don’t want to lose you to your risky and gambling decisions.”

“Oh Belle… Sweetheart, I—“ Spinner was at a loss for words, which was unusual for him. But to learn that the woman you have been pining for has the same feelings for you too? That would render anyone speechless! So, he allowed his actions to demonstrate what he couldn’t get himself to say.

He kissed her.

It started off slow and tender, his lips learning her shape with each dip and pull of their mouths. Then, it began to take up speed as the heat between them flared and he was pressing her into the car with one leg tucked between hers. Belle’s hands flew to his hair, holding the ends with each breathless sigh she took as she returned his kiss with all the passion she kept hidden for so long.

Eventually, the need to breathe became a necessity as he rested his forehead against hers. Both quietly panted in front of the other and it was then they realized they reached a point of no return. She was a crossing a line and he was giving up his lone wolf’s way. When he flies again, he was going to have to be careful lest his risky move ends up being too risky.

“My house isn’t far from here,” she whispered and he had to chuckle.

“You sure you want this?” he whispered back.

He could feel her nodding. “This is all I ever wanted.”

“Me too.”

Neither one was aware of what happened next. All they knew when their bodies separated was that they never wanted to be apart again. Belle got back into her car, and he on his bike, and they drove to her house (safely and not recklessly). He had his bike parked and was quickly at her side so he could resume kissing her. Never had he felt something like this before. This heat, this fevered fire growing inside him. He couldn’t get enough of her taste or her sighs as they managed to find their way inside the house, which was an incredible feat in itself.
Once the door was closed, the fire burst from within.

Both moved on the other at the same time: his jacket was the first casualty that went sailing to the floor. Her blouse and his shirt followed right after as he moved forward—he backwards—leaving behind a trail of clothes to her bedroom. They only paused long enough to remove their shoes and his socks when Spinner hoisted Belle up so she could wrap her legs around his waist.

Mouths fused together, he held onto her as her legs tightened their grip. He stumbled once but because she was running her tongue along his jaw, teasing him with her breathy words about how good he tasted and how she dreamt of him that first night in the bar. God knows, he dreamt about her too and what he was going to do next to convince her that he was the man she should be with.

Now, those dreams were coming to life as he found the bedroom and settled her on top of the mattress. Belle sent him a feline grin as she crooked her finger in her direction.

“C’mon pilot. Show me what else you got.”

She was already ready for him but Spinner took his time stretching himself out over her, kissing and caressing every inch of her skin that he could find. Belle tossed her head back and groaned his name as her nails raked down his back, yet the devilish Scotsman took his time in sampling her soft curves and finding what made her gasp and cry.

By the time he reached her core, her panties were soaked with her arousal that he took mercy on her. Sliding the silky material off her legs, he then brought himself closer to her, teasing her entrance with tiny thrusts.

Finally, when he couldn’t take anymore teasing on his part, he flew into her and trembled over her scorching heat as he moved deeply and powerfully within her.

Time felt like it was frozen and all they could feel was each other’s breath escaping with every winded moan, touch, and kiss. Belle arched her back and whimpered as her release suddenly hit her and she opened her eyes so she could take it in as he followed after.

Then, slowly, time resumed before he could fly with her again.

Chapter End Notes

Next time I will post my four prompts for Let Me In. After those, how many of you want another prompt for A Long Fatal Love Chase or One Night Stand? Cast your votes in a review or PM me!
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Rumbert is a lonely child with a neglectful and drunkard father. With no friends of his own, he tries to make the most of his situation until he meets the new girl next door. (Rated M)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own Once or any references about Let the Right One In/Let Me In. This series of prompts are pretty intense and they deal with bullying and child abuse. But... it also has vampires! If you have never read the book or seen the movie (both US and Swedish), then I strongly recommend it if you are a fan of vampires. Don’t forget to leave a review!

Let Me In

“Hey Smelly-bert! Come here and let’s play a game—now squeal like a little piggy. Squeal!”

A small boy with shaggy hair and clothes a size too big prowled the sorry for an excuse playground, his voice high pitch and maniacal as he talked to no one in particular. Of course, if anyone was watching him they would think he was speaking to an imaginary friend (then secretly think he was too old for that and needed serious help).

“Squeal!” he demanded. Then in a flash he brandished a pocket knife and slashed it in the air. “Take that Piggy! You gonna cry? Well cry! No one cares for you Pussy Face!”

He jabbed the knife a few more times at the invisible being, but in his mind he pictured the blade plunging in and out of Killian Jones’ fleshy belly. His lips curled in a frightful smile as he envisioned the blood trickling from his mouth, those big eyes bulging from the realization that he was slowly dying and by him—Rumbert Gold—the poor, lonely boy in Shitsville Storybrooke.

Falling to his knees, Rumbert continued stabbing—this time too caught up in his fantasy—the snow on the ground. But it wasn’t snow anymore... No. It was Killian and the rest of his gang and he was showing them no mercy. They chose the wrong kid to pick on! He’ll show those motherfuckers he wasn’t Smelly-bert or Pussy Face or Piggy. He will never have to squeal for them again—

“Why are you doing that?”

The new voice startled him and Rumbert looked up to see a little girl around his age (twelve) sitting on the snow-covered picnic table. She had long, thin dark hair that fell past her shoulders; her face was pale as the snow with two of the brightest blue eyes he had ever seen. The last thing he noticed was the lack of clothing she wore. It was practically twenty below and she had no coat over her threadbare blue dress and her feet were bare. However, the cold didn’t seem to bother her let alone
“Aren’t you freezing?” he blurted out.

She shrugged. “I don’t feel the cold.”

“Oh.” What do you say to that?

“So…” she trailed. “Why are you attacking the snow?”

Rumbert sheepishly lowered the knife, his cheeks flushing scarlet. He never intended for his overzealous display to be seen by anyone and he was more concerned that word would get back to his father. Not that the old man would care much, but it would earn him a few slaps to the face and a belt across the back. “It’s nothing.”

“Doesn’t look like it,” she responded. “You were telling it to squeal.”

“I said, ‘it’s nothing’!” he snapped, then sighed in defeat. “Some stupid thing this older boy made me do, okay?”

“I see.” Her countenance dawned with understanding, those blue eyes glittering with crystal clarity in the night. “What did you do?”

“What do you think? I squealed.” Getting to his feet, Rumbert brushed the snowflakes off his pants and slipped the knife back into his coat pocket. “Who are you? I never seen you around here before.”

“I just moved in,” she replied.

“Right,” he said with a perfunctory nod. “That was last night wasn’t it?” At her confused look, he added, “I live next door and heard the boxes and furniture moving around. My Dad was pissed you woke him up. He complained all morning.”

“Sorry,” she said softly.

It was his turn to shrug. “Didn’t bother me. How old are you?”

“Twelve,” she answered. Well, he was right. She was his age so that meant they would be in the same grade. Somehow that uplifted his spirits a bit.

“Me too. We could have the same classes. Do you start school tomorrow?”

“I don’t go to school.”

“Oh.” That was… disappointing. He kicked the ground. “What’s your name?”

“Belle. What’s yours?”

“Rumbert but you can call me Rum.”

“Is that what your friends call you?”

“I don’t—I don’t have any friends.”

“Me neither,” she admitted. “You want to be my friend?”

“Yeah.” Rum never had friends. Although, he would count Jeff as one but they never hung out and
he never talked to Rum at school. On occasion he’ll say hi to Rum outside of school, but that was the extent of their “friendship.” All he ever wanted was to have someone to chill with and have fun together. And this strange girl comes along who is much weirder than him and she wants to be his friend. Why not?

She nodded. “All right Rum. I can tell we’re going to be the best of friends.”

His lips twitched into a full-length smile.
Let Me In

Prompt: Rum gets beaten up and Belle takes care of him. (Rated M)

He was a mess. A fucking mess.

Stumbling into the playground of his apartment complex, Rum couldn’t hold back the stinging salty tears as he covered his face against the metal spider’s web. It was best to let it out here before going home and facing his father. He already knew what he was going to say: “Ah, look at you! Why the fuck didn’t you stand up for yourself like a real man and teach those fuckers a lesson? No wonder they beat the shit out of you, you quivering quim!”

Once more it would be more proof to how he was a disappointment in his father’s eyes. Nothing he can do would be right and he will always be that scared little Piggy.

“Are you okay Rum?”

Sniffling, Rum wiped his nose, flinching at the contact. Luckily it wasn’t broken but it sure hurt as Hell. He turned to look at Belle, ashamed that his only friend would now witness how much of a pathetic loser he was. Instead, he saw only concern in her face, but it was her eyes that gave him pause. The bright blue of her irises had darkened to an almost black shade as a flicker of hunger leapt within them. Her tongue darted out to wet her lips, yet she made no move closer to him.

For some reason Rum was grateful for that. “I’m fine Belle. Really.”

“You don’t look it,” she pointed out, and like magic, her eyes were normal again. “Does it hurt?”

His nose was on fire, his lip was split opened with dried blood covering them, and he knew he was a sporting a shiner; not to mention the other bruises kept hidden under his bulky clothes. But he wouldn’t admit it to her—only he would secretly carry that shame.

He nodded. “It’s not as bad as it looks. I’ve been worse.”

“Don’t joke about it!” Belle snarled, her sharp tone slicing in the empty air. “Don’t you dare hide from it Rum. You’re not okay. It was those boys that did it.”

It wasn’t a question but a fact.

“They took me by surprise,” Rum suddenly admitted. “It was a game.”

“That’s not a game.” Belle tentatively walked towards him and he could see an internal struggle on her countenance as she drew closer. He wanted to question it but not sure how to properly word it without sounding crazy in his head. Yet, she made up her mind and sealed the distance as her petite white hand cautiously touched the corner of his mouth. The slight pressure alone caused the chapped lips to bleed anew, which she wiped it away with her thumb.
“Next time you need to fight back Rum. You understand? You need to fight back,” she told him solemnly. There wasn’t a trace of that twelve-year-old innocence in her voice as she looked at him keenly. “Promise me you won’t back down.”

“I promise,” he said automatically. Where that came from he didn’t know, but Rum felt a surge in his veins that the next time he saw Killian (and it would be a next time) he will show him and his goons not to toy with him. “Thanks Belle.”

“You’re my friend,” she reiterated. “I hate to see you get hurt.”

She was the only one apparently. Not even his own father would breathe those words. “I don’t want you to be the victim anymore Rum.”

Belle licked her thumb and then cleaned his forehead, removing the blood above his eyebrow. It never occurred to him that she was cleaning her bloody fingers with her tongue. All he knew was that he felt safe and warm with her ministrations.

At last Belle stepped back to admire her handiwork. “Your eye is closed but you’re not bleeding now.”

“Good.” At least he could lie and tell his father he ran into a pole or something. That would give the old man a chuckle. Looking down he noticed her bare feet again. “Belle, why don’t you wear shoes? Aren’t you worried you’ll get frostbite?”

“I don’t feel anything so there’s no need,” she explained matter-of-factly. “Tell me more about these boys. If they ever hurt you again, then you must tell me, got it? You’re not going to keep it a secret from me.”

“Never,” he breathed and proceeded to tell her what she wanted to know.

Later, when Killian tried confronting him… Rum fought back. He grabbed the nearest stick he could reach and slammed it into the side of his skull. Killian’s eardrum ruptured from the force. He knew Belle would be proud of him when he told her, and she was judging by her wide grin at the news.
Prompt: Rum doesn’t invite her in and there are serious consequences. (Rated M)

Let Me In

For a while now Rum suspected there was something dreadfully wrong about his best friend Belle. He only saw her in the evenings and she always argued with her father (he could hear them through the walls). Then there was the incident with the candy on their little date (that hadn’t turned out well). And of course, there was her poor choice or lack thereof of clothing during the winter weather.

She had said the cold didn’t bother her and so far it was true. She never once shivered and her constant bare footedness never resulted in frostbite, hyperthermia, pneumonia, or even the flu! It was totally inhuman and bizarre, which he wondered if she was actually some kind of superhero with a tolerance for the cold. It was pretty cool in thinking his only friend could be a superhero incognito and to prove his loyalty he never once told anyone about her or brought it up when they were alone. If he acted natural, then she would see he was trustworthy and eventually let him in on the secret.

However, nothing happened until the other incident in the storage room. For the first time since they met, Rum was terribly frightened.

It all started when he cut his palm to make a blood oath with her to always be the best of friends. Her eyes instantly enlarged and the depths were as black as coal as her gaze riveted on the blood that gathered on his hand and dripped on the concrete floor. Her lips stretched into a snarl, her white teeth gleaming threateningly, as a low moan ripped from her throat.

When she fell to her knees, Rum could not help the tremble as she crawled to the tiny pool of blood and began lapping it up as a dog would do. Her nails were planted firmly into the ground as she lifted her crimson-stained lips and teeth upwards. “Run!” she commanded in that throaty growl.

So he did.

He ran all the way to his apartment, closing and locking every door and window, and huddled underneath his blankets all night long. He didn’t get any sleep that night, fearful he would find Belle waiting outside his bedroom window. The image of those pearly white teeth covered in his blood and those dark eyes… so hungry so feral that he spent the next couple nights sleepless too.

He hadn’t heard her next door those several days. The heavy silence was cloying and suffocating that Rum wasn’t sure what to do. He knew instinctively that during the day he was safe, but as soon as the sun set… he stayed in his bedroom with the locked doors and window, the curtain pulled down. So matter what he tried to do to distract his mind… he couldn’t shake that vision of sweet, little Belle from his memory on the floor like a wild animal and licking his blood.

And that was where the problem lay.

She was still Belle and at the same time she wasn’t. They were friends, she said so herself, and he knew she wouldn’t hurt him. Or did he?
In the storage room, she looked like she wanted to *devour* him. But… she told him to run. She stayed there while he fled and now he could only look back and wondered if he did the right thing or if he behaved cowardly. Perhaps she was in trouble or sick, and he abandoned her. Some friend he proved to be, and yet… he couldn’t forget everything that has happened since he befriended her. There was too much that didn’t make sense and then one by one… the pieces began to come together.

Thus was his dilemma when he opened his apartment door and found Belle standing in the hallway looking remorseful and scared. She always been small but she looked even smaller as she kept her eyes rooted to the hideous rose-carpeted floor.

“Hi Rum,” she said shyly.

“Hi,” he greeted, his hand firmly holding the doorknob. He wasn’t sure if he should slam the door or not; not when he didn’t know her intentions.

“Can I come in?” she asked.

“Can’t you walk in?” he shot back and she visibly flinched. Her eyes shifted from him to behind him like she was staring at a massive wall and he wondered if his theory was true after all. “Well?” he challenged. “Aren’t you?”

He was being mean, he knew it, but she frightened him and he wasn’t sure what to believe or if he could trust her. Just because she told him to run didn’t mean she was still planning on hurting him.

Crossing his arms over his chest, he raised his brow. “Let me guess… you can’t.”

“Rum—”

“Tell me the truth,” he rejoined. “What are you?”

She closed her eyes briefly as pain flickered across her countenance. “I think you already know.”

“It’s true,” he murmured. “How old are you really?”

“Twelve,” she answered. “Well, I’ve been twelve for a very long time.”

“Are you going to hurt me?”

The question seemed to physically hit her. “Never! I would *never* hurt you Rum.”

“Oh? What about in the storage…?”

“I lost control okay? I held it back as long as I could so you could leave. Believe me. If I wanted to hurt you, then I would have done so when we met.”

She sounded earnest and Rum felt his anger and fear slowly slipping away. She had many an opportunity to hurt him, but she chose not to. Why… he didn’t know. But at least there wasn’t a trace of that monster he saw a week ago.

“Okay, I believe you.”

Relief overwhelmed her as she smiled happily. “I am sorry Rum for earlier. When I’m around blood it can be difficult to remember myself.” She paused and cast a nervous glance on either side of the hall. “I’ll answer whatever questions you have, but can we speak inside your apartment?”

“You need an invitation right?” he pointed out. “What happens if I don’t? Can you enter?”
“Yes but something bad happens…”

“So? Just try,” he encouraged. “If what you say is true and you don’t mean me any harm… you’ll try.”

She was hesitant but this was a test about their friendship and her honesty. Biting her lower lip in determination, Belle shuffled her way into the room. Rum watched in fascination as she did so (though he was slightly disappointed that there wasn’t a magical barrier or something that prevented her). He stepped back to make room for her and she got about a few feet in when her body suddenly seized up, her spine going completely rigid, and her eyes wide.

Rum shut the door and ran over to face her. So she could enter without an invitation! She was only trying to be polite with the whole asking—

He gasped when he saw blood trickling out of the corners of her eyes, nose, and mouth. He could only watch in horrified astonishment as trails of dark blood-red fell down her pale cheeks onto her dress and her feet. Then her ears began to bleed as she started to shake and convulse in the middle of the foyer, her throat gurgling from the blood pouring from her.

He wanted it to stop. She was in pain and the agony in her expression was much worse than the storage room. Yet, it was her silence that got to him and he realized this was her way of atonement for scaring him in the first place.

She did care for him!

Throwing his arms around her neck, Rum frantically cried, “You’re invited! You can come in!”

Immediately, Belle’s convulsing stopped and he gripped her tighter in his embrace. “I’m sorry Belle!” he sobbed. “I didn’t mean for this to happen! I…”

Her slim arms came around him as she squeezed him back. “It’s okay Rum. I’m all right now.”

He drew back to look at her and bitterly snorted at the blackened red streaks all over her face. “It’s my fault Belle. I did this to you.”

“No,” she adamantly insisted. “I did this to me. I knew the consequences and I did it anyways. You’re my best friend Rum. My only friend. You mean the world to me and I can’t lose you. I did this because I would do anything to protect you, even at my own expense and suffering. That’s how much our friendship means to me.”

Rum was floored by the sincere emotions and knew this wasn’t a lie. Belle cared for him and she risked her life by proving it with his stupid request. Never again, he thought. He would never put her in harm’s way again.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Vamp!Belle is hungry and feeds on an unsuspecting soul. (Rated M)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Let Me In

The gnawing pains were back. Every time it became necessary for Belle to feed, an excruciating pain would rip through her tiny body. There was no hiding from the hunger or the control when it was upon her. She had to feed soon or else things would get messy and quick.

Unfortunately, her caretaker (and very human) had failed on several occasions to bring her the fresh blood she required for her survival. As dear as Moe was to her, Belle was impatient and couldn’t wait for him to return. She decided to take matters into her own hands.

She went to the park and despite the frigid temps… she knew there would be at least one person out and about.

She was right.

A woman with fiery red hair was pacing angrily with her cell held up in the air looking for a signal. Her teeth were clattering but she clearly spoke every bad word in the book with her British accent. Belle recognized her as one of the tenants in the complex—Zelena was her name. An awful, horrid woman who complained about everything and everyone. Rum told her about her and even Belle overheard some of the nasty things she had to say to her best friend. Her voice grated on Belle’s nerves and it was downright fucking fate that she had a flat tire.

Oh Karma.

Belle began to limp towards her, her face shining with wetness as she drew in gasping breaths and heaves like she was crying. Her pitiful sobs reached Zelena and the woman stopped what she was doing and watched as Belle collapsed in front of her.

“What the--?” Zelena started.

“She was attacked! Make it stop! Make it stop!”

“Oh my Lord…” she said, looking around nervously for the man to appear. Yet, she was alone with this weeping little girl as she rocked back and forth, her shirt torn and pants soaking wet and feet bared to the frozen elements.

“Please help!” Belle whimpered. “Won’t you help me?”

Her pleas managed to get to Zelena. The sight of a broken child clearly traumatized by the rape melted her icy heart. “Don’t worry. I’ll call for help and we’ll call your parents and get you to the
hospital. That man won’t hurt you ever again.”

“Thank you!” Belle sobbed in relief as she hugged the older woman at the knees. “This means a lot to me!”

“All right, all right,” Zelena said, patting her head awkwardly. “I can’t get a signal here so let’s go this…”

She was cut off once Belle slapped the phone from her hand and jumped on her chest. Hooking her legs around the woman’s torso, Belle dug her nails into her shoulders as she ripped into her throat. Blood splashed all over as Zelena attempted to fight futility with the vampire child to no avail.

With each pull and bite, Belle guzzled her life’s essence until Zelena’s legs gave out and she fell into the snowy bank with Belle wrapped around her. She never once let go until Belle drained her dry.

With a vicious roar, Belle tossed her head back and seized the dead woman’s head and snapped the neck.

There… no chances of another vampire stalking Storybrooke. Belle stood up and took a few steps back to where Rum was hiding, the pocket knife dangling in his gloved fingers.

“It worked,” he whispered in amazement.

Grinning at him, it didn’t bother them that Belle’s mouth was still covered in blood and that her clothes were drenched with it too. “All right. Here’s the hard part. We have to hide the body. Do you think you can do this Rum?”

“Yeah. I have my knife to cut her fingers to avoid identification.”

“Good. But there are other ways to learn the identity.” Belle grabbed the loose head and with an effortless pull, she separated it from the body. “I’ll take care of this,” she told Rum as he sat on his knees and picked up the hand.

Chapter End Notes

Aren’t they adorable? There is more where this came from if you prompt me! Next four prompts will be based on Rebecca by Daphne Du Maurier. And… as promised, the winner for the bonus prompt is…
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle leaves the sisters at St. Meissa’s and finds something unexpected. (Rated K)

Chapter Notes

Based on the votes from FF.net and AO3, here is the winner! Thank you to everyone for reading and don’t forget to send me any ideas you would like to see in these verses!

A Long Fatal Love Chase

It was no question in Belle’s mind that she had to flee the safety of St. Meissa when she realized that her dream of her husband was no dream at all. In addition, to learn that he had known all along that she had resided there… She couldn’t help but feel what a fool she had been to think she could have tricked him so effectively. Of course, Tempus could see right through her! He had always said that their souls were connected and his heart would know her wherever.

The once romantic thought was now perverted and it was frightening to know how true he meant that statement. That meant Belle had to be extremely cautious and doubly clever to escape him this time.

There was no question that he probably expected her to run that very day or the following evening. After all, he knew her secret. He could just as easily waltz right through her door at any moment if he willed it. However, she did have an ace up her sleeve in that she knew Tempus. He wouldn’t so much dare to enter her room again, not when he has been enjoying this “chase” as he called it. It would spoil the whole idea if he were to seek her out!

At least Belle knew she had this reprieve to plot her next move. And when.

Since she knew that Dove was also lurking somewhere, Belle had to be mindful of every person she comes into contact with lest it should be her husband’s trusty valet. Unfortunately, she felt foolish for not recognizing Dove at all until her husband confessed he was watching her. Dove did have very distinct features and he was rather tall than most men of her acquaintance. That alone should have been obvious but Belle committed a grievous sin: she underestimated her husband and his ways. Clearly, Dove could disguise himself and even hide his height, which made it all the more difficult for her to discern who was friend or foe.

Eventually, Belle elected not to go to the village with her fellow sisters. She feigned a stomach illness and stayed in her room as the others left to do their holy work. Will, bless him, dared not enter her dormitory but he kept walking past her window.

He didn’t stop underneath lest it should be suspicious; however, there was no question in her mind that he was concerned and he had every right to be. It grieved her not to tell him about her husband’s
visit and how he is a very jealous man. The truth was… she didn’t want to spark Tempus’ ire any more than that chaste kiss did. Will didn’t deserve his wrath and she didn’t want to see him hurt. He was her friend and if anything happened to him—No, she couldn’t think like that. But she couldn’t tell Will the truth either.

That left her with her only option: she had to plan her escape. Perhaps with her presence not in the village Dove will tell his master that she left. Then Tempus will have no choice but to follow. The thought was comforting; then again, Tempus might consider it a ruse and stay close in case his suspicions were right. That was a possibility and a risk but what other choice did Belle have? She knew she had to take extra precautions as she decided her next move.

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In the end, it wasn’t easy, but Belle knew the longer she stayed… the closer she would have been in telling Will the truth about who she was. She knew she promised him that she would share her story and that he would help her after all that she had done for him, but she couldn’t risk it. Couldn’t risk his safety. As much as it killed her to do this, she had to leave him by breaking her word. She could only hope that in time he would forgive her and find the courage to find his beloved Ana. Maybe when this horrible chase was over and Tempus was gone from her life… Maybe she could find them and then reveal her woeful tale.

It was the only consolation she could give herself as her justification to leave under the shield of night.

This time she took her time and she did her research as the best possible time to take flight. She also had to bide her time and set up her intentions in case Tempus was nearby. If he took the bait… then she bought herself the needed time to make sure he never knew that she double-crossed him.

There was a mission that Mother Superior had been planning that would take a dozen sisters to Spain. Belle convinced her to let her go with them on this trip now that she was feeling well. Mother Superior welcomed her and it wasn’t long for the word to spread. Now, Belle had no intentions of going, but she had to make it look like Sister May was leaving the country with her sisters. That meant she had to ask Sister Astrid a rather large favor.

Thankfully, she didn’t have to do much convincing and Sister Astrid accepted before Belle could finish explaining. The kind-hearted and virtuous soul always knew that there was something troubling in Belle’s past.

“I knew God sent you here for a reason. And I pray every night that whatever it is that you run from… you find the salvation you are seeking,” Astrid said.

“Thank you Sister. This means the world to me,” Belle replied. “Remember, no one must know of this.”

“Of course. You have my most censored discretion.”

When it came for the sisters to leave, Astrid left the convent dressed in Sister May’s clothing. As for Belle? She remained behind in the convent, hiding. She had snuck and hidden enough food to last her a few days in her hiding spot before she could officially leave. There was a ship that would sail to Geneva and Belle was determined to get on that ship by any means necessary. She donned her disguise as a boy with the only difference that she hide any femininity that she failed to do the first time. That meant… cutting her hair as opposed to hiding it under a hat. Tempus wouldn’t expect her to remove her curls and as she mourned her lovely tresses… she knew it was only momentarily.
Hair could always grow back. Freedom was less easy to obtain.

When the appointed time came, Belle stole away under the concealment of night. It was God’s will that there was no moon and very few stars to light the way, which meant Belle could move about freely without being captured.

As she reached the wall where she had first met Will, Belle felt the first lickings of remorse and regret that she never told him about her plan or the supposed mission to Spain. She purposely ignored him in case he figured out what she was doing. It came to a point where he did stop walking past her window in the hopes of getting her attention, and it was a friendship that she had once cherished that she now mourned. Again, she prayed God will send him wisdom and understanding so they might meet again with the former tenderness that their friendship was forged.

With a soft “amen,” Belle began to climb the wall. She never looked back.

Looking back, Belle was afraid that she would have been discovered that night and the sequential days that followed once she made it on the ship *Pearl of Hope*. She worked as a cabin boy and kept a low profile from the other sailors. It was God’s will that no one bothered her as He safely led them to their destination.

From Genova, Belle shed her disguise and became a girl again as she quickly found occupation with a family who sympathized with her. They took her in to be their child’s governess (which wasn’t difficult for her to do), and it was Fortune that when she met them… they were preparing to leave for Nice. Belle leapt at the opportunity and soon after they were on their way to the southeast coast of France.

The previous darkness that hung over Belle’s head began to subside. She no longer felt the shadows of Tempus lurking at every corner. She felt truly and utterly safe and free. Her plan had worked! If Tempus discovered her deceit in Spain, then by the time he realized she sailed to Genova, there would be no word or sight of the cabin boy. He would be searching for a ghost and it pleased Belle that she was able to outsmart her clever and cunning husband.

Upon arriving in Nice, Belle settled in her new lifestyle. Now and then she would get the sudden urge to up and leave, but she was safe. The Jefferson’s had been too kind with their generosity and kindness that Belle could not repay them with her absence. Furthermore, she was quite fond of their daughter—her charge—Grace. Not to mention, she did reveal the truth of her circumstances to Mrs. Jefferson.

She hadn’t planned on telling them the truth, but Mrs. Jefferson had this quality about her and Belle was so desperate to find a confidante. It all came gushing out one afternoon and Belle had been so frightened that her mistress would turn her out as a liar. Instead, the woman embraced her as if she was her child, and vowed that she would be protected under this family. She assured Belle that her husband would keep an eye out if Tempus or Dove or any of his spies should enter Nice.

With that consoling measure, Belle felt at peace. Tempus would never discover her and she could continue living in harmony with this wonderful family.

Unfortunately, despite the ghosts and demons keeping away at bay, Belle would find herself now and then thinking about poor Ignatius and the cruelty of his fate that he suffered at his father’s hands. He was denied the opportunity to grow up into a fine young man, to find a loving wife, and to raise a family. She wished she had known Tempus’ dark past before all this and maybe she could have spared the boy’s death. Now, she was enjoying the pleasures that life could bring while he rotted
away underground. It wasn’t fair. Ignatius should be with her under the same safety and protection that she was granted.

Wiping away the hot tears, Belle did her best to maintain a happy façade as she and Grace were in the market. The child was too innocent to learn about the world’s cruelties and she would not mar that purity if she could help it with thoughts of poor Ignatius. At night she will mourn him properly and not during the day for Grace to see.

Forcing a smile was coming too naturally to her, but she did as she and her charge conducted their errands.

“Catherine! Look!” Grace exclaimed, tugging on Belle’s hand.

Even after her submission, Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson insisted on using Belle’s nom de plume. It would have been difficult for Grace to remember the secrecy, and this was Belle’s second chance. It was better for her to start anew with a brand new identity.

As Belle looked up in the direction that Grace was pointing, she saw two boys playing a harp and pipe while singing. Both appeared haggard and hungry yet one looked strangely familiar…

Grace pulled away from her and began walking in their direction before Belle could realize what had happened. Immediately, she ran after the child and caught her as Grace dropped a couple coins into the hat at the boys’ feet. The one playing the pipe grinned cheekily at her while the harp player blessed her for her charity.

It was at that moment that Belle’s breath seized in her throat as she looked into the eyes of the harp player. There was no mistaken that carefree dark brown hair and those wide, soft brown eyes growing larger by each passing second.

“Ignatius!” Belle gasped. *He’s alive!*
9 Edward Scissorhands Rated K

Chapter Summary

belle’sdarkangel Prompted: Scissors!Rum adjusts to his new hands. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

Here we go! I wanted to include some more prompts from my reader’s requests so I hope you like them all. Thank you again to everyone for reading, reviewing, and giving me their ideas! And as a thank you, I decided to add another prompt to the One Night Stand verse as well.

And… I also want to include some good news as well: I just found out that I will have a short story published in an anthology soon! It’s a collection of horror stories centering around the Great Lakes region with the theme being “holidays.” It won’t be out until October but I will post details later about where you can pick up a copy if you like. I also joined Tumblr as well so if you like to follow me and talk about Rumbelle, Once, or just to say hi… That’s all right! My username is erikstrueangel.

Now, I give you…

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Edward Scissorhands

The feeling had been foreign for him. The first morning he woke Rum panicked when he didn’t see the familiar knives and blades that had been his fingers. Instead he found his hands wrapped up in white bandages all the way up to his elbows.

Hyperventilating, he sat up in the hospital bed and was flailing about until Belle’s soothing touch on his forehead calmed him down. It was then he remembered he had surgery to replace the blades with actual fingers and he felt a little silly for reacting the way he did.

Belle only smiled and assured him it had to be strange for him not to see something familiar as those scissor fingers. While she was right, Rum couldn’t believe he was holding her hand—well, it was more her holding his. He could feel the pressure but he couldn’t feel her skin. All he knew was that he wanted these bandages off as soon as possible so he could feel skin against skin. And know that he couldn’t harm her.

The doctor came in to check on him and was pleased to see the patient awake and impatient to see his new hands. After living a lifetime with those knives and such, the good doctor couldn’t blame Rum for wanting to leave immediately. Yet, he still had some recovery to do, not to mention physical therapy. It was the first time ever that he performed a procedure like this and wanted to be certain that Rum would be able to use his new appendages with no complications.

It took a few days before the doctor deemed it all right for the bandages to be removed, and once the
last wrap was gone… Rum found two perfectly good hands with five long smooth and lean fingers. He stared at them in wonder and awe, looking back and forth at the backs and the palms. His fingers were a little stiff but it was a feeling he was quite used to as he flexed them, feeling the little tendons perform little miracles as they moved in tandem and then one at a time.

Tears gathered in the corner of his eyes as he gazed at the doctor with gratefulness.

“Now, let’s try them out, shall we?” The doctor asked with a grin.

xxXxxx

It didn’t take long for Rum to acquire the use of his extremities. In physical therapy, he learned how to hold utensils and to use them, how to write, how to dress, how to open doors, etc. Every new skill he mastered was met with a beaming smile and pride filling his countenance. And… Belle was with him every step the way.

She helped him with his exercises and acted as his personal cheerleader when he did something on his own. Even her father had been supportive and encouraged him as time went on.

Before Rum knew it, he had his hands for a month and he felt like he could take on the world. Yet, there was something else he wanted to do and had been shy to even try. After all, touch was not something he was able to do so willingly, not when the consequences could hurt someone. But this time it was different. He was different. He had nothing to fear, at least… he hoped not.

It took him a while but eventually he worked up the nerve to make his wish come true.

He and Belle were enjoying a lovely walk in the park when she pointed out a bench for them to sit on for a short break. It was a beautiful day—not too warm, not too cold. The truth was Rum was really enjoying his time spent here in Sydney. Not that he wasn’t occasionally homesick for Storybrooke (he missed the mansion and his garden), but here… he didn’t feel like he was being judged. People weren’t terrified of him. They didn’t know his past and they didn’t know about the bad thing he did. Of course, as Belle told him many times, if he hadn’t done what he did… Who knows what could have happened?

He wished others thought the same as Belle, but the truth was… All he really needed was her. Maybe when they did return to Storybrooke, he could venture back into town with his newfound hands. Maybe people won’t be scared anymore. Maybe they will want to be his friend again when they see he can do them no more harm. But that was a lot of “maybes.”

Until then, Rum was going to focus on the present. And he was going to attempt what would have been the unthinkable.

As they looked out to the sky where the sun was setting, Rum knew his chance was now or never. Backing out was no longer an option. He was going to do this.

Tentatively, he stretched his hand towards hers, which she laid flat on the bench, and rested his palm on top.

Instant bliss flooded his senses.

Her skin was soft and supple as silk, completely smooth and flawless. Lifting his hand, Rum’s finger trailed over the length of her finger to her knuckle and down to her wrist. He marveled over how warm her flesh felt and how she always seemed to radiate comfort and acceptance, but to actually feel her… To touch without fear was an entirely new sensation. Her hand was truly a work of art with its dainty and delicate curvature, and at the same time, feisty and tough since it was her
hands that welcomed him to her world. She was never afraid of him, even when he accidently hurt her. She never shied away from him.

Pressing his hand on top of hers once more, he couldn’t help but be amazed at the contrast of her petite hand and his slightly bigger one. Belle had done so much for him and changed his life for the better.

She was his savior.

Then, her hand shifted beneath his until her fingers interlaced with his.

He looked down with astonishment at how perfect they fit with one another and shifted his gaze to her face where he caught a hint of a blush as she smiled up at him.

Chapter End Notes

I figured a nice dose of fluff was needed. Thanks belle’sdarkangel for the request!
One Night Stand

After that night, Belle hadn’t gone back to the bar. The first week she avoided it in case he was there again. But then, she began to realize she was being silly. It was a one night stand. There was no way in Hell he would seek her out. That would defeat the whole purpose of what a one night stand was and he more than likely forgot all about her anyways. Whatever problem(s) he had, he probably found the answer he was looking for or found another woman to drown his sorrows with.

Either way, Belle knew she was better off forgetting about him. But there was something about the guy that Belle couldn’t get out of her head (or what it felt for him to be in her) and she knew she was being ridiculous. Yet, this was the first time she had done this and she didn’t know exactly how she should be feeling. She just knew from past experiences with Ruby that thinking about him was a big no-no.

So by the time the second week since “that night” came along, Belle was ready to put the past behind her. It was over and done with and she had to stop obsessing over something that was meant to be meaningless. He was a stranger and she got what she wanted from him (comfort and nothing more) and she should move on to other things.

Like, for example, it was Ruby’s birthday.

And it so happened that the birthday girl wanted to meet at The Bar before heading out to dinner and the movies. So Belle put on her best dazzling smile and a very cute outfit and went there after work.

A quick scan assured her she was being paranoid and silly. Again, why would he be there?

Shaking her head, she strode up to the bar and sat on one of the stools as she waited for Ruby. Fortunately, she didn’t have to wait long as the birthday girl slapped her hand on Belle’s shoulder.

“Hey!” Ruby greeted. “Ready to meet the others?”

“Sure.” Belle grinned. “Let’s go. I’m starving.”

They began to walk towards the door and Belle heard what sounded like a commotion behind her. Before she could turn her head to see what was going on, Ruby snorted and shook her head.

“Some drunk spilled his drink on some poor guy. Would it be too much to ask for a bar fight for my birthday?”
Belle couldn’t help but roll her eyes. “Only you would want a bar fight.”

“C’mon. Seeing a bunch of drunks trying to fight is hysterical. Especially if there’s a girl involved because you got to see what kind of girl could inspire grown men to act like that.”

The two friends giggled and continued their way out. Belle never knew that Ryan Gold was there or that he was the “some poor guy” that Ruby referred to. And by the time, he was able to get to the door; she and Ruby were already gone.

The first month wasn’t as bad as Belle thought it would. Morning sickness was a pain but she was grateful it didn’t last long. Her breasts were sensitive and she hadn’t had any strange cravings… yet. Of course, it would change over time but for now, Belle was relieved she wouldn’t have to tell anyone or raise their suspicions.

Was she being ridiculous? Perhaps. She didn’t want her friends to look at her differently, which might seem shallow, but it was only because she held herself to a higher standard and her friends believed her to be a saint. Then again, what saint sleeps with a stranger after her mom’s death? Never mind the grief talking; Belle needed time to break the news. When the opportunity arises then she will tell her friends about the pregnancy.

Until then, Belle stuck to her routine like clockwork. If she could keep her mind focused on other things, then she wouldn’t let her thoughts return back to him. She was successful (albeit briefly) about not thinking about Rum until she found she was pregnant. Now, he was the only person she could think about besides the little peanut growing inside her.

She thought about returning to the bar more than once. There was a possibility he could be there and then she could break the news to him.

However, she always found herself steering away the building whenever she came too close to it. Sometimes she couldn’t even look at it without remembering the consequence she was carrying. Mainly, she was afraid she would see him again. If she saw him, then she would have to tell him the truth, but how would he react? Would he blame her? Would he yell or make some kind of a scene? Or worse… would he decide to take the child from her? It wasn’t like Belle was in a bad situation; although, a librarian’s salary wasn’t big and if he happened to be well off financially…

She couldn’t think about that. This child was hers and she was going to raise her son or daughter.

But should she tell him? She made the decision to keep the child, but what if he does what the child? Or be in his/her life? She didn’t know the man or what kind of person he might be and she didn’t want to do something she regret (of course, one could point out it was too late for that). Perhaps, it was better she never saw him again. She could raise this child fine by herself and she didn’t need his help or anything. And if her child does ask about his/her father, then…

Belle hadn’t figured that part out. The truth was something she would save when her child was older or an adult. But she could use the same reason her mother gave her when she was younger. It wasn’t too mean or harsh, but it satisfied her for the moment.

Yeah, telling her child that she found her Prince Charming but he was lost and now they can’t find each other would be appropriate. At least… she hoped it would be.

Walking down a street in Boston, Belle absentmindedly rubbed her belly. Her latest check-up was done and so far she was following the prenatal care to the letter. She didn’t want anything to happen
to the baby, but she knew she was better off going to her doctor closer to home instead of making these long trips.

Soon, she reminded herself. Until that moment arrived, she was enjoying the trip to the city. Boston was enriched with history and there was a beautiful public library she liked to pass the time in. But she knew it wasn’t something she could continue doing the further along she became. For now, Belle was going to take advantage and enjoy the city as much as she could until she had to return home to Storybrooke.

She decided to check out the Christopher Columbus waterfront park and walk around the statues and water fountain. Over by a pond she saw a small boy and his father and they were fishing.

It was such an adorable scene to watch as the father was bent over his son, and showing him how to properly hold his fishing pole as he casted. Then the man stood up and limped over to a chair not far off and sat down.

She wondered if she had a boy if he would like to fish. Maybe I should take some lessons. Then she walked away.

xxXXx

Ryan Gold had reached the pinnacle of obsession.

It had been a few months since that life-changing evening with the mystery woman and he hadn’t any luck in finding her. He knew he was being ridiculous, even stalkerish but he couldn’t help it. This woman had him feel something. He might have been drunk but that had been the first time in his pathetic life that he felt alive.

Hope still blazed in his heart each morning he woke, determined that this would be the day when he would find her and find out her real name so he could take her on a proper date. Yes. He wanted to see this woman again. He wanted to get to know her. It was that burning desire that maintained him during the divorce proceedings.

There was no point in dragging it out and the sooner he had Milah out of his life—the sooner Ryan he could move on with his.

Thankfully, it hadn’t been nasty (probably since Milah wanted this part of her life to be done quickly), and as soon as the line was signed and the “t’s” and “i’s” were crossed and dotted (respectively), Ryan Gold was now a single man.

As for his son, Bae, Ryan and Milah agreed to a joint custody with them switching every two weeks. So far, the arrangement was working pretty well, but Ryan knew Bae wasn’t happy about going back and forth between Mommy and Papa. He was young, only six, but it was still difficult for him to understand why his parents were no longer living together.

Ryan wanted to make the transition easier for him and he and Milah decided that seeing a counselor would help. Fortunately, the sessions were going well and Bae was doing much better than before when the divorce proceedings started. Except that now and then, something would remind Bae that his parents weren’t together and he would get upset and keep to himself.

It wasn’t good and Ryan was at a loss on what to do to help his son. Even Milah was having problems too whenever Bae got into one of his funks.

It didn’t help that this was Ryan’s turn to take care of him, and Bae was experiencing his blues.
The last time Bae felt this way, Ryan took him fishing. That put a smile on his face for a while, but he knew he couldn’t always do the same activity.

So he told his son they were going on an adventure. The place: Storybrooke, Maine.

Ryan had some work he wanted to do there. He hadn’t stopped his search for the mystery woman and thought a low-profile way was the best option. If he were to ask a bunch of questions to every person he met, then word could get back to her and the last thing he wanted was for her to call the police because he frightened her.

No… He was going to do this quietly and on his own, and if he happened to run into her, then all the better for it to be a coincidence.

He had already started the process into looking at some properties he wanted to invest in, and if everything worked out, then he was going to move there.

The first thing Ryan did take Bae to the library. Bae loved to read and if anything could bring him out of his mood… a good storybook would do the trick.

Or so Ryan was hoping.

He took Bae to the children’s section when nature called. After giving his son explicit instructions not to leave the area, Ryan went in search of the facilities. Of course they were on the other side of the building and in the basement on top of it. The grand time total he was gone was about ten minutes. By the time he returned, Bae was all smiles and laughing!

It would seem Ryan was right in that a storybook was the answer.

Except there was no book in his son’s hands.

So when he asked Bae what had him smiling? His son’s reply: “Miss Belle. She told me a really funny joke about a scarecrow’s favorite fruit is strawberries!”

“That is funny. I never knew that,” Ryan said, grinning.

“Yeah and she was super nice too. I liked her.”

“So where is this Miss Belle of yours?” Ryan asked, looking around.

“She had to leave but can we come back again?”

“Of course.”

If it was possible, Bae’s smile became even wider.

Infectious was that smile, Ryan could only feel his good mood becoming brighter as he and Bae checked out the book that Miss Belle apparently recommended to Bae. Ryan kept his eyes peeled for this Miss Belle to thank her for making his son happy, but the head librarian didn’t know where she was if she wasn’t in the children’s section. Well, he couldn’t stick around until she showed up, so Ryan held Bae’s hand as they walked out to his car.

At that moment, Belle came walking up the steps from the bathroom. She hated leaving the sweet little boy abruptly but her lunch didn’t agree with Peanut. Rubbing her belly, she walked past the information table where Mr. Page called her.

“You just missed them but a father wanted me to thank you for what you did for his son. You made
his day.”

Belle wondered if it was the same little boy with floofy hair and smiled. He was so sad looking that she had to go over to him to turn that frown upside down.

“I’m glad to hear.”

Chapter End Notes

So close...
Chapter Summary

Oncer4Life69Dearie prompted: Alistair Gold is the best man to his best friend Jefferson Hatter. The only problem is that he’s in love with the bride, Belle French. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

Now, I’m getting to my requests from AO3! Thank you for being so patient when it got to your turn. Now, this prompt was given to me a while back before the RCIJ stories were posted. I read suchadearie’s Any Just Cause or Impediment and it is BRILLIANT! So while the theme might be the same, the circumstances are going to be totally different.

The Best Man?

It all started like most things tend to do with a couple of uni-aged pre-law students. Instead of studying for that big exam the following day, Alistair Gold and his roomie and best mate Jefferson Hatter were at the pub. It was better drinking away the stress and getting so rightfully pissed than to worry about some exam that they were going to ace anyways. It helps to be at the top of the class.

After kicking back another shot, Jefferson clapped Alistair on the back. “I got to take a leak man. Be back.”

Alistair nodded as his friend stumbled to the back of the bar where the restrooms were. Shaking his head to himself, he couldn’t help but smirk at how often Jefferson had to use the toilet when they drank. The guy practically had no tolerance or his liver was rejecting it in hopes he would get the message. Either way, Alistair could hold his own (being a pure Scotsman sure helped a lot) and he reached over and stole Jefferson’s shot.

As he set the glass down, he couldn’t help but notice the lovely woman at the other side. She was alone from the looks of it with long brown curls and vibrant azure eyes that lit up as she smiled at the bartender. His eyes roamed over and saw that she was wearing a charcoal gray skirt with fishnet stockings and a white blouse. Her shoes were conservative, a pair of black heels that were about a half an inch, and a pair of black-rimmed glasses were nestled on top of her hair.

She looked very much like a librarian. A sexy librarian, his mind supplied.

He didn’t recall ever seeing her in here before, but then again, he would remember a woman like her if he had. She was so breathtakingly beautiful with that alabaster complexion and pink lips that time seemed to stop altogether.

He was staring. Quite blatantly too but no one paid him any attention as he watched the angel lift up her glass of wine in a toast before resting the rim against her lips.
Every nerve in his body was telling him to get up and approach her. She could be a fellow student or maybe she was a librarian, and if so, then he seriously should start hanging out there more often to get to know her.

However, he remained rooted in his seat.

The truth was… Alistair wasn’t good with women. His last relationship with Milah didn’t work out and that was because she had been cheating on him. She told him straight that he was too boring and the only time he was fun to be around was when he was drinking. Well, Alistair couldn’t go through life drunk all the time so the relationship came to an abrupt end.

And, well, he didn’t know how to really talk to women. The fact that he even had Milah as a girlfriend as short-lived as it was astounding. Then again, she was the one who initiated everything from their first conversation, to their first date, to making love, etc.

Honestly, Alistair wasn’t comfortable around women, period. Jefferson was the smooth talker and he knew how to charm the ladies.

But this one was different. This one Alistair wanted to be brave and go up to her and find out her name, her hopes and dreams, everything!

Licking his lips, he was determined to do this. He was going to talk to her.

For another bit of courage, Alistair swallowed another shot before getting to his feet. With his eyes set on the pretty lady, he took a step forward and then another. Before he knew it he was about halfway to her and his brain was going a mile a minute trying to figure out what to say first.

But at that last second, he turned on his heel and retreated back to his barstool just as Jefferson was sauntering back from the loo.

“Hey mate,” Jefferson said, frowning. “Why the face?”

“It’s nothing. I thought… I thought I saw Milah,” Alistair quickly lied. While Alistair wasn’t torn up over his break-up, his best friend thought otherwise. He never told Jefferson that Milah cheated or it was mutual (he might have been boring to her but she wasn’t exactly all that exciting either), but his friend believed that he was madly in love with her. He just didn’t have the heart to admit what really happened since Jefferson was the one who introduced them.

“Ah. I’m sorry. You… okay?”

“Yeah, I’m fine. It’s nothing.”

“Uh-huh.” Then Jefferson looked past him and his eyes widened. “Whoa. Wait a sec. Do you mind if I—?”

Alistair waved his hand nonchalantly. “Go ahead Jefferson.”

He was gone before Alistair could finish his sentence. No doubt there was some voluptuous blonde that captured his attention. Alistair cackled before he ordered another drink.

When his drink was in his hand, he happened to turn his head to admire his angel when the glass slipped through his fingers.

xxxxxx
Two years later…

“Oh God. Oh God.” Jefferson was adjusting his tie for the umpteenth time as sweat broke across his brow.

“Stop it. You’re gonna make it crooked again,” Alistair scolded, swatting his best friend’s hand away so he could fix it. “There. Better.”

“Good, good,” Jefferson said. “I don’t know how calm you can be. Usually I’m the calm one.”

“Aye, well, you are getting married.”

“That I am.” Jefferson grinned crookedly. “Can you believe it? I never thought I would ever settle down and then Belle entered my life and…” He took a deep breath. “I’m going to marry Belle. I’m going to marry Belle.”

“You keep saying that.”

“I know! All right. I can do this. She is the woman I love. I love her.”

“Good. Now, let’s get you married.”

Alistair was doing everything he could not to grab his best friend by the shoulder and tell him that this was a mistake. One. BIG. Mistake. Not that Belle was going to make him a terrible wife. Or that she was a horrible person who enjoyed mocking others. Or she was a secret alcoholic. Or she was in a mountain of debt. No… Belle was none of those things because she was the kindest, gentlest, smartest, and frankly, the most honest person Alistair has ever met. She was beauty personified and had a soul that was pure honey and gold.

Oh, and Alistair was in love with her.

That fateful night… Jefferson saw her and talked to her and he asked her out before Alistair realized what was happening. By then, the damage was already done. Jefferson and Belle were together and he was the boyfriend’s best friend.

Now, he was the groom’s best man and the woman of his dreams was marrying someone that was not him.

He wanted nothing more to break it up, but he would be hurting the two people he loved the most. They were the perfect couple. Always happy, always loving and it sickened Alistair that he wasn’t the one to enjoy her kisses and smiles. Sure, Belle smiled at him a lot and he treasured each and every single one. In fact, he kept every conversation he had with her cherished in his heart. He knew all her quirks, her likes, her dislikes, and he used that to help Jefferson whenever he was at a loss on what to buy her for a gift or just because.

And it didn’t help that after their first year together, they decided to move in. Then, Alistair had to deal with seeing Belle every waking moment and right before she went to bed with his friend. He wanted to move out but he couldn’t think of a convincing lie other than I can’t live with you because I love Belle. Eventually, the couple decided to move into a bigger place and they were engaged soon after.

All the while, he was the best friend who was happy for his best friend and became best friends with the woman that should have been his girlfriend the moment he laid eyes on her.

But he was a coward who couldn’t even talk to her and now it was too late.
She was marrying Jefferson.

Alistair kept his expression neutral as the organ began to play and Belle was suddenly walking down the aisle. He knew if he looked in her eyes he would break. He would literally collapse and his emotions will come flooding out and he would demand her to marry him and not Jefferson because he didn’t deserve her.

His hands clenched as he visibly shook but his betraying eyes looked up and his breath caught at the vision the bride presented.

She was so beautiful. Even in white, she was a sight to behold in all that silk and lace.

It wasn’t fair.

It should have been him. And now…

“If any of you has reasons why these two should not be married, speak now or forever hold your peace.”

Alistair took a deep breath…
Chapter Summary

Likes_My_Red_Cape prompted: Tortured and soul-tormented vamp!Rumple is trying to make amends for his sins with the help of his friend seer!Belle. (Rated M)

Chapter Notes

I have to say… God bless you for this prompt! ;) Now, I should give you a fair warning… I love Buffy the Vampire Slayer and I’m a shipper of Buffy/Spike. That means I’m not an Angel fan—didn’t like him on Buffy and I definitely did not watch the spinoff. But seeing this prompt was something I couldn’t resist. So I’m taking the idea but I’m not replicating something from the show. So those of you who are Angel fans, I’m sorry but none of this is related to canon. Not even close, except for the curse. I’m keeping that.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Angel Inspired

Anyone saying it was easy to have a soul clearly was not a vampire. Then again, most vampires would say it was easier to not have a soul.

As for Rumplestiltskin, his circumstances were certainly unique. When he was turned, it was more so out of love to help protect his son and it was that love kept him grounded on still trying to live a life as a good man despite having the inner demon residing in him. And he succeeded until his son was murdered and then Rumplestiltskin allowed his demon to roam free.

Slaughtering those men who took his son from him was only the beginning. He spent the next three hundred years causing mayhem and stirring chaos wherever he went. It was easier to destroy than to confront his grief. He lost count of the number of the faceless victims he took over the years, but the one face he was always haunted by was his dear sweet Bae’s.

After all, he was his father. He should have protected him and he failed him. He failed Bae and he was now part of the dirt and dust while he roamed the earth as this shell with only the demon at the helm.

It wasn’t until Rumplestiltskin came upon a tribe of traveling gypsies that he decided to have fun with, which inevitably was the wrong decision to make. He made a deal and when the person didn’t deliver… Rumplestiltskin took her life. After all, a vampire has got to eat doesn’t he?

He had expected the clan to rise up and cast a curse on him, which returned his soul and forced him to live with the consequences of his actions.

That had been the first time he was confronted with his grief over his son’s murder and he had to face the fact that he was truly a monster. For too long he allowed the demon to control him; now
Rumplestiltskin was going to take back his life (or lack thereof) and try to do good. After all, Bae only wanted him to be a good man even with the darkness. It was the only thing he could to make up for the fact that all the bloodshed was done in his son’s name.

Although, saying he was going to do a good deed was way more complicated than Rumplestiltskin thought. When people find out you’re a vampire, they tend to panic and run from you rather than give you an opportunity to help them. But eventually, he was able to find a way to do good that even Bae would have to approve of doing.

He became the Deal-Maker.

And this time, he didn’t make it so that his deals were impossible or found a way of benefitting only him. It all depended on the person’s request and if it was something he could do. All he required for payment was blood packets. People assumed he was eccentric or just odd but they would give him the bags and he would look into their problems.

Not to brag or anything, but he did a decent job. He helped a couple escape to Canada when the woman’s mother didn’t approve of the match. Then he helped another couple find a way to be together when the boy’s father forced him into an engagement with another woman. Then there was the one other time he helped this lass escape her stepmother’s wrath so she could find her true love…

Okay, so he did a lot of matchmaking and saving star-crossed lovers from a life of unhappiness. Not that he actively sought those problems out. They always seemed to present themselves.

But the other thing he enjoyed doing was saving people from his kind.

Yes… he was a vampire hunter. Ironic considering he was a vampire, but there were some bad apples that had certain tastes that he didn’t approve of having. Even when his demon took over, Rumplestiltskin never fed from children nor did he harm helpless women. That didn’t appeal to him. But there were vampires who thrived from hunting the innocents so Rumplestiltskin would do anything he could to stop them.

That was how he met Belle.

A fortuitous meeting he later found because Belle was a seer. She could see things before they ever happened. She told him that she had a vision about him and she knew she must go to him to help his cause.

What cause… he had no idea since he didn’t have one. He was doing good in the name of Bae and that was all. Yet, there was something about her that drew him in and he couldn’t tell if it was her bewitching blue eyes or the husky Australian accent, but Rumplestiltskin heard himself tell her that she was more than welcome to work alongside him.

Now, it was him and Belle against the world of dangerous bloodthirsty creatures.

xxxxxxx

“Are you sure he’s somewhere nearby? Because I’m getting nothing,” Rumple told Belle as they were walking through a cemetery and searching for a lost little boy. Belle had a vision that he was trapped and being guarded by two vampires. As it were, Rumple couldn’t sense them let alone hear anything.

“I’m telling you this is what my vision showed me. See that tree? It was there.” She pointed to a scraggly and twisted oak whose branches were swaying in the breeze.
“Are you certain? Because all these trees look the same to me.”

She rolled her eyes. “Rumple, I’m a seer. I know how to read my visions. Now, get your pointy face on just in case these vamps pop up.”

“My face isn’t that pointy,” he grumbled as his normal face transformed into his vamp one. “It’s more bumpy.”

She snickered and he knew he wasn’t helping his case at all. “Whatever,” he said, although with his fangs bursting through his gums, his words combined with his accent made it sound like “Whatava.”

Then in an instant, they were ambushed. Three vampires jumped on top of them, catching the two off guard. But Rumple’s reflexes were fast and he was soon fighting his attacker on his right.

Belle, luckily, had her stake already drawn and swiftly dusted the vamp on her left and charged the other.

Rumple was able to seize the neck of his vamp and twisted as the neck broke and the creature became dust beneath his fingertips. Brushing his hands off, he looked up in time to watch Belle fight.

He never told her this (nor will he ever live it down if she did) but he enjoyed watching her fight. It was almost like a dance… a life or death one but she was able to maintain her grace as she ducked, punched, and kicked her prey. Plus, she loved to toy with the vamps before she killed them. This one wasn’t anything different—she even allowed the vamp to “trip” her so she was on the ground so he could climb on top of her presumably for his kill.

“Three… two… one,” Rumple counted down and *swoosh* dust exploded on top of her.

Waltzing over to her, he held out a hand so Belle could stand up. Her blue eyes were glowing in the dark, her lips parted in a breathless smile, and even though she had vamp dust sprinkled in her hair… she certainly looked like an Angel of Death.

He inwardly shivered as he pulled his hand back as if burned. If Belle noticed, then she didn’t comment as she brushed off the dust on her pants and continued where her vision showed her the boy was located.

They were approaching a mausoleum when Rumple could hear the crying finally.

“He’s here,” he told Belle as she nodded.

“Do your stuff Fang-Boy.”

He gave her a look. “Fang-Boy? You do know I’m older than you.”

She smirked. “Are you? I forgot,” she teased as she crossed her arms.

As he came closer to the door, he didn’t see Belle’s expression suddenly change and before she could utter a word… he ripped the door opened to find a recorder playing the sounds of a child crying and pleading for help.

“What the…?” Rumple started to say but he heard Belle’s cry and spun around to find a vamp pinning her arms to her back and his other hand wrapped around her pale throat. The look on her face was not fear or the horror that her life was now in danger… but shame as her vision came too late.
“Hello Deal-Maker,” the vamp crooned. “I knew you wouldn’t resist rescuing a child. And it looks like I have your precious seer. What to do, I wonder?”

“If you wanted my attention, then all you had to do was visit me,” Rumple said his expression hard and the demon full of anger that this soulless thing was touching his woman.

Well… she was a woman and they were partners. Not his in that way. Belle would kick his ass if that was the case.

“I’m in the yellow pages.”

“No. I like this a lot better. Deceiving is much more fun.” The vamp grinned, his fangs glittering with red tips from a recent feed. The missing child was real but it would appear they were too late to save the poor soul. This only fueled Rumple’s rage as he began to take a step forward, but it was another yelp from Belle that had him freezing in his spot.

“For a seer, you’re certainly a cute thing.”

Belle had to hold back a grimace. “Wish I could say the same about you. Your breath stinks.”

The vamp glared, taking offense. “My breath does not stink.”

“Sure fooled me,” she mumbled.

“Look! You’re my victim, got it? And I’m going to take you out of the picture so the Deal-Maker won’t have any more help. I always wondered what a seer’s blood will taste like…”

Belle began coughing as dust filled her lungs. Glaring at Rumple, she sputtered, “What the Hell!? Couldn’t you have waited when I wasn’t looking at him?”

“No.”

“Well, great. I think I’m going to be coughing up vamp dust for the next—” Whatever else she was going to say was cut off when Rumple’s face was suddenly pressing against her throat. Belle immediately tensed as she felt his tongue slowly lapping at her skin.

She hadn’t realized it, but when the vamp grabbed her, his nails did break her skin as blood trickled down her throat. Now, Rumple was deliberately following the trickles as he cleaned her up and sealed the wounds with his saliva. During this, Belle trembled in his embrace as she bit her lips to hold back a moan. Even though he was still in his vamp face, the bumpies didn’t hurt her like she thought it would. If anything, they were making her sensitive flesh even more sensitive with the way it would lightly scratch and brush against her jaw and exposed shoulder.

Her eyes were closed tightly as she felt Rumple slowly pulling away and her lashes fluttered as she looked up into his normal face. There was an unreadable expression in his brown eyes but she caught him blushing as he took several steps back to give her space.

“He… uh… I didn’t want your blood to be attracting any more vamps,” he told her.

“Oh-okay.” She felt dizzy but she managed to stand upright as he continued to look away from her.

“We should—”

“—Head back,” she finished his sentence as he chuckled nervously.

“Yeah. Good idea.”
Meanwhile, two other vampires who were off in the distance watched the entire exchange and looked at each other.

“See? I told you there was something going on between them! Pay up!” A woman with long brown hair with streaks of red told her companion.

“Here you go,” grumbled the man with an Irish accent. He placed the twenty in her hand as she let out another self-congratulatory whoop.

“It’s too bad that our friends died in the process. But oh well. I never liked Stealthy anyway,” the woman said.

“Yeah he was annoying,” her friend agreed.

Chapter End Notes

All right! The next ones will be based on Rebecca. Thanks for reading and don’t forget to review!
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle’s first day as Mrs. Gold in Manderley. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own the concept of Rebecca. That belongs to the talented Daphne Du Maurier but… I do own the novel and movie.

A/N: This is absolutely one of my favorite books of all time. I’ve already adapted the story using characters from Phantom of the Opera (it’s called Heaven by the Sea if you want to check it out) and of course it also fits with Rumbelle! I was very picky with the prompts for this turn mainly because I didn’t want to give too much away and I want to hear from you guys what you want to see. It’s a brilliant suspense/romance story and the climax is epic. Check it out if you haven’t. Don’t forget to review as always!

A/A/N: Now that school is back, I won’t be able to update as often. I will try to get to your requests as quickly as I can, but I might stick to my pre-written prompts in the meantime. At least those I can update those fairly quickly.

Rebecca

Already things weren’t going exactly according to plan as Belle would have liked. She had been hoping to have breakfast with her husband, but Anthony had to leave on urgent business. It was their first day as husband and wife in Manderley, and Belle looked forward in exploring the grounds with him.

Yet, breakfast proved to be a lonely affair and Belle resigned herself in looking for amusement herself. Anthony boasted about the library so it was the perfect place to start. Now… if only she could find it.

The manor was quite grand and there were a countless number of rooms. As Mistress, it was expected for Belle to know where she was going. However, every door looked the same and the last thing she wanted was to ask for help. Eventually she chose to go into the room with the rose-colored door, but it turned out to be the morning room.

A fire was already set, making the room warmer, despite the cold stillness of the décor and palette. It was beautiful in a sense with every piece of furniture chosen specifically for its purpose; although, they hardly looked inviting if one were to rest on the settee with its hard appearance. As Belle inspected further, the room seemed more of a showcase than comfort, including the richly crimson rhododendrons scattered in vases throughout. They were as horrid and frightful looking on the drive to Manderley as they were here. The first Mrs. Gold must have loved them, but they only inspired dread in Belle.
At least the writing desk seemed welcoming as her fingertips trailed along the sleek edge of the ebony top. It was neat and tidy with a telephone at one end; papers and pens on the other for letters. A thick, long book sat in the center and as Belle opened it, her eyes zeroed on the initials of C.G.—Cora Gold.

Her hand flinched as if burned when she realized this room belonged to her previous mistress. This was her address book, her friends and acquaintances!

Belle felt a chill in the air as her gaze settled on a china cupid posed on the edge of the desk. The face was cocked in her direction, its arrow aimed at her heart as its wings were in mid-flight. It was an ugly piece and its stone cold expression held nothing but malice as this timid usurper disturbed its peace.

At once the phone rang waking Belle from her reverie. The cupid watched her carefully as she picked it up.

“Hello? I’m sorry… you must be mistaken. Mrs. Gold died a year ago.”

Belle hung up, then realizing her grievous error, she looked up as the cupid seemed to mock her with that tiny, curled smirk. Even it knew that Belle wasn’t the real Mrs. Gold and her mistake was completely acceptable.
All eyes were on her—*waiting* for the new Mrs. Gold to make some grand speech before the Masquerade Ball could go underway. They were eagerly and anxiously awaiting the profound and witty words that surely should come natural to Mrs. Gold. After all, Cora always knew what to say so Belle shouldn’t be any different.

Yet as Belle stared at the massive crowd, she found herself faltering, her tongue thick and heavy and stuck in her throat. What can she say? What can she say to these people that she barely knew? She wasn’t some lady born in a well to do family. She was a lowly daughter of an inventor—nothing more.

She wasn’t anyone special.

“Go on and say something, my dear,” Anthony said, encouraging and kind as he nudged her closer. “Show the world that you’re Mrs. Gold now.”

Her mouth opened as a pitiful squeak came out. She tried to cover it up as if she cleared her throat, and then went to try again.

“You’re an imposter!” came a shout from the crowd. “You’re not the true Mrs. Gold!”

A resounding gasp gathered from the guests as a woman barged through. Belle tensed as the woman lifted a finger to her. “Look at her! She’s not a lady befit to the likes of Manderley! She’s nothing more than a common peasant!”

“No—not anymore. I’m Mrs. Gold now—“ Belle’s voice trailed off as the woman disappeared. Looking around, she jumped when the woman rematerialized next to her.

Bending her face to Belle’s ear, she sneered, “You’re worthless. You think he loves you? You’re nothing more than a bed warmer, and even then, you’re a poor substitute compared to the pleasures I gave him. You’re a charlatan, a fraud. You’re not worthy of possessing the Gold name. *I* was born to be mistress, not you!”

With that exclamation, Cora shoved Belle and she was falling backwards—falling, falling, until her body plunged in the tumultuous waves of the freezing water of the sea.

“You’re better dead!” Cora cackled, her voice ringing in her head as Belle fought to stay afloat. Yet the prickling pull of icy fingers grabbed at her skirt and arms, pulling her down in the murky depths—

Belle screamed, jumping up in bed as her husband, also startled, woke up in alarm.

“What’s wrong?” he asked, his brow frowning as he felt his wife tremble uncontrollably at his side.
“Belle?” he spoke with concern as he carefully placed his hand on her shoulder.

“A nightmare,” she replied, breathing hard. “Oh Anthony! It was a horrid nightmare!”

At once, he pulled her into the safety of his arms, his right hand sneaking up to delve into her curls, holding her closely as she wept against his shoulder.

“Tell me,” Anthony bid gently, stroking her tresses softly.

Sniffling, Belle did. “It was the Masquerade Ball and I had to give a speech and—“ She choked as she confessed, “I was so scared Anthony! I was afraid I was going to say the wrong thing and be an embarrassment to you. Worst of all, they all knew.”

“Bloody Hell,” he muttered. “I feared this would be too much for you. Damn my wretched sister! You shouldn’t have let Mary Margaret persuade you to host this in the first place—“

“No!” Belle exclaimed. “Please don’t blame Mary Margaret. It’s just me being silly ‘tis all. Nerves getting the best of me. I’ll be fine. I promise.”

Anthony didn’t look convinced, but Belle couldn’t let him cancel this ball. This was her chance to prove she was worthy of carrying the Gold name. This was her party, not Cora’s, and Belle will make him proud.

To prove she was well, Belle kissed him on the mouth. To her chagrin, he didn’t return the kiss… and why should he? Ever since they arrived at Manderley, Anthony rarely showed his affections anymore. Smiling sadly to herself, Belle looked down at her lap. “It was only my doubts affecting my dreams. I assure you that everything will be perfect. It shall be the most talked about ball in years to come. I have a very good feeling about it.”

He nodded and patted her hand. “Very well. Do try and get some rest.”

As her husband slid back under the covers, Belle followed suit and it wasn’t long after that she heard his quiet snores. Closing her eyes, she refused to let her nightmare rule her. Cora Gold was dead but Belle Gold was alive and well. She will show that ghost that she is capable of putting on the best ball.

With that firm thought in mind, she fell back into a wonderful slumber. There was certainly one thing she was looking forward to and that was for Anthony to see her costume.

She knew he would love it.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Anthony Gold reacts to Belle’s costume at the ball. (Rated T)

Rebecca

The color had been drained from his countenance; in fact, all of them had turned ashen white: Mary Margaret, her husband Colonel David Nolan, and Anthony’s good friend James Hopper.

It was like they had seen a ghost.

Frowning, Belle looked over her snow white gown and the lacy parasol, even her bonnet was in place. What in the world could have rendered them speechless?

Then… the ragged intake of breath as Mary Margaret murmured in horror: “Cora?”

That’s all it took for Anthony to snap as his loving brown eyes hardened into a dark, emotionless shade.

“Go,” he ordered in a raspy voice. “Go and change that horrid costume! I don’t care what you put on, but God’s sake… anything but that dress!”

Belle turned and ran up the stairs, the burning hatred of her husband’s visage chasing at her heels.
4 Rebecca Rated T

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Zelena persuades Belle to take that final leap. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Rebecca

“It’s real simple, my dear,” the vapid, redhead cooed. “Just step on the sill and jump… then all your fears and worries are gone. Mr. Gold’s undying love for the real Mrs. Gold won’t burden you no more. It’s not fair to you to live in the greatness of her shadow. For everyone to compare her to you and recognize your flaws and mistakes. But step this way and it will be over—you will be free.”

“Free,” Belle echoed, looking out to the wild sea.

“Yes,” Zelena hissed, her lips twitching. “Think about it… no more tears, no more heartache… Just sweet bliss for you and him. And he will be with her again, like it was meant to be, Mrs. Gold and Mr. Gold alone in Manderley.”

Belle paused, her brow knitting. “He’ll be alone again. With all that darkness…”

“Yes but that’s the point. He belongs to the darkness just like my Mistress. Can you not hear her now? She knows this is the end for you so she can be reunited with her husband. Give him that bit of happiness. To be with his one and only love.”

She knew in her heart he could never love her like she loved him. How many times had she witnessed it? How much more can she take to hear Cora’s name on his lips night after night and not hers? There was only one option left; Belle saw that now. She may not make Anthony happy, but she could offer him some peace and no longer be tormented by his infidelity to Cora.

Biting her lip to fight back the tears, Belle hoisted herself on the ledge. All she had to do was take one more step and the pain would be gone… forever.

Just one step.

With her foot stretched out, Belle hovered over the empty air and sea…

“No. I won’t do it.”

Chapter End Notes

All right that ends this round of prompts. Don’t forget to review and you can leave behind a prompt in your review or you can PM me. Next… Indecent Proposal with a twist.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle French is engaged to Grayson Knight and has a successful business. Until profits from her bookshop began to drop and they are struggling to pay their bills. Enter Mr. Gold, the shrewd and ruthless landlord, who has had his eye on Belle for quite some time. He offers her and her fiancé a deal. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

A/N: This series of prompts do not follow the movie at all. What happens is that Gold will offer Belle an indecent proposal that you will see.

A/A/N: Hi everyone!!! I know it’s been a while since I posted anything but work has been kicking my butt. I’m finding very little free time as it is so I’m so glad I was able to have the time to quickly revise these prompts for you. I still have a list of prompt requests, which I haven’t started writing any of them yet but I’ll try to squeeze them in as soon as I can!

Plus… the anthology my short story is published in is now available to purchase! It’s called Erie Tales VIII “Holiday Horror” and it’s available only on Amazon. I have the link for it posted under my Tumblr page. My holiday was Christmas and it’s titled “Granny’s Christmas Cookies.”

Hope you all like!

Indecent Proposal

“Damnit!” Belle muttered, looking over the paperwork for the latest quarter in profits. Once again the numbers dipped another 10%.

Then again, she shouldn’t have been surprised. Lately, the number of customers had been declining and even the habitual browsers have also stopped coming. Yet it was still startling to see the actual numbers for this issue that has been ongoing for the past several months.

With sales drooping, Belle French didn’t know how long she would be able to keep The Book Escape from closing its doors for good.

The thought inspired tears as she covered her face despairingly. This shop had been her dream come true and she was successful when she opened two years ago. After all, she did own the only bookstore in Storybrooke. However, she was losing business and even her loyal customers were dwindling. She couldn’t figure out why that was the case. Now, she did see more of the electronic books popping up throughout town, but she didn’t think that was the only factor that was driving her customers away. There was a major chain bookstore outside Storybrooke, and it was a lengthy drive to get to it, but why drive so far when there was a convenient bookstore around the corner?
She tried everything to entice her customers to return to her. She offered sales, discounts, donation collections (donate five cans of food and choose a book of your choice for half off), etc. to no avail. It seemed people would rather drive out of Storybrooke or use Amazon as opposed to her small shop.

Resigned, Belle wiped her eyes with the back of her sleeve. She knew she will have to break the news to her fiancé, Grayson. They were partners turned lovers and he had invested as much as she did in opening this store. Ever since the sales began to drop, they had to postpone their nuptials, hoping things will turn around. Now that it looked much bleaker… there was only one other option to consider: closing The Book Escape.

She didn’t want to but what other choice did they have? Bills were adding up, jobs had to be cut, not to mention scrapping for rent was getting difficult, especially with a landlord as ruthless and unfriendly as Mr. Gold.

The last resort would be to go to Mr. Gold to make a deal, but Belle would rather close than be indebted to him. Too many people have made deals with him, and the one thing that is always true about Mr. Gold’s deals was that they always benefitted him. So no… Belle didn’t want to go that route. Bad enough he was their landlord and she had to bear the bad news they may not have enough for the month.

Well, she shouldn’t say that. If anything, he had been kind to her or close to kindness he could offer with his reputation and all. The rent was never excessive and was acceptable within the property’s value. On Rent Day, Belle always had his money ready along with a book (on the house) that she thought he might like. In the beginning, he had scowled at the offer, but in recent months he had been warming up to the gift; even insofar as to even discuss the book with her on the next Rent Day.

However, it was the Dealmaker Mr. Gold Belle didn’t want to mess with. Even though she saw him as an acquaintance, she wasn’t naïve to think she would get special treatment by any means, which was why she had been careful not to mention the decrease in profits to avoid the inevitable deal he might make.

Belle locked up the store and walked home to her apartment. Grayson got home before she did and had been putting the last touches together on dinner.

She waited until after to tell him the grim news. By eleven o’clock they decided they would shut down The Book Escape for good.

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It didn’t take long for news to spread about the closing. Belle and Grayson had spent the better part of the evening making and drawing up signs to announce the last sales, everything must go. It didn’t make her feel any better, especially when she called and left a message with Mr. Gold about the bookstore closing and breaking the lease for the property. She and Grayson had discussed breaking the contract was better than suffering the remaining months until renewal. If they weren’t turning a profit, then what was the point in keeping the doors opened?

Of course, they knew Mr. Gold would drop by to find out the details, but there was no point in beating around the bush. As soon as he came they would tell him the truth and pay whatever the contract said for breaking it. If it meant delaying the wedding a little bit longer… then that’s what they had to do.

It was late afternoon by the time Mr. Gold did show up. The few customers they did manage to ring in took off as soon as he came into the store. Grayson nudged her to let her know he was there and
Belle swallowed thickly as she approached him.

Mr. Gold was quite a sight to behold. Donned in one of his Armani suits, he was the very image of elegance and money down to the leather shine of his shoes. Even his cane was regal looking—a slick ebony body with a gold handle. The look on his face was stoic and unreadable, but his eyes held a glint of a promise for a potential deal in the making.

“Ah, Ms. French,” he greeted with a slight tip of his head. “I received your message, and I must say, I was quite bereft when I heard the news. I’m sure you know how I feel about when a person breaks a contract with me.”

“Yes but we saw no other way. Believe me, Mr. Gold, this decision wasn’t made lightly,” she said with a sense of confidence she did not know she possessed. “As much it grieves us… we weren’t making any money. We’re doing you a larger favor in closing so someone else can buy the property and possibly make use out of it.”

He raised a finger to his chin and tapped it pensively. “Perhaps. Or maybe there is a way to keep it open.”

Here it came. Just as Belle dreaded.

“I’m sorry Mr. Gold. But we’re not interested in making a deal. Businesses come and go. This wasn’t anything different and we need to move on.”

“Indeed. But wasn’t this always a dream of yours? And Mr. Knight’s?”

At the mention of his name, Grayson appeared beside her with his arm supportively wrapped around her waist. “You heard the lady, Mr. Gold. We’re not interested.”

He feigned shock. “Truly? Even when it means this could save your bookshop?”

Grayson gulped and Belle hoped he kept his resolve. The last thing they needed was to bury themselves further. “’Fraid so Mr. Gold. Grayson and I are ready to move on with the next chapter of our lives.”

He eyed them carefully. “So I see. Well, it is a shame really. Pity, too. I had such high hopes for your store. The town could use its own bookstore.”

“We tried,” Belle insisted. “But it seems the people would rather go elsewhere.”

“Perhaps you should hear me out. I might be able to change the tide sort of speak.” His grin was predatory and Belle wasn’t sure she liked the tone of his voice. While she never was exactly frightened of Mr. Gold, there was something… unsettling about him. She couldn’t place her finger on what or why, but he seemed insistent they keep their doors opened.

“What is it?” Grayson asked and Belle whirled at him in astonishment. “Grayson!” she hissed. “We talked about this. We weren’t going to do this.”

“I know but Belle,” he sighed. “This store is your dream as much as mine. You can’t honestly expect me to believe you would rather close then give it a chance?”

“No. I guess not but we’ve talked about this. We made a decision.”

“No. You did,” he corrected. “And I want to hear what Mr. Gold has to say. It might not be as bad as we think.”
Looking back at the older man, Grayson nodded. “What are your terms?”

Mr. Gold broke out in a wide smile. “Simple. You see... I have another business venture in the works and the problem is... this investor prefers to negotiate with family men. Or at least men who are wed. It makes them a little more trustworthy. If you assist me with sealing the deal with this man, then I will give you the necessary funds to pay off your bills and any other debts you might have collected in the last six months. With a clean slate, I will also provide the resources needed for advertisement to drive customers in.”

Belle arched a brow. It sounded too good to be true, and yet... “So how do you propose we help you? Are you suggesting you want Grayson to pass off as you?”

Mr. Gold burst out laughing. The sound was so sudden and abrupt that Belle jumped. Wiping a stray tear, Mr. Gold settled his chuckling fit and cleared his throat. “No offense to Mr. Knight but there is no way in Hell he could pass off as me.”

“What are you implying?” Grayson demanded. A chill went down Belle’s spine as the older man locked his gaze on her.

“I thought it was obvious. Ms. French will be my wife during this time.”

“How do you propose we help you? Are you suggesting you want Grayson to pass off as you?”

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“I thought it was obvious. Ms. French will be my wife during this time.”

“How do you propose we help you? Are you suggesting you want Grayson to pass off as you?”

The proclamations were in unison and the disgust in her expression was evident for them to see. “No. There is no way I would agree to do this.” She shook her head vehemently. Marry Mr. Gold?! He had another thing coming if he thought she would accept an offer like that.

“What?!”

As tempting as it sounded, Belle couldn’t accept it. She was still selling herself and she didn’t like the idea at all. If he was that desperate to have a “wife,” then he should find some other desperate woman.

“Absolutely not. I’m sorry for the waste of time Mr. Gold, but I think you should leave,” Belle said, motioning to the door. “Grayson and I will never agree to those terms.”

“Belle,” her fiancé said, placing his hand on her arm. “Let’s not be too hasty.”

“What?” She jerked her arm away from him as she looked at him with shock. “You cannot be seriously considering this.”

“Think about it Belle,” he argued. “We can keep the shop, rent free, and start fresh. We couldn’t have asked for a better deal.”

“Yes to what extent? This has to be illegal.”

“Belle, he isn’t going to push you to do something you don’t want. If you do this, then we can keep living our dream. Think about it.”

“I have and I can’t—"
“Ahem.” The couple turned to face the landlord. “I see you two have a lot to discuss. I’ll give you twenty-four hours to consider. If I do not hear back from you, then I know the deal is off. You may close the store and I will expect the thousand dollars fee for breaking the lease on my counter the day after. No later. Is that understood?”

They nodded.

“Very well. I will be looking forward to your answer. Good day.”

And he was gone.

Belle gazed at her fiancé in a whole new light. She couldn’t believe he would actually go along with it. It sickened her that Grayson would be willing to sell her off like a prize stallion. Right now, she couldn’t bear the sight of him so she excused herself to get some fresh air. She needed to clear her mind and get her thoughts in order. There was no doubt that this will be a battle and she had to have her wits about her to make sure this doesn’t happen.

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Hours passed and Belle returned to the apartment where he was already waiting for her. Sitting across from him, she softly asked, “Where do we go from here?”

“Belle—” he began. “I know you don’t like it. Trust me, I don’t either. To see you with him… it’ll drive me mad. But we need to think about our future. This could very well save us.”

“Yeah at my expense. It’s not worth it to me Grayson. Even if the tables were reversed, I wouldn’t be having this conversation with you. I would have placed my foot down as soon as Gold laid out those terms.”

“This is not just you, Belle. I invested a great deal into this store as well. This is my dream too and I can’t sit back and let it go away. We have to give it a shot. This new start could be the thing we need to get back on our feet and try again.”

“You would be okay with this? With me being married to him?”

“It’s not like it would be real,” he pressed. “Yeah the marriage might seem real, but the rest is a charade. You can do this Belle. I know you can. Whoever this business guy is… he won’t be able to help himself and fall for your charms. He’ll give Gold whatever he wants.”

“Yes and what if it includes me? Grayson, I can’t do this. Don’t ask me to do this.”

“We don’t have a choice. We’re broke Belle. Even the money Gold needs to break the lease is going to take some creativity. We just can’t afford it.”

She closed her eyes. “There has to be another way.”

“There isn’t. Please Belle. You’re all the hope this store has. If not you…”

Tears swell in her blue depths. “Grayson…”

“I know. I know darling.” He took her in his arms and held her close. “No matter what. I love you.”

“I love you too,” she said. And like that… the choice was made.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle and Mr. Gold get married. (Rated T)

Indecent Proposal

Ideally, when a girl fantasized about her wedding it puts out all the stops to make it memorable. The beautiful white church, roses galore, the snowy white ball gown fit for a princess, and the handsome prince as the groom. Belle wasn’t alone to dream of her big day with her friends and family at her side, the lacy Vera Wang gown she had her eye on, and the love of her life waiting by the altar.

Instead, there was no church or floral arrangements. There were no friends and family present, except the local psychiatrist (although an acquaintance is more accurate), and the groom was definitely not the love of her life.

No… Standing in the courtroom with Judge Midas as officiate was the groom, Mr. Gold, her landlord and business partner (in a way). He made her an offer that she refused, but her fiancé insisted she accept the terms to his contract. The marriage was a sham, a façade, and nothing more so Mr. Gold could claim his true prize—a business deal with another investor. The only emotions she had in her heart for him were indifference and resignation. He promised to save her bookstore on the condition she’d become his wife to trick the family-oriented figurehead, and in turn, she will have a divorce and the funds to run her business so it won’t ever collapse.

At the last second, Mr. Gold added another stipulation that some of the monies he will give her and her fiancé must be used to pay for their actual wedding. When Belle saw the additional bullet in the contract, she wondered if this was some kind of sick joke. Mr. Gold gave her one of his wry smirks. “I don’t joke, my dear. I know how unpleasant this deal is for you and Mr. Knight. Once our divorce is finalized I have no doubt you would want to hasten your nuptials with your true intended. I’m speeding up the inevitable so you won’t have to look back at this time of your life and remember what had to be done. You two can still have your happily ever after and pretend that the villain never interfered in the first place.”

Of course, Belle doubted if she or Grayson could ever forget such a thing. But it was generous of him to make sure they wouldn’t have to wait. The quicker she was Mrs. Knight then the quicker she won’t ever have to remember she was Mrs. Gold first. However, it was going to be difficult for their friends to accept this, especially when she was going to have to pretend that her marriage to Mr. Gold was the real McCoy.

Unfortunately, the terms of the agreement prevented her and Grayson from speaking in public or about this deal after it has been concluded. Not that they would wish to converse about this once it’s over, but Belle understood Mr. Gold’s reasons. During the false marriage, Belle and Grayson would have to act as if they parted ways once it came into light she was having an affair with Mr. Gold. It was up to them how they wanted to spread the story as long as the end result was that Belle ultimately chose Mr. Gold. It hadn’t been easy to do, especially when Grayson looked to be the victim in this situation. He wanted Belle to do it despite her protests. Of course, it was not like anyone knew this so to their friends Belle was the home wrecrer and broke his heart.
It was no wonder she didn’t have any support from the people she cared—all who were against this union from taking place. Her closest friends, Ruby and Ariel, couldn’t grasp the idea that Belle had cheated with Mr. Gold of all people. They were the firsts to sniff out that it had to be something diabolical or else Belle wouldn’t have followed through. Knowing exactly what was hanging in the balance, Belle had to maintain the story they forged and prayed that her friends would forgive her when she returned to Grayson. She claimed that Mr. Gold made her feel things about herself that Grayson never could and he got her as a person. She also claimed that Mr. Gold wasn’t as nasty or horrible or evil as everyone made him up to be. He was kind and caring and she fell in love.

A lie, of course. But she had said it with such sincerity and with such compelling adoration that they bought it. Or, she hoped she did. If they hadn’t, then they didn’t voice it.

Yet it would have been nice to have some moral support present. Even seeing Grayson would have given her the solace and strength to follow through, knowing she wasn’t the only one suffering and that this was to ensure their future together.

But the contract… not even he could be there for her. Belle was alone.

“Ready my dear?” Gold asked, waking her from her reverie.

She hadn’t realized she already walked down the aisle and was standing next to him. “Let’s get this over and done with,” she whispered hastily, before straightening her posture and fixating him with a smile that could convince the skeptics she did love him. “As ever darling.”

No… this wasn’t her dream wedding she hoped for. But Belle will endure this obstacle with everything she could muster, playing the role as the happy and besotted bride should be.

Little did she know Mr. Gold was pretending that her smile was genuine and she was happy to be marrying him. The fantasy helped to ease the pain that this will never be real to her.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: They practice at being a loving married couple and share a first kiss.

Indecent Proposal

He told himself he was doing this for authenticity’s sake. They were married now and it had to look real. It had to look like they were a couple in love. After all, if the investor and potential future business associate believed otherwise… than the whole thing would blow up.

So yes… for the sake of the deal and Belle’s… this had to look real.

“Come again?”

He had asked Belle to meet him at the pawnshop. They were in the process of getting her moved into his house and were figuring out what she will bring and not bring with her. To Belle, she thought this was another discussion before it was official. She wanted to talk to him about her apartment. After this deal was over she wanted to be able to move back in with no problems. Then he ambushed her with the need to make their marriage real.

“I’ll say it again,” he said with a sigh. “We need to make it seem like we’re in love. Living together doesn’t equate newlywed bliss.”

“I know but the terms were specific. In public we will hold hands, smile at one another, a kiss on the cheek—“

“Yes all very well but also platonic. There is no passion, no love. How can we nurse this image that you suddenly left your brawny fiancé for me?” Gold spread his fingers across the glass counter as he levelled a gaze at her. “We need to be convincing. Don’t forget… your bookshop is hanging in the balance, and your future wedded bliss.”

He was right. Damn him… he was.

Gold smirked inwardly, knowing he won this matter. He was afraid he would have to push her to agree in some shape or other. At least she conceded to the notion rather than fight him on it. Although, a little fighting might have put some rosy color to her face, even a little dash of hatred would have sizzled things. Yet, she was complacent and he didn’t like that she gave in so quickly. Before… he had seen her in her anger, the way her blue eyes would spark with such indignation. He mentally shivered at the recollection when he first announced his deal to her. That was the Belle he longed to see again.

But that Belle wasn’t here today.

As soon as he moved away from the counter and was standing in front of her, he frowned at the expression on her countenance. There was hesitance in her eyes and reluctant acceptance for whatever he had in mind. He knew she wouldn’t be jumping for joy, but did she have to look like she was about to face her execution?
Knowing he was treading deep waters here, Gold set his cane against the counter and raised his hands to cup her face. He had done the same during their wedding ceremony and as soon as the Judge declared they were husband and wife… he had kissed her chastely on the mouth, ignoring the obvious shudder that went through her. Now, at his touch, she flinched, probably dreading another repeat like before but swallowed her pride as she knew it must be done.

He didn’t like that but he made his bed when he came forward with this deal. He knew what he was getting into and it was up to him to follow through, regardless of his personal feelings.

Wanting to put her at ease, his thumb stroked the smooth curve of her cheek in methodical circles. As soon as he felt her loosening up and relaxing, he forced himself to look into her eyes so she would see there was no reason for her to fear him. Yet, Belle was stunned to see the insecurity that flashed briefly in his eyes. Then, as if it never occurred, determination set in as he lowered his face to hers—his lips a breaths inch away.

Belle’s body stiffened, her breathing stopped as she waited for the next move, which she didn’t have to wait for long. Slowly, he brushed his mouth over hers—just a mere graze—and then a second sweep. This time he lingered so she could get used to the pressure and proximity. Finally, he hovered as if waiting for permission to continue.

She didn’t know why he would stop, but the gesture was appreciated. Despite his earlier claims for authenticity, he didn’t want to do this against her will. He was giving her a choice to back out and end this if she wished. It was perplexing… this seemingly contradiction of words and actions that Belle wasn’t sure if this was kind of test or him making up to be a gentleman after everything he put her through. Whatever his reasoning or motive, she strangely enough wanted him to go on.

Maybe it was to get it done so next time would be bearable. Or easier. Or something else entirely. Whatever it was Belle was ready thanks to his soothing caresses and the warm press of his body, stirring the butterflies in her belly. Not to mention, his lips looked quite soft…

She didn’t know what possessed her, but she gave a slight nod and it was all the answer he needed to his unspoken question as he sealed the distance, closing his lips over hers in gentle strokes.

The instant touch sent a shockwave through her legs and Belle nearly lost her balance. Thankfully, it was the secure hold his hands had on her that prevented her from falling. Time was lost as they stood in the silence of the shop with only the wet, clinging noises of kisses shared echoing around them.

And, like that, Gold broke away to catch the remaining air in his lungs while his heart thumped against his ribs. Belle’s eyes were firmly shut, her mouth parted with slight pants, until she realized he was no longer kissing her. Eyelids flying open, she could only stare at him with some unreadable emotion within them.

“I think we got it,” Gold murmured, his voice hoarse and raspy.

Belle nodded. “Y-yeah. I think we do.”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle sees a new side to Mr. Gold and it's not what she expected. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Indecent Proposal

Home.

It was an odd word to say to describe the Victorian house, yet home it was until the business transaction was over.

Mr. Gold was anxious to have her moved in and her belongings secured at once. She assumed he was afraid she would get cold feet, but she was wearing his ring now and they had shared their first kiss—a shocking intimacy that still shook her to her core.

Who would have thought Mr. Gold would be so chivalrous? Or thoughtful? Or gentle?

It was a contradiction she wasn’t used to seeing, but she had to remind herself that Gold was a means to an end and the sooner she helped him… the sooner she could return to her old life and marry Grayson. With that firmly set in her mind, Belle finished unpacking her clothes and other accessories she brought. He told her she needn’t worry about certain trivial things (i.e. hairbrush, tooth brush, toiletries) but Belle insisted she bring the ones from her home. At least they were hers and it gave her some piece of mind that not everything she used was bought with his money. After all, this debt was plenty in itself.

He kindly gave her the day to herself so she could get acquainted with the old house and do what she wished to make it a happy, newlywed nest.

Easier said than done.

Mr. Gold owned too many unique and priceless items that Belle was more afraid of disturbing them than anything else. Even with his permission she couldn’t bring herself to upset the atmosphere. She had no idea what they were worth, but she knew they had to be expensive and irreplaceable.

So she chose a safe route and elected to place some of her pictures and books around so it did have some of her touch to it. Belle was mindful not to bring any pictures of her and Grayson, and only focused on friends and family. As she did this she couldn’t help but notice the lack of photos and picture frames period. There was no trace or evidence to give her any kind of insight to her husband’s life. All there was was an endless collection of antiques and dust.

Strange, she thought. *I would think he would have some type of picture lying around.* It became a search for her to uncover something about the man she agreed to marry.

As Belle explored the house, she did stumble upon a room on the second floor whose door was locked. She reached into her pocket and pulled out the key he gave her so she could have access to
any of the rooms. But for some reason this key wouldn’t unlock this particular room. Obviously, Mr. Gold was hiding something and Belle was curious to know what.

Grateful for wearing hair pins, Belle removed one from her curls and stretched the wire out so she could pick it. After a few twists and turns she heard the lock click and the door opened with ease.

Brushing her hands against her knees, Belle stood up and went inside. The last thing she expected to find was a young boy’s bedroom. Looking around the place was neat and tidy—nothing was out of place or dirty. Toys were lined up on shelves with a stuffed bear sitting on top of the bed, waiting to greet its young friend. The closet was filled with more toys and games with clothes hanging neatly inside. Even the dresser drawers were filled with clothes—all folded and stacked on top of the other.

Belle carefully took out a shirt and unfolded it. The top was small, red, with a yellow excavator on the front and the words “Daddy’s Little Digger” on the back. It was the right size for a child of five or six.

Belle quickly folded it back up and returned it in its rightful spot and closed the drawer. As she looked up she found a picture frame on top. There was a boy wearing the same red and yellow digger shirt she had held and he was grinning widely at the camera—a toothy smile of any proud and happy six-year-old could give. Behind him was a cage from the zoo with a monkey looking on with his arm raised in a “hello.” But it was the person next to the boy that drew her attention.

He was much younger then with the same long hair but fuller and darker with no silver streaks. Even his features were lighter—his eyes bright with fond amusement as he smiled on with one arm over the boy’s shoulder. The cane was sorely missing, not that this Mr. Gold needed one. No… he was happy and full of life, not a trace of darkness or cynicism etched on his face.

There was no denying the likeness and resemblance of the two, which Belle knew at once to be his son. She couldn’t help but wonder where this boy was and why would Mr. Gold keep this room frozen in time to suit a child? Clearly he had to be an adult by now with no need for these toys and clothes.

Unless…

Belle looked around noting the somber cheerfulness the room seemed to have. A different notion took wing and she realized this was a memorial she was standing in. A homage to a little boy who clearly adored his father and his father him.

Something terrible had happened and Belle stumbled upon this resting place with no thought at all as to why her husband would keep it locked.

She put the frame back and quickly snuck out as to not disturb anything else. She was relieved the door locked behind her, although she wouldn’t know how to explain her presence if it didn’t. This room meant something to Mr. Gold and to intrude upon that privacy was unforgivable. But it did leave her with questions—questions she wasn’t sure she had to right to ask or know. All she knew it was a room for mourning and she respected that.

A son!

She couldn’t believe Mr. Gold once had a son and they were happy. A long time ago he was a different man and that man had changed drastically to what he was today. Belle doubted if anyone knew this. If they did, then people wouldn’t despise him as much. Or… at least be understanding.

However, finding the room gave Belle a new perspective about her husband. He was only a man and
a grieving father as well.

*I guess there is more to him than I thought.* Nonetheless, Belle decided to make an effort with the situation and fixed dinner for him by the time he returned from work. It was a delightful surprise, and more so with the kindness she seemed to give him. For a second, he had believed Belle was feeling something for him.

Not wanting to spoil the evening or the magic in the air, Gold and Belle passed a pleasant evening together with conversation that was normal and natural for a married couple. He never knew she had uncovered the painful secret of his and it wouldn’t be for some time that he would eventually confide in her about what happened to Bae.

Chapter End Notes

That ends this next four. The next ones are based on a favorite movie of mine starring Emma Thompson and Kenneth Branagh called Dead Again. This literally screamed Rumbelle to me and you will soon see why! Don’t forget to review!
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Ryan Gold has now moved to Storybrooke and life is getting better for the divorcee. He is finally doing something he loves and Bae has been adjusting very well. He is making friends and is spending a lot of time at the library. One evening, Bae has a special request for his father… (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

A/N: Whoo hoo! I was able to get some of these prompts done over my break. I know some people have been asking more for these verses so I figured this is my Christmas treat to all of you! Also, I want to add that NONE of these story prompts are “over.” These are driven by you—the readers—and your requests. I may add my own ideas because this is the only way I can write these ideas without committing to a longer story. But I want to include you in the experience as well, especially if you want a remix, a future fic, etc. And if it’s something I haven’t seen or read, then I’ll do the best I can to incorporate it once I do.

With that said… I believe some One Night Stand is in order. *chuckles* Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

One Night Stand

It wasn’t long before Ryan Gold officially moved to Storybrooke. He found a lovely Victorian house that was well-kept and maintained that he instantly fell in love with. Even Bae gave his approval despite the pink exterior. Of course, Ryan told his son it was more of a salmon color, which the boy responded: “It’s still a pink house.” However, Bae was sold when he saw how big his bedroom was going to be.

Ryan also bought a failing pawnshop (the owner was all too glad to give it away) so he could setup an antique and homemade wool spun products. For the first time since the divorce, Ryan was doing something enjoyable with his life.

As for Milah, she was strangely supportive of this new venture. More than likely she was simply glad Ryan was moving on. In addition, she was all right with extending the length of time each had with Bae so they wouldn’t have to do the constant back and forth every week. It was more than what Ryan could hope for and it didn’t bother him that Milah instantly moved in with Killian Jones.

Well, maybe a little.

She was his former wife and Bae’s mum. You can’t erase that history. However, both were finding happiness in this newfound arrangement and they were able to forge a friendship that was better than when they were married.
And Bae…

His son was going through changes as well. The move to Storybrooke (like Ryan hoped) did wonders for Bae. He was finally coming out of his shell and returning to his once carefree and lively being before the divorce. He loved school and he made a new friend—a very energetic blonde girl named Emma. She was a rascal all right with the penchant for mischief, but she made his son laugh and try new things, a feat Ryan never could do.

Then, there was the library.

That became Bae’s favorite place to visit after school and on Saturdays. The children’s librarian, Miss Belle, helped Bae to discover his newfound love in books and always gave him a silly joke to share.

Ryan was so pleased that Bae was flourishing. He wanted to meet Miss Belle to thank her for her kindness towards his boy… He always seemed to miss her. Regardless, he sent Bae a note with his appreciation, which Bae reported that Miss Belle was only too happy to see Bae there every week eager for a new book.

As for the mystery woman he spent that one life-changing night with… Ryan decided it was best to abandon his search. Despite the not so far distance of the bar and motel, it was obvious she wasn’t from around here. It was better for him to resign that night as a brief flicker of light in his dark world when he was in pain.

Perhaps there was a reason he met her and he was able to live again after the divorce. It had to count as something, right?

At least that was what Ryan told himself.

xxxxxxx

“Papa?”

“Yes Bae?”

“Remember Miss Belle I told you about?”

“I remember,” Ryan said with a lifting curl at the corner of his mouth. Whenever Bae mentioned her, Ryan felt this inexplicable urge to smile. “What about Miss Belle?”

“Well, I haven’t told you but she’s having a baby. And I was thinking… more like wondering…”

“What son?” The news of a baby is a happy occasion; however, Ryan felt his chest clench. Why he should feel that way when he never met the woman was a mystery to him. Shaking his head, he waited for his son to continue.

Bae took a deep breath. “I want to get her something. She’s been super nice to me and she makes reading so much fun. I wanted to do something nice for her. I know you made me a blanket when I was a baby so I was hoping you could make her one.”

It was a fine idea, a wonderful gesture in fact. Ryan knew how much Bae loved his blanket as a babe and as a toddler he would take it everywhere. He still had it… Although the blanket had seen better days.

“I suppose I could fit it in among the rest of my orders,” Ryan teased, winking at his son. “Has Miss
Belle told you what she’s having?” If he knew the gender, then he could really custom it for the wee one.

Bae shrugged. “She didn’t say. I’ve heard her say she is going to be surprised.”

“Oh.” Well, Ryan supposed he could stick to neutral tones and shades. The more he thought about it... the more he could see the blanket coming together in his mind. Grinning widely, he felt confident that the children’s librarian would now truly understand the importance and gratitude he wanted to express for the things she has done for Bae.

“Very well, my boy,” Ryan told him. “Miss Belle will have a blanket.”

An earsplitting smile stretched across Bae’s face.

xxx

Ryan prided himself in how his shop was very unique in the process of creating the products his customers wanted. It was a lengthy and time-consuming task but he carded his own wool so he could control the consistency he wanted and the strength of the fibers. He spun his own yarn and did his own dyeing as well to give it that authentic touch, which was far more satisfying than buying the materials already premade.

Since this was ultimately Bae’s idea, Ryan wanted to add his son’s input so it would be more personal. The design would be similar to Bae’s own blanket, which was a chunky cable knit so it would be comfy to wrap up in. As for the colors, Bae selected a light oatmeal shade with a pale yellow contrast crisscrossing in the weave.

Once it was decided, Ryan began to craft the blanket. It was a tedious practice but Ryan loved it. There was something so soothing and wonderful about the combing and the spinning and the knotting and the knitting that it was a truly a labor of love. He could almost imagine the look on Miss Belle’s face... Of course, he had no idea what she looked like or if this was her first, second, or third child. But since Bae told him that she wanted it to be a surprise... he could only surmise that it must be a firstborn.

The days stretched on in endless minutes and hours as the blanket grew and grew. He worked on it in between customers and other orders. He worked on it at home when Bae was fast asleep. And when the blanket was finally finished it was indeed a magnificent masterpiece to behold. Ryan outdid himself with this creation and the look on Bae’s face was all he needed to know that the lad was very happy on how the gift turned out. He was so excited that he wanted to give it to Miss Belle right then and there, but Ryan insisted that they would give it to her during the daytime and when the library was opened.

So on the rare occasion, Ryan decided to close his shop down just so he could accompany his son to the library on a Saturday morning to give her the gift. He was finally going to have the chance to see her for the first time and thank her properly for everything she has done for Bae. Plus, he hoped she would like the blanket.

Stepping inside, Bae led the way to the children’s section with the gift bag clutched in his small hand. It took everything within his willpower not to break out into a sprint (not that he would run inside a library but he just couldn’t wait to get there!). At last the section loomed close by and Bae quickened his pace despite his father’s protest.

Instantly, Bae sought out Miss Belle, watching as she was already shelving books from her cart. He
didn’t bother to look back to check on his father as he walked up to her.

“Miss Belle?” he asked, clearing his throat. When he got her attention, Bae told her that he wanted to get her something for the baby.

He knew she was going to say the usual “you didn’t have to” but Bae didn’t waste a second as he shoved the bag into her hands.

“My Papa owns a shop where he spins and stuff. He made me one when I was a baby and I thought your baby would like it too. Hopefully the colors are all right. I picked them myself but since you wanted it to be a surprise… I hope this is okay.” He was rambling but he was nervous. He didn’t think she wouldn’t like it but he didn’t want to assume as she removed the tissue paper to reveal the blanket within.

Her slight intake of breath was enough for Bae to relax as he saw her eyes well up at the sight of the blanket.

“It’s beautiful…” she whispered, delicately touching the fabric. “Your Papa made this?”

Bae nodded. “He’s really good at it. There he is now.” The boy pointed as Belle turned around.

Ryan Gold immediately felt a swift punch in his gut as he gazed into the blue eyes of the woman he had called Rose months ago.

Chapter End Notes

I know I’m probably evil for stopping it right here. But hey… a cliffhanger is always good for the soul.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle learns the truth from Ignatius and has to decide what it is that she wants…
(Rated T).

Chapter Notes

A/N: Since this is another verse, I thought I would add in another. This one should put aside some questions you might have. ; )

A Long Fatal Love Chase

She couldn’t stop staring at him. How could she? All this time she believed him to be dead.

Unless… He was a ghost. That or all these months had resulted in her becoming mad.

Just to be certain, Belle reached and gingerly touched the harp player’s arm. Solid flesh met her fingers as tears sprung to her eyes. *It must be! It has to be…!*

“Ignatius,” she whispered again as the boy blushed. “It is you?”

“Catherine?” Grace’s voice piped up, peering at her companion with concern. “You’re pale as white!”

“Thank you for the coins. We must be on our way,” said the pipe player, bending down to pick up the hat. Tugging on the harp player’s arm, the boys vanished but not before Ignatius gave Belle a parting look. Then he was gone.

So many questions were running through Belle’s mind.

He was alive. Ignatius was alive and he was gone. She let him leave. She couldn’t believe she allowed it without knowing what in the world happened to him.

The truth… Tempus didn’t kill him like she was led to believe. Why didn’t he admit it? Why let her believe the boy was dead? Was it all part of his sick game with this chase?

Belle and Grace returned to the house with the former promptly announcing she had a headache. The Jefferson’s were kind enough to leave her be while she rested. However, Belle couldn’t find the rest she so desperately needed. She had to find Ignatius.

But how?

Fortunately, she didn’t have to search for him. Ignatius came to her two days later.

Belle was taking a stroll through the garden when the boy appeared so suddenly that she had to
wonder if he was really a ghost after all!

“I can assure you I’m quite alive,” he said cheekily, the usual mischievous twinkle in his eye. “Oh Miss Belle! I missed you so much!”


“I will tell you what I can before it’s known I’ve disappeared,” he vowed. “But first, you should know that my real name is Baelfire.”

“Baelfire…” she repeated softly, her eyebrows rising to her hairline.

He nodded. “Let’s sit and I will tell my tale.”

They walked towards the wrought iron bench where they sat and turned to face the other. The boy took a deep breath as he gazed upon her with such earnest that Belle began to realize she was only beginning to scratch the surface of her husband’s secrets and how Ignatius—nay, Baelfire—was a part of it. However, the poor dear was not sure where to start or how to say what he must.

“Miss Belle, I hope, no, pray, you understand that living in deceit wasn’t something I enjoyed doing. I cannot begin to tell you how many times I longed to tell you the truth and how many times I almost did. You… You’re so full of kindness, warmth, and love that I knew it was wicked of him to do such a thing, and yet… I know why he did and I cannot fault him for what must be a sin in the eyes of man. And seeing you now in this place, with a new name… I can only surmise that you must have learned something of the truth about your husband—my father—Tempus Gold.”

Hearing it from Baelfire’s lips, Belle’s suspicions to Tempus’ connection to the boy was proven in fact to be correct. Her expression did not betray her as Baelfire gave her a small smile.

“You figured it out, didn’t you?” he asked.

“On that fateful night,” she confessed. “Of your disappearance. There was a woman on The Dark One. She was pleading to see you. I did not realize it at the time that she was referring to you until Dove told me how you left. She was your mother and Tempus prevented her from seeing you.”

At the mention of the woman, Baelfire’s countenance hardened. “Ah, yes. She is my mother but I never seen her as such. You were more of a mother to me than she ever was.”

The animosity in his tone took her by surprise. “Ig—Baelfire, you didn’t hear how desperate she was. Or how cruel Tempus treated and mocked her.”

“Miss Belle, I fear your sympathy is lying on the wrong side. Alas, I am getting ahead of myself. There is a reason why I did not go by my birth name for the same reason I am not with my mother. It was for my protection that people did not know of my existence. It hurt my Papa to lower me to the status of a servant, but it was the only way to keep me close and to make sure my mother did not ruin us further.”

_For you must know, my Papa hadn’t always lived in the life of luxury. He was a poor spinner, barely making ends meet, but he was a good man who worked hard to provide for his family. I was very young but I do remember the old cottage and spending the day anxiously awaiting Papa to return home from work. He would greet me with a smile and a kiss, and then he would tell me stories by the fire. Despite his cheerful visage, I knew there was something troubling him, but bless him; he did his best to make sure I didn’t want for nothing._
However, it was no secret that we were in debt. Papa did his best to shield me from the awful truth but it was that woman—my mother—who persisted in the daily reminders my Papa’s shortcomings. She enjoyed ridiculing him, mocking him, emasculating him. She forced him to work harder for his coin, yet she would squander it as soon as he arrived home. She did not care that she was running up the bills or running my Papa’s name in the mud. Greed and selfishness and vanity were the only companions she kept, and inevitably and ultimately led her into making a deal with a man called Hordor.

We were on the brink of eviction unless my Papa came up with the rent for the landlord. My mother, realizing what her actions wrought us, decided to strike our debts clean so she could start life anew. Yes… You heard me correctly. My mother was dissatisfied and wanted to leave, but not without making sure no creditor will follow her. She struck an agreement with Hordor, a ruthless villain in our village who was a brute and other distasteful words I shall not repeat in a lady’s presence. He would release my mother from her debt in exchange for my servitude. When my Papa heard of this… you can imagine his horror and anger that naturally followed.

I was about six-years-old when Hordor came for me. I put up a fight, kicking and screaming and flailing about, but I could not fend off his men. My mother stood in the doorway and did nothing as I was being dragged off. As for Papa, he had gone to the village to reason with Hordor, which was a ruse to lure him away from the cottage so I could be taken. Fortunately, the horrid man did not get far with me for I have a good set of lungs and was screaming for anyone to come to my rescue. My Papa heard me and rushed back in the nick of time. He charged those men and fought with the very strength of his love for me. When it was done, my Papa hardly knew what transpired as shock overwhelmed him. I was frightened but I knew my Papa would not harm me. Together, we made it back to the cottage where my mother wisely disappeared.

But we could not stay either. My Papa would be a wanted man for what he done. We packed our meager belongings and took what little money he had hidden from my mother and fled into the night.

For months, we traveled from village to village, city to city. Papa worked whatever odd job he could find. We were lucky if we were offered a roof for the night as payment. Then, one day Papa made the acquaintance with a gentleman of questionable reputation. He had heard about our misfortune and informed my Papa that he is a fugitive and we will certainly be separated forever if he was captured, unless… He agreed to work for him. It was a devil’s bargain but what choice did he have? So the spinner was no more and Tempus Gold was born.

I cannot give much detail exactly what the gentleman tasked my father to do. Even I was kept in the dark when he went out, but I dare not question or complain about our new circumstances. We were safe and together and that’s all that mattered.

Eventually, my father became quite good at his new living. More so than his predecessor and it was a matter of time that even he stopped calling on father. Papa assumed his holdings and amassed a large fortune. We were living the life we could only dream about; although, the risk of our true identities hung over Papa. For my sake, he never told anyone he had a son. I was dutiful and obeyed his orders for I did not want to be parted from him.

Until she found him.

My mother had fallen into hard times. Worse than our old life in the cottage. She had met a man, a captain, who swore to take her around the world, but he abandoned her first chance he got. She bribed, dealt her way back to our old village when she heard the news about Hordor and what Papa
had done. She barely had a farthing to her name but she was determined to find my father... perhaps to turn him in for the reward. How she did find us... I do not know but I can assure you it was not by honorable means. She learned how Papa became wealthy and saw it as her opportunity to save herself from poverty.

Yes, she blackmailed Papa. It was in her best interest to keep the law out of it. She used his love for me as her leverage, but Papa had grown wiser and was familiar with the game she was trying to play. He offered her a handsome deal that she could not refuse. In exchange for a hefty sum of money, she will keep to herself and never acknowledge our existence. As long as the world knew, Tempus Gold was never married and she could tell people she was a widow. She would also relinquish her maternal rights to me and never see me again.

She accepted.

“My heavens!” Belle gasped, her hand clasping over her mouth. “How could a mother do that? To her own flesh and blood?”

“As far as I’m concerned, we might share the same blood but she is not a mother. She forfeited that title when she tried selling me.”

“Of course. Oh Baelfire… That is horrible!” What other words could she express for her own abhorrence that came from his own lips? No wonder he held such animosity for the woman! And Tempus... Was she surprise to learn that her husband’s name wasn’t his birth name? No but the puzzle pieces were coming together and she was beginning to see the man in a new light.

“Do not despair Miss Belle!” insisted Baelfire. “I tell you this for this is my truth. Papa wanted me to be close so I was now Ignatius, a servant, so I did not have to hide in the shadows. Would he have preferred to acknowledge me? Indeed but that would complicate things and only incriminate himself. For years we lived in peace and then he met you and the world became a brighter place. You brought him so much happiness and you made me happy just to be in your service. I couldn’t have asked for a kinder mistress.”

Belle blushed. “You are too kind. But that doesn’t excuse his bigamy.”

“No it does not.” Baelfire frowned. “But that is the law of man. You cannot fault him for wanting a wife or a mother for me. Even though I was only a servant in your eyes, I looked to you as a mother and loved you as such despite the deception occurring in front of you. I begged him to let you in on the truth but he is stubborn. He didn’t want to ruin himself and earn your resentment. You were too precious to him, an angel sent from Heaven to save him from his past. If he could do well with a future with you, then perhaps God will forgive him for his sins and transgressions.”

She worried her bottom lip. It was wild this reveal to her and she couldn’t find it within herself to loathe Tempus. Despite the despicable things he committed, Tempus was always steadfast in his loyalty to her and his love was something she did not have to question or doubt. But what about her and her reputation? He deceived her and made her believe he was unattached. He had her living in sin with him while she was being paraded as Mrs. Gold. Should she not hate him? Despise him? Regardless of his past, he knowingly married an innocent girl. However, she could not rouse a single ounce of remonstration after what Baelfire told her. If anything, her heart only grew to love Tempus even more.

“Then what? Why did you disappear?” she asked.

“Ah, that,” he said. “Well, not everything can go according to plan. She returned because she knew Papa married another and she wanted more money. She tried evoking her maternal rights to see me
as well. She was destitute and desperate if you can recall. She would take anything from him just to quiet her but Papa refused to give into her blackmailing attempts. He finally saw her as powerless and he was in control of the situation. So he taunted her on the yacht and swore to never let her see me for as long as we live. Then he hatched the idea to make sure she never bothered him again.

“We had to make it authentic. Papa aroused me from my sleep and shared what had passed between him and mother. He told me I had to leave for my safety and that Dove would know what to do. I was against it. I didn’t want to leave your side but Papa convinced me it was for the best. In time you will know the truth that I was his kin and then I could return. I left with Dove to the field where we fashioned a grave to make it appear that I was deceased. Mother believed it. But to make sure she wasn’t close by to uncover the lie… I was sent away under a new identity. I’m now Neal Cassidy the harp player extraordinaire! I have good lodgings but the boy you saw me with… His name is Peter and we have to entertain to continue earning our keep. Of course, I do not have to since my Papa arranged everything, but to keep the pretense alive… I must do what I must not to raise any suspicions. When it is safe he will call for me. Until then, I wait.”

Inconceivable! This whole strange affair was nothing she could have imagined in a thousand years. As fantastic as it was, Belle knew there was no reason for her to refute or question Baelfire’s narrative. The sincerity in his tone and countenance was plenty to satisfy her curiosity and it gave her a great deal to think about and reflect upon.

“I must go.” He stood from his seat, and pulled her to her feet. “Miss Belle, I wish I could spend more time with you. Alas, I’ve been gone for too long. Please. Think about what I told you and do not judge my Papa harshly. He is a good man beneath the exterior and he needs the love and understanding to continue on the righteous path. Just… promise me you will consider it.”

There was no doubt what he was trying to get at and Belle could only offer him a gentle smile. “Don’t be a stranger Baelfire.”

“I wish I didn’t have to but this is the only time I can see you. Perhaps later? When it is safe for us to return to my Papa.”

“I don’t—” Belle started to say but stopped herself. It was best not to give voice to any false promises. Besides, she had a lot to think about and mull over about Tempus. So, she embraced Baelfire as a mother would with her child against her bosom. “We shall see each other again. I promise you.”

“I know we will,” he assured her. “Farewell Miss Belle. Until our paths cross once again.”

Then he was gone. Vanished once more from her sight.

Later that evening, after Belle retired to her bedroom, she sat in from of her vanity and brushed her hair. Slowly, she watched the teeth of the brush slide into her curls and run down their length and released it. However, the movements were mechanical and she wasn’t paying much attention to her task for her mind wandered to her encounter with Baelfire. Everything he told her was incredible and she was starting to realize that what she thought, what she knew about Tempus may not be black and white. Despite his actions, Belle now knew that he was not responsible in the death of young Ignatius. The dear boy was not even dead!

That alone was enough to shake Belle to her very core. Could she have reacted prematurely? She only thought she did the right thing at that moment upon discovering that horrifying grave. But if what Baelfire said was true… Would Tempus have been honest with her? And why didn’t he tell her the truth when their paths crossed? Why continue the chase?
It was all perplexing.

Setting the brush done, Belle continued to stare at her reflection. She knew that her love for Tempus hadn’t wavered. That was part of the reason why she was angry with herself and why she had been so conflicted in her time spent at St. Meissa’s. She truly believed that she was guilty of sin and while Tempus did knowingly place her in that situation… She now knew he was not as evil like she believed him to be.

While that brought some relief to her mind, Belle wondered what she should do next.

Should she leave the good care of the Jefferson’s to seek out Tempus? She already branded him as the devil and condemned him. If she were to find him, then what could she say now? She already felt like a fool but that was because he led her to believe that what she believed was fact. Did he find this whole thing amusing? Did he purposely confirm her worst opinion of him to further his entertainment and the chase? Why?

That was something Belle couldn’t understand. And the only person that could explain his actions was Tempus himself.

But did she want to? Did she want him to confront her husband? Did she want to return to him and continue their lifestyle as before?

Could she?

Belle knew she must make a decision regarding her and Tempus. And it was clear that she knew what she wanted.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Hamish Gold is a private detective entrusted to find out the real identity of a woman who cannot speak, but suffers from terrible nightmares. (Rated K)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own the ideas and parts of the dialogue to the film Dead Again. I’m just borrowing them and Rumbelling them because… seriously, once you see this movie you will see why.

A/N: This is probably one of my favorite movies of all time starring Emma Thompson and Kenneth Branagh. And it has a very nice (and hilarious) cameo by the late Robin Williams. If you haven’t seen it, then I strongly recommend it for the fantastic storytelling and acting.

Dead Again

“So lemme get this straight,” Hamish Gold, a fairly good-looking (if he said so himself) fortyish young man, said in a way that didn’t sound convinced at all to what Mother Superior was saying. “You said this woman showed up out of the blue in a middle of a sodding downpour with no ID, no nothing, who can’t speak other than to scream bloody murder at night. And you want me to help her —how?”

Before Blue (his nickname for the old nun when he came to live in the orphanage as a boy. She would get so mad that the vein in her forehead would bulge blue) could speak, the other nun present spoke up.

“Yes Mr. Gold. That’s what happened. The poor thing was wet and so frightened… You would think a ghost was chasing her! And her nightmares. Every night she has them and she always keeps a chair barricaded at the door to prevent anyone from coming in. It was so bad last night we had no choice but to break the door down. We need your help Mr. Gold. She needs your help!”

“Thank you Sister Astrid,” Blue interrupted curtly with a warning look in her eye. “If you believe it’s a waste of time Mr. Gold, then I understand. As I told Sister Astrid here that was the last straw for our guest. She scares the children with her screams and nightmares and we’ve already provided enough to the poor soul. It’s time we take her to the County and have the doctors and nurses treat her. I see no other way.”

“The County?” Hamish repeated. “Christ, do you know that’s where they keep the crazies?” he exclaimed. “It doesn’t strike me that she’s a threat from what you said. She hasn’t hurt anyone physically, has she?”

“Oh no!” Sister Astrid piped up. “She’s as docile as can be!”
“Until one day she’s not,” Blue said with an arched brow. “We can’t take that risk Mr. Gold.”

“Of course not—” he started.

“If you won’t help she’ll go to the hospital. Please you must do something,” Sister Astrid pleaded.

Looking at the nuns, Hamish sighed deeply. “Okay. I can’t promise results because typically my clients can speak. I’ll do my best and if I can’t help her, then I’ll take her to County personally. Deal?”

“Deal,” Blue said with a sharp nod. “Bring her in Sister.”

They must have had her waiting outside all along for as soon as Astrid opened the door, the mystery woman shuffled inside. Her head was down and her long brown hair was hiding her face. Her clothes that the nuns gave her were clean and sterile looking with the oversized white shirt that fell to her knees and the periwinkle blue pants. Even her shoes were stark white! She stopped beside the younger nun and finally lifted her head at the other’s gentle coaxing.

Hamish was instantly struck by the brilliance blue hue of her eyes—so wide and full of alert. She regarded him warily, and why not? He was a stranger who was going to help her. Or try to at least.

*She’s awfully young,* he thought. *No older than twenty I imagine. And pretty.* Strangely, he found himself a little choked up as he cleared his throat. “Hi. I’m Hamish Gold. Detective Hamish Gold, I mean. I’m going to help you remember who you are and find your family, all right?”

The girl-woman nodded in understanding, a small smile filled with hope gracing her slender, pink petal lips. Well, so far he took that as a good sign.

“Great. Well Sisters, I’ll go ahead and take your guest off your hands. We have a lot to do if we want to trigger that memory of hers.”

He offered his arm to let her go first and she gave him another sheepish grin—*and was that a blush?*—and took the lead as they left the orphanage.

“I figured we stop at a buddy’s house of mine first. You may not know who you are, but I bet someone here in Storybrooke will. He’ll take your picture and we’ll put an ad in the paper and see what happens.”

His silent companion gave another nod.

*Well,* Hamish thought. *Here goes nothing.*
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Hamish Gold gives the mysterious woman a name and someone comes in who might be able to help. (Rated T)

Dead Again

It had been several days since the ad was placed and Hamish Gold was busy fending off crude calls and no leads as to who his pretty and quiet client was. So far his plan was backfiring, and all the callers (all men too) wanted nothing more than to take her off his hands.

The last scumbag wanted to know if she was good at giving head when Hamish slammed the phone receiver down.

“Sodding pig,” he mumbled, ripping the paper from his notepad. “Just because she can’t speak they think this is some escort service! What in the world is this world coming to?”

He glanced up to see her standing in the doorway, her fingers fidgeting nervously. She was quite timid and she had a right to be with the number of perverts calling in. At least he knew which ones were false since he wrote she was found wearing a single piece of jewelry. If someone knew her, then they would know that the jewelry was a ring with a Celtic knot and tiny emerald embedded in the setting.

*Thank God for small miracles,* he thought.

She was certainly looking better than the moment he met her. The color was returning to her pale features and her hair had a lovely auburn shine to it. Hamish also bought her some decent clothes so she wouldn’t have to continue wearing the nun’s prison garb. That earned him a chuckle when he described what she wore. At least she had sense of humor.

Now, she seemed perturbed and he had no choice but to tell her straight. “I’m sorry. He sounded sincere at first until—well, I won’t give you the details. Don’t worry. Someone with information will call,” he promised her.

She sighed, a deflated sound of air filling the room. Her past hope was fading with each and every failed call. Hamish wished he had better news to give her—anything to see that beautiful smile again.

*Whoa, what? Where the Hell did that come from? She’s a client and needs all the help I can give her. The last thing she needs is someone else with designs on her person.*

Shaking his head to get rid of those thoughts, Hamish set his pen and notepad down. Twirling his chair around, he interlaced his fingers and drummed them against his lips. “I don’t want to take you to County. I feel the answer is right there and I’m missing it somehow. You hungry?”

She nodded.

“Great,” he said. “I’ll order a pizza. Um, I don’t know which toppings you like so I’ll order everything and we’ll find out.”
She nodded again. Once the order was placed, Hamish watched her as she sat on his couch as she stared out at nothing in particular. Then an idea occurred to him that was so brilliant he couldn’t believe he hadn’t thought of it beforehand.

“I was thinking,” he told her. “You need a name. I know your real name is preferred but if you can humor me in the meantime. I can’t keep calling you, ‘Hey you’ or ‘miss’ or ‘madam’ which is weird I know. So how about it? Can I name you? I swear it’ll be good and not some stupid one too.”

She giggled, her blue eyes twinkling.


She scrunched her nose at the name and even he had to admit it didn’t sound right either. “Okay, not Emma. Not a Jessica. But what?” As Hamish searched his apartment for inspiration, he happened to look back at her as the sun played with her hair and her eyes glowed in that lovely shade of hers, making them stand out with their unnatural beauty.

Beauty…

“Belle,” he breathed. “I’ll call you Belle.” The name meant beauty and he did love the fairy tale as a boy. And it was fitting for her.

Belle seemed to like the name as well as she beamed at him. Satisfied, he gave a nod to himself. “Then it’s settled. Okay, Belle, once that pizza comes, then we’ll know one other thing about you—how you like your pizza.” He laughed as there was a knock at the door. “That was fast,” he muttered.

Going to the door, he opened it and instead of a delivery boy… there was a woman. She was older with white frosted hair and streaks of red that lingered behind from her natural color. She wore a pea green pantsuit, her hair twisted in a bun, and held Hamish’s gaze with warm and curious green eyes.

“Mr. Gold? Mr. Hamish Gold?” she asked.

“Yes,” he said carefully. “Can I help you?”

A bubblish chuckle erupted from her. “Actually, it should be—how can I help you? I saw your ad in the paper and wanted to come by and offer my services. You see… I’m a hypnotist and I believe I can help your client here.”

“A hypnotist?” Hamish repeated. “Look, sorry lady, but we’re not in need of that service. Thank you for dropping by—“

For an old woman, she was quick as she blocked the door from closing. “Mr. Gold, I insist you let me in. At least give me the chance. Unless you already have a lead about her identity?”

He felt a slight tug and turned to see Belle standing beside him. Her head bobbed as if to say she wanted that woman to help. He didn’t like it but if it could help… what’s the harm? Reluctantly, he let the woman in. “Fine. But no funny business. I do have serious leads to follow.”

It was a bluff, not that she needed to know, but Belle gave him a look that clearly read “stop it.”

The woman did a sweep over the apartment before settling her focus on Belle. Giving her a friendly smile, she held her hand out. “My name is Diane Madsen.”
3 Dead Again Rated T

Chapter Summary

Prompt: With the help of Diane Madsen, Belle is able to get a clue on who she might be. The only problem: Is it her or a past life? (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

A/N: I did tweak the timeframe for this story to make it fit in modern times. In case anyone was wondering why it was different.

Dead Again

Since the moment Diane came to his apartment, Hamish wasn’t sure what to make of her. What was her angle? What was she hoping to gain? In his line of business free didn’t mean free, yet he couldn’t pin what her price might be. She seemed earnest and Belle seemed to like her. Maybe it was his suspicious nature talking but Hamish wasn’t going to leave Belle alone with her.

“Let’s give it a try, shall we? If it doesn’t work, then I apologize for the waste of time,” Diane said.

“Whatever,” he replied. Belle glared at him and turned back to Diane to give her full cooperation.

“All right, my dear. Take a seat and relax. Good. Mr. Gold, if you would be so kind as to dim the lights? Thank you. Now, this type of amnesiac behavior happens when something traumatic happens. It’s so bad they want to erase it from their minds, but the trouble is they can erase everything else too. Hypnosis can look back into your memories and find out exactly what went wrong. Keep your eyes on me my dear. Very good. Listen to my voice as you go deeper and deeper… Very nice. Now, let’s go back and see what we uncover.”

Hamish, skeptically, watched the exchange but to his shock… Belle’s eyes began to flutter and then close as Diane spoke softly to her.

“Good, good,” she went on. “Tell me—has something—“

Then, without warning, Belle threw her head back screaming, “Somebody help me!” Her hands clawed at her throat as she opened her eyes and stared at Diane, her breathing uneven and erratic.

Carefully, Diane pulled Belle’s hands away. “There, there,” she cooed. “Wake up. Wake up now.”

Belle was back or as close to being back as her eyes frantically searched the room, her petite frame shaking uncontrollably.

Hamish immediately tried to go to her, but Diane waved him back.

“Is she—?” he started to ask. “Did something happen?” He directed this to Belle who could only look at him helplessly. “Can you speak now?”
Her mouth opened but no words would come out.

“Well, we know that she can speak,” Diane said. Standing up, she went to Hamish with a business card in her hand. “If you both like… you can come by my shop tomorrow and try again. I will need more time—several hours at the most. Then we can find out who this young lady is.”

Belle’s renewed hope was all he needed to keep him from saying “thank but no thanks.” She wanted to do this and who was he to say no? Despite his initial feelings, Hamish had to begrudgingly admit the hypnosis did get her to talk. With more time… who knows what else they could uncover?

“Tomorrow it is,” he said, taking the card.

xxXXxx

Around twelve-thirty they arrived at Diane’s shop. It was an antiques store and Hamish was starting to regret coming here. Yet, Belle playfully tugged at his arm as she led them inside. They found Diane already with a client (if he had to guess) in the corner sitting at a table.

Hamish and Belle watched with part amusement, part are-you-kidding-me? as the client—an older man—speak with such a high, childish voice as he recounted the fun times he spent with Uncle Houdini. Yet, it was Diane’s unusual questioning about an Ouija board that caught Hamish’s attention. As soon as the client told her what happened, Diane told him he would wake up and not remember this discussion. In a snap, he woke up with a smile on his face.

“I don’t think you needn’t fear about those cigarette cravings. Have a good day!” Diane told her client as he got up and left the store. She saw Belle and Hamish standing not far away and beckoned them to come closer.

It didn’t take long for Diane to close the shop up and get Belle settled as she darkened the windows and lights. Only candles were lit to cast enough light for the three to see as Diane took a seat across from Belle at the table.

“Now, Belle, I want you to look at the candle in front of you. Now picture yourself walking down some stairs. With each step you’ll relax further and tell yourself you’re going deeper and deeper…”

Like the previous time, Belle’s eyes began to close as her breathing became steady. She was under all right and Hamish had no choice but to watch and pray that this works.

“Since you were excited yesterday, we’re going to have you distance yourself so you’re only a witness to the events that you see. You’re not involved in any way is that clear? Now, as you reach the ground, I want you to imagine a door in front of you. This door can be anywhere or anytime you wish to visit. Go on… open it and what do you see?”

Hamish was waiting for another freak out, but only a glimpse of a very happy smile graced Belle’s lips. Wherever Belle was… she seemed all right.

“The day we first met,” Belle replied dreamily.

“Distance yourself,” Diane advised. “You’re a witness.”

It took a moment before Belle spoke again. And what she said was astounding. “It was the day Rupert and Isabelle first met.”

“Isabelle who?” Hamish asked, earning a hiss from Diane to be quiet.
“Strauss,” Belle continued.

That sent Diane in a sudden spur of coughing, but she quickly swallowed some water. “Very well. Tell us about the day that Rupert and Isabelle met. How long ago was it?”

“1968,” she answered.

“Okay. That’s it. We’re done here,” Hamish said.

“Mr. Gold really. I insist you stop at once—“

“Do you hear her? She thinks she met a man in 1968. As far as I’m concerned, this session is done.”

“On the contrary,” Diane said. “There are times that hypnosis can bring a person back into a past life. Do you recall what I said about a traumatic experience? This could very well explain what it was that led to Miss Belle forgetting who she is. Now I suggest you keep your comments to yourself and let me finish.”

Hamish didn’t like to be chastised, but this crazy old bat could have a point. Wisely keeping his mouth shut, he listened as Belle proceeded to describe what went on that day.

“Rachmaninoff was on the program. Rupert was a guest conductor and everyone was terrified of him. Everyone except Isabelle. He had escaped Germany before the war and wanted to spread his music here in America. Isabelle played the piano and she was right below him as the show played. She wasn’t afraid to look him in the eye, which unnerved him since no one would directly make eye contact. But that was Isabelle—she was different from any other woman he had ever met.

“After the opera, she invited him for drinks and he couldn’t seem to refuse her… They danced the night away and told stories. Rupert could tell jokes, which made Isabelle laugh. There was a charm about him that no one knew or realized in the fierce maestro. But Isabelle adored him. They fell in love. As Isabelle’s career grew, Rupert decided to write a new opera that would make him famous here as he was in Europe. He wanted Isabelle to play for him and she gladly accepted.

“However, there were some who didn’t like Isabelle near Rupert. They told her all kinds of things about his past—like how he was married before and she died as they tried to escape Germany. But she knew this. Rupert told her his wife died of a weak heart in the mountains as they fled. It had been horrible for him, but Isabelle was grateful he had survived so they could meet. Rupert lived in this huge house with only him, his housekeeper, and his music. When he met Isabelle he had never been so happy and he had to have her. Little did he know, Isabelle was already his.

“The wedding was so beautiful. They were so much in love and so incredibly happy that even Rupert’s harshest critics couldn’t deny that this was real. And they knew that no one and nothing could ever tear them apart. Until he saw her. It was a former friend and lover that came to the wedding. A reporter. He came to wish the blushing bride a lifetime of happiness and bliss. Rupert didn’t like him but Isabelle assured him that he only meant well. Rupert acceded but it didn’t stop him from watching him to make sure he didn’t try to take his wife away.

“As nighttime came, Rupert gave Isabelle the most beautiful present she ever had. It was an anklet encrusted with diamonds and rubies. He told her that the man who sold it to him told him that when a husband gives this to his wife they become two halves of the same person. No matter what… nothing can separate them, not even death.”

Before Belle could go into further details of the wedding night, Diane snapped her fingers thus ending the session.
Hamish let out a whistle. “Man, I wasn’t expecting that.”

“No one ever does Mr. Gold. Well, there you have it. Of course, we do need to have more sessions, but it won’t be long before Belle regains her memories and her voice—“

“May I—May I have a glass of water?” The very soft, tender voice like chimes interrupted them and they realized it was Belle!

“You can talk!” Hamish cried, going to her. “What’s your name? Where are you—?”

“Mr. Gold, you should give her some space and time. Here you are, my dear. Drink up.”

Becoming irritated with the woman, Hamish ignored her. “Do you know if they’re alive? Maybe I can contact them—“

“Mr. Gold, I think you two need to look at this.” Diane came out with a magazine. “I thought the names sounded familiar and I remember as a young girl I’ve seen Rupert Strauss’ operas before. See?”

She flipped the pages to an article that showcased the accomplished musicians at the time. Putting her finger to the page, she showed Hamish and Belle. “This is Rupert and his wife, Isabelle.”

Belle gasped as she took the magazine from Diane’s hands. “She—she looks like me,” she said in awe. “Hamish…”

He looked over her shoulder. Indeed, the resemblance was uncanny. The only difference was that Isabelle had shorter hair and it was way curlier than Belle’s. But it was Rupert that captured his attention. If Hamish had a beard and mustache, then he would be the spitting image of the German composer. It was farfetched, although he couldn’t ignore the flutters in his stomach that something seemed wrong.

“Yes. It’s hard to believe he had murdered her.”

At their looks, Diane gravelly nodded. “He stabbed her in the throat with a pair of scissors. Lovely ones too. Gold-plated I believe.”

“But—” Belle looked at the photos. “It doesn’t make sense. They were so much in love. Rupert would never hurt Isabelle.”

“Sadly, in most cases, it’s the loved ones that murders,” Hamish explained. “I don’t understand how she could know this.”

“Hard to say Mr. Gold. But we seem to be on the right path. Let’s try again tomorrow. Will that be all right with you my dear?”

Belle blinked. “Oh. Uh, yes. Tomorrow’s fine. Thank you.”

Hamish couldn’t keep his eyes off her, but he didn’t know if he believed in this past lives bit. But Belle was talking now and that was progress. Maybe Diane Madsen had something going here. Though to be sure he was going to make sure Belle wasn’t alone in their sessions.

“Well, I guess we have some research to do,” he told Belle as they walked out of the shop. “Let’s see what else we can find on Rupert and Isabelle Strauss.”
4 Dead Again Rated T

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Hamish and Belle look into the trial of Rupert Strauss and find some interesting information about Isabelle’s death; they go on a date. (Rated T for mild sexual content)

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Dead Again

It wasn’t difficult to gather the resources needed to find out what happened to the Strausses. According to the reports and trial documents, Rupert insisted it was a thief that murdered his wife and stole her anklet. Eventually, witnesses came forward to tell about Rupert’s jealousy and the heated arguments he had with Isabelle over Gaston Baker. There was one incident—a New Year’s party—that led to a confrontation between Rupert and Gaston. The anklet was involved and the two men ended up fighting in a fountain.

Even the housekeeper testified the jealous flare ups between husband and wife. It wasn’t long for the police to declare a motive and arrested Rupert Strauss on charges for murder. He continued to claim he was innocent, but his alibi didn’t hold up.

The trial was a dramatic one—very much like one of his operas. The jury found him guilty and he was sentenced to death.

Surprisingly, Rupert didn’t appeal the verdict and was resigned to his fate. On the day of his execution, he requested to speak to Mr. Baker. The prison worker who witnessed the conversation said that Strauss wanted Baker to print how much he loved his wife. Then Strauss bent over to whisper in his ear and he was led to the chamber. The worker hadn’t a clue what was spoken, but whatever it was, Gaston Baker never wrote a word again.

Groaning, Belle set the papers down. “I don’t get it. None of this makes sense. Rupert loved Isabelle. He wouldn’t kill her.”

“But according to these,” Hamish said. “Seems to me this Rupert fellow had a nasty temper.”

Belle rolled her eyes. “Then why don’t I remember that? I would think Isabelle would have known… or be afraid or something.”

“Well, we don’t always see the worst in people that we love until it’s too late. Could be Isabelle didn’t know what she was getting herself into.”

“I refuse to believe that.”

“Whatever you believe doesn’t matter. Rupert was found guilty. Look. He didn’t bother to testify in his defense. That pretty much screams guilty.”

“I don’t care what it says. I know in my heart it can’t be true.” Belle got up from the ground. “I wish I knew who I was; why I am so afraid.”
“Hey. We will. I promise you, didn’t I?” Hamish went over and took her in his arms. “I never go back on my word. You can trust that.”

She smiled. “I’m sorry. I guess all this talk about murder and death is making me batty.”

Hamish grinned. “How about a bite to eat? Clear our minds a little and work on that memory of yours.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

He took her to a little piano bar that he knew. The owner was a good friend—well, an acquaintance—but Hamish had helped him in the past with a former employee embezzling.

“David, hey! Belle, I want you to meet my pal, David. David, this is Belle.”

David had a warm smile and easy going eyes. Belle could see why they were friends as she shook his hand. “Nice to meet you David.”

“Same here. What can I do you for you?”

“David, we would like a nice meal underneath this lovely moonlit night.”

David chuckled. “I can do that. Come this way.”

Along the way, they met his wife, Mary Margaret, a very sweet woman who welcomed them. David had a patio where he showed them their table—a nice, secluded spot so they wouldn’t be interrupted. Once their drink and food orders were placed, Hamish regaled some stories of past cases he worked on. As soon as they received their drinks, Hamish accidentally spilled his on Belle’s lap.

“Ah, geez. I’m so sorry Belle.” He picked up a napkin and began to clean up.

She laughed. “It’s all right. In fact, this reminds me of Rupert and Isabelle’s first date. She spilled his drink on him.”

“I take it we’re both klutzes,” he said. “Really. I’m sorry.”

“Forget it. Let’s enjoy the night.”

And it was enjoyable. After dinner, Hamish and Belle walked along Main Street until he grabbed her hand and pulled her into an impromptu waltz. Belle couldn’t recall a time where she had this much fun. Actually, she couldn’t recall anything at all, but if she had, this was definitely at the top.

They began to head back to his apartment when it started to rain. Drenched, the two were too busy laughing as they ran back. As soon as they got to the door, Hamish took one look at her and found himself kissing Belle.

He couldn’t ignore his attraction to her anymore. While there was a chance she could be married or taken, Hamish didn’t care and neither did she as Belle kissed him back with the same longing he felt.

They wound up on the couch, tearing each other’s clothes off. As Hamish and Belle continued their kissing and touching, she gasped, “This is like Rupert and Isabelle all over again.”

“I’m not Rupert!” Hamish moaned as their passion swept over them.

Later, they were tangled in each other’s arms and wondered where they would go from here. Hamish knew he wouldn’t be able to let her go. Fate brought them together and he was starting to fall in love
with her. Strange how this happen, but a part of him knew this was where he belonged.

As for Belle, she was thinking the same. This man had done so much for her and she didn’t know how she could repay him. There was a part of her that didn’t want to know who she was. This life now was what she wanted and the truth could go to Hell for all she cared.

As they slept in their embrace, Belle dreamed of the past. She saw Isabelle lying down in bed, sleeping peacefully and unawares as a cloaked figure entered the bedroom. She tried to warn Isabelle, but her throat was silenced. Instead, she could only watch in horror as the figure raised his arm, the scissors glinting from the lightning outside. Thunder clapped, waking Isabelle as she looked up in fright.

The figure removed his mask—it was Hamish!

“*These are for you!*” he shouted as the scissors came down on Isabelle’s throat.

Belle woke up screaming and scrambled to get away from Hamish as he fought to wake up.

“What is it? What’s wrong?” he asked.

Holding the blanket to her chin, Belle pointed at him. “You. It was you that killed her.”

Confused, Hamish stared at her. “Me? What?”

“You heard me. You killed her. I saw you. I saw you!”

So much for the wonderful evening out.

Chapter End Notes

Hmmm… did he or didn’t he? I will certainly add more between the requests and such. Next series of prompts is based on my favorite TV show and my very first OTP—Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s The Lost World. You know the drill. Feel free to leave a review and tell me what you think!
Chapter Summary

Prompt: At the dawn of the twentieth century, a band of adventurers set out to prove the existence of a prehistoric world. Stranded in a savage land, befriended by an untamed beauty; together they fight to survive in this amazing world of lost civilizations and terrifying creatures—always searching for a way home. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own Once Upon a Time or Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s The Lost World. I’m borrowing the characters and situations to show my love and to spread it to those who love to read. Also, the prompt is based on the intro to the show and I did borrow most of the dialogue from the pilot movie for the first two prompts.

A/N: This is based on the TV show Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s The Lost World, which aired in the early 2000s and I used to watch every weekday morning before school back in the day. Unfortunately, TNT no longer plays the reruns, but this was my introduction into a fandom and my first OTP. I just knew I had to Rumbelle it and I hope you will like it as much as I did. Just to clarify—Belle is going to seem OOC but it fits with the character she is based on, and of course, there is a reason for it. In fact, it’s more of a role reversal for Rumple and Belle when you think about it.

The Lost World

It was hard to believe that a couple of months ago they all were gathered in the lecture hall of the London Royal Zoological Society, listening to what was assumed to be the mad ravings of Professor Reginald Mills. Of course, he had the last laugh when it turned out to be true since the expedition had found the Plateau and already experienced the dangers that lay ahead.

First, majority of their hands and guide were murdered by vicious head-hunters and now… the hot air balloon was in need of repair after the terrible turbulence from the storm they encountered upon their descent.

Thankfully, no one was seriously injured.

“Figures you’d land on top of me,” mumbled Belle French, the wealthy and moody heiress that funded the entirety of this venture. While her intentions were unknown, there was no doubt that her skills as a linguist proved to be useful. However, there was one person who was consistently questioning her motives, and he was currently fighting back a smirk as he took advantage of the moment, pressing his body into her warm and soft curves.

Lord John Rumpton, world renowned hunter and sole heir to the Rumpton estate in Avebury, grinned wolfishly as he pushed up on his arms so he could gaze upon her furious features.
“I must say,” he said. “You broke my fall quite nicely.”

There was a beat and then Ms. French shoved him off her making him fall on his side with an “oomph!” Getting to her feet, she brushed the debris off her clothes and bent down to grab her hat. Dusting the brim off, she plopped it on top of her curls and joined the others to see what could be salvaged. She didn’t bother to glance behind her to see if Lord Rumpton injured himself. He was a big boy and if he had a boo boo… Well, she wasn’t Florence Nightingale.

Stumbling from a bush was Professor Mills. “Nolan!” he cried.

“I’m all right. I’m all right!”

Belle looked up to find the young American tangled with the rope from the balloon in a tree. The journalist managed to free himself and was using the rope to climb down. He jumped the last couple feet where Doctor Hopper stood, patting himself in stunned disbelief.

“I’m alive!” he whispered.

“Is everyone okay?” Mills demanded.

The unanimous voices of “yes” echoed as they all surveyed the land. They were very fortunate the balloon on a tree’s canopy and the distance to the ground wasn’t life threatening. Apart from the scratches and bruises, there were no broken bones. Once Mills was satisfied the party was in good health, he ordered them to grab what they could carry so they could find some shelter.

Belle noticed Nolan veering off on his own and rolled her eyes. Typical American boy scout, she thought. Ever since they first assembled in Mills’ study, she wasn’t impressed that he had come. David Nolan had little knowledge about the jungle, and not even his experience during the war could prepare him. Belle pegged this was more to impress a girl and she had been right.

xXx

“Her name is Abigail. She’s my editor’s daughter and my fiancée,” Nolan said, showing her a photo of a handsome woman with blonde hair.

“Oh?” Belle said with her brow raised. “Cutting the wedding short with this expedition, I take it. Cold feet?”

“No. No. Abigail insisted I do this. Once we’re married, her father won’t give me the chance to do a story like this. At least I can say I went on a wild adventure to tell my children and grandchildren.”

xXx

There was no turning down his excitement. Even the spill they took didn’t slow him down with a pen in hand and a notebook in the other. No doubt detailing the frightening accounts already.

As for Mills and Hopper, the two scientists were busy bickering as they fought over the compass and which direction to take. Dr. Archie Hopper was a brilliant botanist and Professor Mills greatest critic. Hopper was a skeptic about the existence of this Plateau and the creatures that were said to have inhabited it. The Zoological Society volunteered him to go on this expedition to prove Mills wrong.

So that left…

Stepping beside her was the one man who was proving to be a thorn at her side. His prized rifle was held in his hands, his face on the constant lookout for danger. While it seemed that was his purpose
(she had no doubt since he took his job as protector serious), Belle knew he had an ulterior motive for sticking close. Especially to her.

xXx

“Happy to prove you all wrong, gentlemen.”

With a dramatic entrance, Belle pushed the doors to Mills’ study open just as her future colleagues were spouting their theories of her absence. She relished their looks of astonishment as she glided across the floor, taking in the many artifacts and fossils scattered around the room.

“What a marvelous collection of dead things you have here Professor Mills.” As her eyes swept over the displays, she rattled off their respective Latin names.

“Ah, you know your reptiles madam,” Mills commented with a hint of surprise.

Belle’s lips curved in response as she locked gazes with the one person in the room who was trying to ignore her. He looked away, keeping busy with cleaning a pistol, but she caught the impressed look at her intelligence. Grinning widely, she sashayed past him.

“I’ve been around a few,” she purred, catching the glint of the hunter’s eye. She knew Lord Rumpton’s reputation as a ladies’ man and she couldn’t resist the harmless flirting. He was a very attractive man with a very attractive wealth attached to his name. She could have fun on this expedition or perhaps add him as husband number five.

Breaking away from him, she turned her stare on Mills. “My main interests lie in geology.”

“Of course, Madam French,” Mills said with a slight bow. “We will bring back as many samples for you.”

“Yes but what I see will be in their natural habitat.”

As she quite expected, the men’s jaws slacked open at her announcement. The protests were immediate. However, Belle dismissed them with a flick of her wrist. “I am funding this little adventure of yours Mills,” she reminded him coolly. “It’s only right I go where my money goes.”

Yet it was the scoff that captured her attention as she levelled a piercing glare at Lord Rumpton who silently trailed behind her to lean on a desk. Crossing his arms over his chest, he met her glare full on as he calmly stated, “The Amazon is no place for a lady. We are capable of bringing back what you wish. After all…”

The gull of the man! Well, Belle will show him. Grabbing one of the rifles on the table, she pulled the pin, aimed, and fired a shot between his legs.

The smirking lord jumped with a startled cry and gazed at her in disbelief.

“I’ll make sure to leave my dresses at home,” she replied.

xXx

Since that meeting, Lord John Rumpton had made it his sole purpose to follow and annoy her to no end. Belle was sorry for even contemplating about toying with him as a diversion. He was downright infuriating! From the moment they began their journey, he had plagued her with endless questions about why she funded the expedition to her motives and what she was hoping to gain. Of course, her reasons were hers alone and she wasn’t going to share her real motive. He wouldn’t understand and
it wasn’t a pleasant topic conversation anyway. And it wasn’t his business. Yet he followed and bothered her like it was his mission.

“To what do I owe this pleasure Rumpton?” she said, irritable he couldn’t leave her alone for a minute. Even when she had bathed that first night in the jungle, he followed her! Of course he saw the Cayman before her, but that wasn’t the point. She would have made it out of the water in time before she became that animal’s dinner.

“Just making sure there aren’t any head-hunters or cannibals lurking around. And… I wanted to make sure you weren’t hurt. I did land on you.”

His touch of concern surprised her. She quickly masked her reaction and tossed her braid over her shoulder. “I’m walking, aren’t I?”

“Yes—“

“Clearly, I’m fine.” Anything else Rumpton was going to say was interrupted by Nolan screaming. At once, everyone ran in the direction. They arrived in time to see Nolan getting to his feet and a girl several feet away. She had a small knife in her hand, her green eyes wide and wild. Her long, wavy black hair cascaded over her shoulders to reveal her fur and leather outfit.

“It’s all right! She saved me!” Nolan exclaimed.

“She did?” Hopper said incredulously.

“Yeah. She swung here on that vine and saved me from being plant food.”

Belle saw a giant flower behind the girl whose petals were closed in a chastised way. “Human fertilizer. How lovely.”

The girl waved her knife as they slowly inched towards her. Mills and Hopper were using their hands to communicate. And Nolan took a can of food, dipping his fingers into it. “It’s food. See? You eat it.”

“I don’t think she understands us,” Hopper said.

The girl’s nostrils flared as she let out a grunt towards Nolan.

“Go on Nolan,” Mills encouraged. “I think she’s listening to you.”

She crept near Nolan to look at the can. She sniffed and took a step back, grunting again. So Nolan grunted. She grunted again, a bit deeper. Then her grunts turned into a rhythm and Hopper snapped his fingers.

“Why, that’s Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony!” he declared with delight.

The girl smiled and straightened her posture. “It’s a favorite of mine, especially my parents,” she said. At the explorers stunned expressions she let out a giggle. “Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Snow White.”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Snow White offers her home to the explorers and Lord Rumpton tries to get close to a certain heiress; the Ape-men attack. (Rated T)

The Lost World

A tree house!

An actual bona fide tree house was where Snow White lived. As she led the explorers to her humble abode, she told them that her parents built it during their expedition twenty-one years ago.

“They fell in love with the Plateau and decided to stay,” she said. “I’ve lived here my whole life. But you have to be careful. There are many creatures that will be all too happy to eat you, especially the T-Rex.”

“T-Rex?” Hopper stammered. “You’re saying—?”

“Yes. Dinosaurs are alive here. And if you’re quick… you might be able to have a meal out of one before they eat you.” Snow smirked.

“Mm. A T-Rex will make a fine trophy,” purred Rumpton with anticipation. Patting his rifle, he turned and gave Belle a boyish wink.

“Not if they decide to make one out of you Lord Rumpton. I’m sure your hide will be the talk of the whole animal kingdom,” Belle said.

“Well, I do have a pretty damn good hide if I say so. Thank you for noticing.” His eyes sparkled as the color rose in her cheeks and she quickly walked away from him, mumbling something under her breath.

They did manage to see a few pterodactyls and a brontosaurus. All of which filled Mills’ eyes with greed at the proof he had to show the Zoological Society that he was right and not crazy. Nolan was filled with wonder—taking it all in for his journals and readers. He certainly found the story of the century! Hopper was in shock and begrudgingly knew he would have to apologize to Mills for calling his theories preposterous.

As soon as they arrived at the tree house, it was truly a magnificent sight to behold. It sat about fifty feet high and had a working elevator to take them up. It took a couple of trips but once everyone was settled inside—they were able to look around the warm and pleasant home—pleased to find some civilization in this savage land.

“My parents are botanists,” Snow explained, showing them the many pots of flowers and plants scattered all over. Hopper picked one up close to him and called it by its natural name. “Why! I thought they were all extinct.”

“Many are but for some reason they survived here,” Snow said with an amused and knowing smile.
Belle looked at the kitchen to the main living space—all opened and bright with the sun peeking through. She saw shelves filled with books, and for the first time, a genuine smile blossomed. “Not a bad selection,” she said to herself. There were quite a few science textbooks but there were some entertaining novels at least.

“So where are your parents?” Hopper asked politely.

Snow wavered. “Oh, they went to gather some samples.”

“I hope they won’t mind us as guests,” Nolan said.

“They won’t.” Her smile was thin and tightlipped.

Belle thought that was odd and inquired, “What time do you think they’ll be back?”

“I don’t know,” Snow confessed. “They’re missing.”

“Missing?” the beauty repeated. “For how long?”

“Eleven years,” the dark-haired girl replied. “But I know they’ll be back.”

“Eleven years?” Belle snorted to herself.

“We can help you find them,” Nolan jumped in quickly. Ever the heroic. “The Plateau seems like a very big place.”

“It is and thank you,” Snow said gratefully, the twinkle back in her eyes as she gazed at Nolan. “Now, let me show you to your rooms.”

The tree house had three floors so it was large enough to accommodate each explorer in his (or her) room and downstairs was a lab, which Mills was in his element. It was well-equipped and with the additional supplies they brought… Mills was a kid in a candy store.

Belle found a box of rocks and gems and took it upon herself to peruse it. Mentally, she made a note to ask Snow where the precious gems came from so she could “collect” more.

“It’s hard to believe you’re on top of the world,” the gruff Scottish voice said, interrupting her concentration. And there was only one man that spoke with that accent…

“Lord Rumpton,” she cooed. “Checking on me again, I see. What the jungle girl’s company not interesting enough for a hunter like yourself?”

“The company is fine. It’s you I’m not sure about.”

“Oh?” She stood up and cast a look at him, her brow arched defiantly. “And what is that supposed to mean?”

He reached over to snatch the gem in her hand. Holding it up to the light, he inspected it to see what was so intriguing about it. “You’re a geologist you say,” he commented. “Yet, you know so many languages.”

“So? Is that a crime?”

“It’s just… a little voice in my head tells me I should throw you to the wolves for the good of the party. First chance that I get.” His smirk bared his teeth as his eyes swept over her.
“Why don’t you?” she whispered, challenging him as she stepped closer in his personal space.

“Because another voice tells me that you only meet a woman made out of fire and steel once in a blue moon. And you wouldn’t want to waste her when she’s in your hands.”

As he spoke, Rumpton moved in and slowly tilted his head as he sealed the remaining distance with a kiss. There was a pause and then he jumped back, his hand flying to his lower lip as he stared at her with shock and anger at the bite.

“I’m not in your hands Lord Rumpton,” Belle said with no mistaken tone that meant be-careful-what-you-do-next. “And if you do get the chance to throw me to the wolves… Go ahead and try. You might be surprised who gets thrown in first.”

With a spin of her heels, Belle stalked away and up the stairs where everyone gathered. The hunter followed behind her, but he veered off so he wouldn’t be near her. Belle fought to hold back a smile. She put him in his place all right. Maybe this will teach him a lesson and leave her alone.

The group was joined by another young woman. She was clearly dressed in tribal clothes with long brown hair with threads of red woven in her tresses. She looked at the explorers with wary cautions as Snow calmly explained to her they were friends.

“This is Rubi of the Zanga tribe. One of the few friendly natives here on the Plateau,” Snow told them. “She’s also my best friend.”

The introductions went around, and as time went on, Rubi started to relax. She even shared that her people knew of a tunnel of caves that could help the explorers return to the mainland. Her father needed to be persuaded although he was wary of strangers that come here. Apparently, the Whites had to prove their worthiness and trust too before they were accepted.

Evening came and Snow prepared a wonderful feast of roasted raptor, which strangely tasted of chicken. Rumpton wanted to see one and Snow promised he would have his chance as long as he doesn’t do anything stupid.

They ate to their fill and sat around and shared tales of London to Snow and Rubi. Nolan had a knack for storytelling, but it didn’t mean he could make any subject exciting. While he was telling about a World Series game in New York, there was a loud snap and then the roof caved in.

Men… At least they looked like men covered in hair came through, waving clubs around as they attacked the unsuspecting people.

Snow shouted “Ape-men!” and took out her knife and began to fight.

Whatever they could get their hands on was used as a weapon. Belle looked up to see a hairy creature creeping behind Rumpton. Pulling out her pistol at her hip, she took aim and shot the bugger in the head. The hunter regarded her with relief and thanks.

The attack stretched on for what felt like five minutes when one grabbed Rubi and hoisted her up to the ceiling where more of them waited.

“Rubi!” Snow screamed as her friend punched and kicked, but it was no use. There were too many and in a flash it was over. The Ape-men left but there were a few that weren’t as lucky as their bodies laid on the floor.

“We have to save her!” Snow exclaimed but Nolan grabbed her arm to keep her from leaving.
“It’s too dark out!” he cried. “And we don’t know how many there are!”

“It’s a risk we have to take,” Rumpton said. “Everyone grab your guns!”
Chapter Summary

Prompt: The explorers and Snow go on a rescue mission to save Rubi from the Ape-men. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

In this prompt I’m deviating from the pilot just a smidgen but I think you will like it all the same.

The Lost World

As soon as they gathered their weapons and torches, all five explorers plus Snow left the tree house in search for a trail that will lead them to her friend.

The tension was rolling off Snow’s shoulders, fearful for her friend, as she led the way, never once slowing down once she found the Ape-men’s trail.

Belle wished the jungle princess would ease up on them. They weren’t used to the terrain and she was exhausted and wanted to crawl into bed and hibernate for the next week. Moreover, there was a chance that this was a wild goose chase. Yet, the men didn’t utter a word of complaint and one look from Rumpton had Belle biting her lips to refrain from commenting. But her silence didn’t last as she finally exclaimed:

“Why are we rushing? I’m sorry Snow but you might have to face facts that your friend is already dead—Ow!”

Rumpton jabbed her in the side with the butt of his rifle, not hard enough to cause harm but enough to stop her from saying anything else. Snow, wisely, ignored the heiress. Dawn began to break just as they came to the end of the trees edge to an open field where there was a small range of mountains and lots of rocks scattered around.

They found Rubi tied to one slab that was some kind of makeshift altar. The chief of the Ape-men (assuming of course) held up a club and danced around the imprisoned native girl as the others howled and grunted, banging their chests with their hairy fists and stomping their feet.

“I count forty, maybe fifty of these devils,” the hunter whispered. “Hate to say it but we don’t have enough ammo to take down these buggers.”

“No… what we need is a distraction,” Nolan said, a plan brewing in his head.

“A distraction?” Belle hissed. “If you haven’t noticed Nolan, there aren’t any bananas lying around or are you planning on dressing up as one of their females?”

“Better,” he smirked. Turning to Snow, he asked, “Is there a T-Rex nest nearby?”
Seeing where he was going, Snow nodded. “Yes about a couple of miles from here. Can you run that far?”

Nolan puffed his chest with pride. “I came first in my school’s track and field team.”

“How charming,” she drawled but it was obvious she was impressed. “You’ll need to run fast. The rest of you—stay here and when you hear the signal—grab Rubi and run like Hell.”

“Got it,” Hopper said as Mills and Rumpton nodded in agreement. Only Belle rolled her eyes but she nodded just the same. After all, she didn’t have a better plan than that.

With Nolan and Snow gone, the others turned and watched as the ceremony progressed. If this plan fails, then they prayed the bullets would last.

xxx

Twenty minutes passed and still no sign from Snow and Nolan. Time was running out for Rubi so the explorers had to act quickly. Before the chief could bring his club down, Rumpton took aim and got the bastard in the chest. All Hell broke loose as the four came charging out with guns firing and the Ape-men running towards them.

Rumpton warned the three to use their guns sparingly and only if they had to in order to save their ammo and focus on using other means of combat.

Mills was slamming his rifle in the stomach and head of his assailants, knocking them out. Hopper did the same but he looked quite uncomfortable doing so. Sometimes his hits weren’t as effective to keep his attackers down as the Ape-men continued to fight.

Belle saw one jumping up and running full steam towards the botanist. Without hesitation, she raised her weapon and fired once, taking the Ape-man down. Hopper quickly lifted his hand in thanks and as Belle grinned—a look of horror came over his features and Belle was suddenly face-planted on the ground.

She screamed as she felt something clawing at her back and as she waited for death to take her… the Ape-man was lifted off her and immediately rolled to get away and looked up in time to see Rumpton’s fist smashing into the Ape’s face.

There wasn’t much time to thank him as a welcoming roar of the T-Rex could be heard. Belle scrambled to her feet and ran to the altar just as Mills was cutting the ropes off Rubi. Hopper was by her too and soon Rumpton joined them as he grabbed Rubi’s arm, yelling, “Let’s go! Let’s go!”

They almost made it to the safety of the jungle as soon as the T-Rex burst through and began chasing the frantic Ape-men. No one looked back as they kept running and eventually found Snow and Nolan—the latter completely out of the breath. But Snow was happy to see her friend alive and unharmed as they embraced.

“Well, what was it that you said earlier?” Rumpton gloated, coming to stand next to the heiress.

“She had a lucky break,” Belle retorted. Then looking at him out of the corner of her eye, she murmured, “Thank you. Back there… You didn’t have to…”

“No I had to,” he interrupted her as a slow smirk took over his features. “Now you owe me Ms. French.”

Belle scowled but he let out a hearty chuckle as he joined the others to head back to the treehouse.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Professor Mills is kidnapped by warriors and ordered to spend the rest of his life with the tribe’s queen, the wife of a former colleague of his, unless his friends enter the Cave of Fear to retrieve her husband’s remains. Now, it’s up to Rumpton and Belle to save the day as they both have to face their darkest fears and demons… (Rated T).

Chapter Notes

This last one is based on Season 1 Episode 5 “Cave of Fear.” This is one of my favorite episodes and this will give you some insight to Rumpton and Belle. There is a moment of an attempt at suicide.

The Lost World

“Can this day get any better?” muttered Belle as she, Hopper, and Lord Rumpton continued on the path thanks to the map given to them by the Lady Coraline Harter. If Mills hadn’t been so hell-bound on collecting the sulfur near that burial mound, then they wouldn’t be in this life or death predicament. As it were, Mills was being held captive as collateral if the explorers didn’t return the remains of Lady Coraline’s husband, Sir Henry Harter.

And… thanks to an unexpected raptor attack, Nolan was injured so Snow had to take him back to the treehouse to clean the wound before it got infected.

By the way, they had only until nightfall to bring back the bones or else they were all dead.

Yes. It was turning out to be a marvelous day after all.

“There it is!” Hopper exclaimed, pointing to the taboo sign that led up to the mouth of the cave.

“Charming.” Belle mumbled under her breath, eyeing the hand-carved and sculpted depiction of a human skull wrapped around the body of a cobra. “I suppose it does add a touch of flair to the native’s décor.”

Rumpton checked his rifle to make sure it was loaded before handing it off to Hopper. The scientist looked at him in surprise as he took the weapon. “Are you sure John?” he asked.

“Well, we need someone to watch our backs,” Rumpton remarked with a wry smile. “Belle and I can handle it from here.”

“Ms. French?” Hopper turned to ask the heiress and the beauty gave him a reassuring look.

“If we’re not back in twenty minutes… call Scotland Yard,” she told him.
Removing their packs, both explorers took out their torches and lit them before approaching the narrow oval-shaped entrance. It didn’t quite scream “Cave of Fear” as the name would suggest. While it was dark within its caverns, the outside was covered with lots of foliage and vines draping above the mouth.

But at this point, the two knew very well that appearances can be quite deceiving. And after the many strange things they had witnessed so far on this Plateau… nothing could surprise them.

“Did Coraline say her husband dragged himself in here before he died?” Belle questioned.

“Yeah. Why?”

She shrugged. “For a dying man… he sure traveled far in here.”

After several more feet, they came upon a fork.

“Ladies’ choice,” Rumpton quipped.

“Left is where I’ll go,” Belle said.

“Very well. No more than a hundred yards and come right back here, yeah?”

Belle nodded before she began walking down her pathway as he did with his. Unbeknownst to the two, there was an unusual green goo slowly trickling along the walls in anticipation.

Rumpton took a slight turn and lost his footing while trying to avoid stepping on a rock. His hand shot out and held onto the wall as he regained his balance when he felt a sticky substance coating his fingers.

Looking down, he frowned at the green goo and tried shaking it off. A little bit still clung onto him stubbornly and he had to suppress rolling his eyes. Belle’s trademark droll of “Can this day get any better?” resonated in him as he began to look for something he could wipe the rest away.

Luckily, he heard what sounded like water dripping and found a small pool.

“Thank God,” he murmured, dipping his hand into the water and disturbing it as he cleaned the goo off. It was then he caught a quick glimpse of a reflection behind him—and it wasn’t Belle—that Rumpton seized his pistol and whipped around...

To find himself standing in the middle of the treehouse rather than the cave.

“What the Hell?” He looked around and yes… it was the treehouse. But it was the sight that was now standing in front of him that had the good hunter spooked.

A young man with an affable countenance with dark hair and blue eyes dressed in khakis… a true adventurer’s outfit stared at Lord Rumpton as an amused smirk formed.

“It can’t be…” gasped Rumpton.

“Hello John,” the man spoke, stepping forward. “Come to murder me again?”

“Ouch!” Belle paused to rub the back of her leg after she tripped. So far, her searching has been for
naught and just as she was about to head back and meet with Rumpton… she spotted another gap.

Figuring it wouldn’t hurt to check there for Harter’s bones, she ducked so she could fit inside and instantly felt something landing on her hair. Reaching up, she grimaced as she pulled her hand back to reveal this green goop.

“Really?” she said to no one and rubbed her hand against her trousers. Once she was able to stand up, Belle did and continued walking…

…right into a little girl’s bedroom.

She did a slow turn, her brow knitted in confusion, as to how she went from a cave in the middle of the bloody jungle to a very fine and luxurious room was perplexing!

And indeed it was fit for a little princess.

Porcelain dolls dressed in many colors and bonnets filled a shelf and all over one corner of the room. There was a dollhouse, books, and a gorgeous looking vanity.

Tentatively, Belle went over to the vanity and gazed down at the silver-handled combs and brushes that she reached out to graze the tips of her fingers to see if they were as real as they looked. The cool touch sent a shockwave down to her core as she gripped the handle of a small mirror and lifted it so she could look. Her eyes met that of an older woman with chestnut hair like hers, styled in a fashionable twist, and two familiar blue eyes peering back at her.

“You’re beautiful,” she exclaimed softly.

Dropping the mirror back on the table, Belle whirled around. “W-who are you?” she stammered. “Where am I?”

The woman was dressed in a modest and respectable dress that seemed to match her stature. That wondrous and bedazzling smile never once fled her face, but it was the heart-shaped pendant that captured Belle’s attention as she looked on with trepidation.

“What is this place?” Belle questioned, tensing as the woman’s skirts brushed against her boots as she bent to pick up a small music box.

“Remember this?” the woman continued, lifting the lid as a waltz began playing and a little dancer spun. “Then again… you were awfully young and probably don’t. We were vacationing in Vienna that Spring. Ah… I can still smell the roasted chestnuts and almonds in the air.”

“This can’t be happening. This can’t be real!” Trembling hands went into her hair as Belle shook her head. “I must be going crazy. I knew this place would get to me.”

“Now, now,” the woman chided, gently setting the music box down so she could bring Belle’s arms down to her side. “Always a stubborn baby you were.”

“Who are you?” Belle pleaded.

“My dear Belle… You know who I am.”

Belle couldn’t stop shaking her head even as the tears began to well up in her eyes. “No. Not true. You’re not my mother.”

“But it is true. See?” The woman touched her locket and opened it to reveal an engraving on both
sides. “You have one just like this—no pictures but there was something that your father and I had put inside. For our daughter Belle. Forever in our thoughts.”

Nothing could prevent the floods from unleashing as Belle immediately clung to her mother in a fervent hold. “I have dreamt this a thousand times! Oh, Mama…”

It hadn’t registered to Belle that her mother had stiffened the instant she embraced her.

xxxXxxx

“Bailey… This can’t be happening.” Rumpton couldn’t take his eyes away from the man that had been his brother. None of this seemed possible, and yet, there was no denying that it was him! The late Bailey Rumpton, the would-be Lord of the Rumpton estate, was standing before him in all his glory. Or he would have if it were not for the ghastly bloody wound where his heart was.

Shifting his gaze to the bleeding injury, Bailey clicked his tongue. “Yes… it’s rather gruesome, don’t you agree? Not to worry baby brother. My heart did explode immediately when you shot me. Cheers.”

Bailey reached for his jacket on the back of a chair and quickly put it on, covering up the sight. “There. Much better, yes?”

“No… This isn’t real.”

Without warning, Bailey threw a punch and connected with Rumpton’s jaw that sent the hunter flying to the floor.

“Well, Johnny, is that real enough for you?” Bailey mocked, his gaze now tinted with resentment.

Before Rumpton could move or speak, his older brother was at his side and sending a swift kick to his ribs. “How’s that?” he glowered. “Still real?”

Bailey delivered another quick blow—this time to his stomach. Rumpton cried out but didn’t move to defend himself. Coughing, he held his hand out in surrender as he searched for mercy in his brother’s eyes. Seeing none, Rumpton managed to say:

“What do you want?”

The older Rumpton grinned. Bending closer, he spat, “Your fear. Now. I believe the trial is about to commence.”

“What trial? Bailey!”

Standing up, Bailey looked down at this brother with distaste. “Get up Johnny. It’s high time you face the music with your crimes. And, boy, you have a laundry list of sins that needs answering.”

“Look… I don’t know how you got here but you have to understand! It was an accident, okay?”

Bailey tossed his head back and laughed. “An accident?! Do you hear that gentlemen of the jury? My brother, Lord John Rumpton, from his own mouth states it was all an accident. Indeed. It was an accident that took my life and my rightful title that I would have inherited.”

“Stop! Please…” Rumpton whimpered.

“What do you say? Is my brother guilty of murder?”
“I tried saving your life!” the hunter bellowed. “That ape… It came out of nowhere and I shot him.”

“Ah, yes. And did that bullet not go through me too?”

“Yes but that wasn’t my intent! He was killing you! I had to do something!”

“So you admit it! Let’s look at the facts. Who convinced Father I should go on that safari?”

“I didn’t—Bailey, Father wanted you to get over your fears. He thought that an expedition would help—”

“‘Get over my fears’?” repeated Bailey. “Look at where it got me. You killed me.”

Belle wandered over to the collection of dolls and picked one up in a light powdery blue dress. Hugging it close to her, she smiled fondly. “I knew it. After all these years… Seeing these dolls and the locket… I felt something. I knew someone was there guiding me, protecting me. It must have been you and your love.”

“Love?” Her mother scoffed. “No Belle. I didn’t love you.”

“What?” Belle’s voice became tiny as she blinked with bewilderment.

“Sweetheart… How could I love you and give you up? It’s not natural for a mother to do that.”

“But… you kept all my things. Why if not for love?”

“You must know—we were very happy and excited when we were expecting. Then you came and right then I knew something was wrong. You were different. There was evil in you.”

“No! Stop! Please!” Belle sobbed.

“Everything I kept,” she continued. “This room… It was to remind me never to have another child.”

Dropping the doll, Belle collapsed on her knees as she covered her face and wept. “You don’t mean it. You can’t…” she said weakly.

“Oh. Don’t cry. It’ll be all right.”

Belle felt her hand on top of her curls and lifted her tear-stained face. “Mama…”

“I’m here now. That’s the important thing. I’m right here,” she cooed. “I know what will help.”

She walked over to the dresser and picked up a folded blanket. Bringing it over to the beauty, she knelt and held it out for her.

“This was the blanket you were christened in. You’ll know what to do,” she said cryptically as Belle shakily accepted the gift.

Fighting back the tears, she lifted the end and wept anew when she discovered a pistol nestled comfortably inside.

“Why?” she asked brokenly.

“You know why,” her mother replied. “All that darkness. It’s wrong. I’m sorry Belle but this is not
your world. You don’t belong here. You know that. Do the right thing.”

“Jury says guilty of your brother’s death. Now, what about your other crimes? Let’s see… Deserting our mother so you could go gallivanting on this expedition? Guilty! Murder of our father… Guilty!”

“No!”

“That’s right gentlemen of the jury. My brother, Lord John Rumpton, not three weeks after he killed his beloved brother in cold blood that our dear father also died. Death by heart attack or heartbreak? Either way, you will find that he is guilty.”

No longer wishing to take this abuse or this farce, Rumpton leapt from his spot and tackled his brother. Grabbing fistfuls of his shirt, Rumpton shook him.

“I. Am. Not. Guilty!” he punctuated each word. “Christ’s sake Bailey! I loved you! It was an accident and with father… that wasn’t my fault. I never wanted this. I never wanted to be the next Lord Rumpton.”

“Oh, I think you did,” Bailey smirked and pushed him off him.

The hunter barely had time to stand up when his brother quickly climbed on top of the railing and held onto the roof to keep his balance.

“Bailey! Get down!”

“Remember how I was afraid of heights?” Bailey said, ignoring him. “I’m not anymore. Although, I do wonder… Would you save me, dear brother, if I were to jump?”

“Bailey… please… don’t do this.”

“Whoa!” His foot shook. “That was a close one. Well? This is your chance to redeem yourself. Let’s see what happens, shall we?”

To Rumpton’s horror, he watched as his brother let go of the roof and fell down below.

“BAILEY!” he screamed, lunging after him only to feel something pulling him back as he tried reaching for his brother. “NOOOO!!!!!!”

“Rumpton! Snap out of it!”

The hunter opened his eyes and was startled to find Hopper suddenly there with a cloth tied around his nose and mouth.

“H-Hopper?” he sputtered.

“Here. Take this.” The scientist handed him a cloth. “Cover your mouth and nose. The fungus in here causes hallucinations.”

Doing as instructed, Rumpton tied the cloth around his face and took several deep breaths. “That was a close one old boy.”

“You’re welcome. Now, where’s Belle?” Hopper asked.

At the mention of the heiress’ name, Rumpton’s eyes widened in alarm. “Belle…” he breathed and
jumped to his feet.

xxx

Cradling the gun in her hands, Belle looked down at it. How easy it would be to end it all… To end this pain and suffering, to end this aching feeling inside her.

Who was going to miss her? No one… She made it her life’s goal not to have friends or anyone close to her. They would only be obstacles weighing her down, and if the truth was ever uncovered… Well, she knew how that would play out.

No… It was better to do this. Like Mama said, it was the right thing to do.

Slowly, she turned the gun towards her and as her finger began to wrap around the trigger… It was pulled away from her.

Realizing her opportunity to fix everything was taken; Belle began yelling as she beat her petite fists against the chest of the man who ruined it for her.

“It’s not real! Belle! It’s not real!”

It took her a moment before she sagged against him, her head moving as she groaned, “No…”

Rumpton held her tightly as he looked over to Hopper. “I got her. You get the bones.”

“How do we know it is Harter’s?”

The hunter held up the gun he took from Belle. “H.H.,” he read the initials. “Henry Harter.”

Hopper took an empty bag from his pack and picked up the remains. At the last second, he decided to scoop up some of the fungus on the skull before gently tucking it inside.

With the bones safely in their possession it was time for the three to reunite with Mills and the Lady Coraline.

xxx

It was nearly sundown by the time the explorers returned to the treehouse. Mills couldn’t believe how cunning Hopper had been, using that fungus against the so-called Queen. Her people didn’t take it kindly that she shot and killed some of their men as she “witnessed” her husband in front of her.

“Remind me never to piss you off,” Mills said, lifting his glass of brandy in a toast.

“Well, I had a feeling she was going to have us killed when we returned,” Hopper admitted.

“You’re right. The she-devil wanted nothing more to see us die just like her husband,” Mills agreed. “How’s your foot doing Nolan?”

The reporter nursed his drink. “Hurts like I had it stomped by a T-Rex. Other than that, I’ll live.”

Snow giggled and took a bite out of an apple.

As for the other two inhabitants, Rumpton found Belle staring out into the night’s sky.

“Hey,” he greeted.
“Hey,” she rejoined softly, but not turning to look at him.

“Back there. In the caves… you, uh, want to talk about it?”

Sighing, Belle cocked her head in his direction. “It’s over Lord Rumpton. There is nothing to discuss.”

“You sure? I mean you were…”

“I said, ‘there is nothing to discuss,’” she repeated, this time with a bit more force. “If you don’t mind, I would like to be alone.”

Not waiting for a reply, she tossed hair over her shoulder and gazed at the stars. She could sense him standing behind her, but after a second, the floor groaned under his weight as he exited.

Silently, she reached into her pocket and pulled out the heart-shaped locket. Opening it, she read to herself the contents inside.

“For our daughter Belle. Forever in our thoughts.”

Perhaps it had been too much to hope that her parents loved her, but why else would they leave the locket behind? There must have been a reason.

Snapping it shut, Belle returned the necklace into her pocket. It only made her all the more determined to find out the truth.

Chapter End Notes

The next four prompts will be based on the movie Strange Magic. I hope you liked these prompts and don’t forget to leave a review and/or drop an idea! School will be out soon and that means for free time for me to write. Until next time my lovely readers!
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle makes her decision and more truths come to light, including some well-deserved revenge. (Rated M)

Chapter Notes

A/N: I’m back! School is out for the summer so I have more free time to write. And I thought it fitting I should return with this prompt. I figured there’s enough for one or two more and that should conclude this particular run unless there’s a future request for more. Hope you enjoy and don’t forget to review!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

A Long Fatal Love Chase

The moment the sun rose Belle was already wake and dressed for the day. She scarcely slept for her mind was heavily burdened with Baelfire’s words. So much she had learned in a short time! To finally discover that Tempus had not really murdered sweet, innocent Ignatius… that he was known as Baelfire and had faked his death in order to prevent that terrible wretch of a mother from causing further pain… It was extraordinary to put it mildly!

Furthermore, it suddenly had everything making sense. The cruel mockery of Tempus against Milah to the hasty exit of a grave and the secrecy kept between her husband and Dove. It was all done in protection of the boy, and yet, Belle had not been included in the ruse. If anything, she was led (and encouraged) to believe the lie and not once been contradicted in its meaning, even after she confronted Tempus when she had lived as Rose.

Why?

The only person who could answer this question was the devil himself. And conveniently, he had not made his presence known! For Belle believed Tempus was still out there lurking within the shadows where he was most comfortable. He was biding his time, no doubt, until he decided to show himself, to remind Belle that he was her master and that she still was under his persuasion.

Well…

The tables have turned. Belle knew the truth and she was no longer blind or ignorant to it anymore. Yes Tempus was guilty of bigamy… but he was innocent in the other matters concerning Baelfire. However, he was still guilty for misleading her and breaking her heart. His persistence in this chase and his insistence in making himself look the villain in her eyes were also blameworthy.

She deserved to know the truth about Baelfire, about why she was now Catherine and not where her heart truly desired. It was only decent and fair that Tempus should be honest with her. She would demand the answers to her questions and more. If he refused… Belle would have to take matters into
her own hands.

During breakfast, Belle decided to tell the Jefferson’s she was leaving their service. It was with a heavy heart she was leaving her young charge, but Belle knew that her time of running away was over. She was no longer afraid. That part of her life was done and she could feel her courage returning once more in her veins.

Naturally, the Jefferson’s protested. They pleaded, begged, and spoke out that it wasn’t wise or safe for her to leave their roof. Even Grace, God bless her, with her large eyes swimming with tears tried to persuade her to stay.

Despite their good attempts, Belle was adamant in her decision. She will leave this house and it was all in likelihood that she would never see them again. Such knowledge did bring unhappiness to her heart for she loved the Jefferson’s as if they were her flesh and blood family. It grieved her to say goodbye but alas she must.

Belle packed a little bit of her belongings. She did not need much with where she intended on going. Then she said her final farewells to Mr. and Mrs. Jefferson and Grace. She held the child tightly, pressing kisses into her hair. The poor, young dear could not stop weeping and Belle was finding it difficult to maintain her composure. But her resolve was resilient and she knew this must do this. Belle, holding her tears steadfast, gave Grace one more squeeze before letting her go.

“Thank you for your kindness,” Belle told them once more. “I was friendless and you took me in. Gave me shelter, food, and safety. I could not have asked for more or for wonderful friends. Please know that I will never forget you. I will be fine and all will be well.”

After a last parting look, Belle took her leave.

xxx

Remembering what Baelfire told her, Belle surmised that going to him was not a good idea. As much as she wanted to liberate him… she could not potentially put him at risk until it was clearly known that his mother was not in the picture.

But… Tempus would be watching him, ensuring his son was safe and sound. All Belle had to do was make herself known and he will come to her. His spies were loyal to him and will report immediately that Belle was alone and he will come running to her.

Or better yet…

Tempus did her no favor with his deception. He could have made it right if he had been open with her from the beginning. Instead, he toyed with her and it was only fair she enacted her own brand of justice. After all, she knew exactly how to have him come to her. And he will not delay once the news reached him.

She counted on it.

xxx

Belle found Baelfire performing with that boy Peter. She kept out of sight so not to draw Baelfire’s attention and instead focused on the crowd. Her husband knew the art of disguise and his most trusted servant was an astute student. He would be watching the boy without being obvious and she had to make sure she pinpointed him so she could carry out her plan.

It took her a good twenty or so minute before she detected the potential observer. Despite Dove
being a tall man, she had been tricked before with his chameleon-like abilities. Appearances can be quite deceiving, a fact that she was becoming familiar with and she needed to look for a subject that was so innocuous that it would have to be him. Thus, Belle found her quarry what appeared to be a beggar. He was wrapped in a ragged blanket, his clothes threadbare, and his face covered in dirt and grime. He was sitting hunched over a bowl for alms, and appeared so helpless and pathetic that Belle knew it was Dove.

Reaching into her pocket, she pulled out a coin and walked over so she could drop it. She was careful not to look into his eyes but lingered just enough so she could feel his eyes on her. Then she moved away to where she saw a young man setting up what looked like a sheep’s wool table. Smiling inwardly, she knew this was her opportunity to send a message to Tempus and she wanted to make certain it was loud and clear to Dove.

Striding purposely over, Belle approached the man and let out a soft yelp as her ankle gave way. As she predicted he would do (for he had a look of kindness about him), the man caught her in the nick of time before she could fall. Peering into his blue eyes, Belle gave him the most gracious smile and breathlessly thanked him. It did the trick as the man seemed beguiled with her smile and he stammered the proper niceties, even so far as to offer to take her to a doctor.

Belle assured him it was no need but if he could be so kind as to take her into the tavern close by to buy him a drink. “It’s the least I can do Mister…?”

“Nolan. David Nolan,” he replied. “And there’s no need—”

“I insist Mr. Nolan. If you hadn’t caught me, then I would have suffered an injury far worse than my current embarrassment.”

He was reluctant but an older woman who was helping him with the setup, interjected, “Of course he will go with you. It’s not every day that a lad saves a pretty lady.”

David blushed as his mother’s praise and saw he was cornered into accepting. Belle felt a little sorry for doing this for he did seem like an earnest fellow, but she had to make a spectacle if she could to rouse Tempus’ ire. So as she attempted to “walk” she fell against David, which prompted him to wrap his arm around her waist to help her the short distance. He asked her once more if she was certain she didn’t want a doctor. Belle chuckled and said some rest will do her some good and having his company will make it better. He continued to blush, which was endearing but becoming somewhat annoying. He couldn’t seem to help himself every time Belle glanced his way.

She prayed Dove witnessed the scene and as much as she wanted to look behind to make sure… She knew she would give herself away if the valet suspected she knew it was he. Then her plan would go awry. So Belle allowed herself to be nearly carried by David and purposely chose a table that was secluded to afford them some privacy but would allow her to view the whole room.

He gingerly helped her so she could sit and she put on a good show with a slight wince to show the pain was beginning to subside. The poor man bought the charade and a part of her did feel remorseful for misleading him so abhorrently. It would seem that her husband’s influence certainly had its way of making it to the surface. Yet, it had been so easy and Belle briefly pondered if Mr. David Nolan was one of Tempus’ pawns. Of course the thought fled when he practically tripped over his foot as he carried their drinks to the table. There was no way Tempus would hire a fool to keep watch over her or his son, even if it was an act. Mr. Nolan certainly brought attention to himself.

Belle was not certain how long it would take for the news to reach Tempus. If her assumption proved correctly, then her other assumption might prove right too. If he was as solicitous as Baelfire
said about his welfare, then Tempus would be nearby his child. The fact Belle was also in the same vicinity was pure happenstance. And if he felt an inkling of jealousy as he had with Will… she put her money on it that he will show up to reclaim or the very least reassert his husbandly authority.

Thus, it was Belle spent some time with David. She listened to him speak about his shepherd’s trade and how he sheared the wool to sell it in the market. He was proud of his work and shared a couple anecdotes about two sheep named Dolly and Willy, both siblings with an intense rivalry to graze the best patch of grass. She politely asked questions and laughed when appropriately; however, Belle kept a lookout if Dove should happen to enter the bar to see what she was doing. Luck was on her side as the beggar man shuffled inside, still slightly hunched over, and Belle swiftly looked away lest they made eye contact and reached over to tenderly touch David’s arm.

This action surprised the young man but he didn’t say anything about her forwardness. She suspected he did not receive much attention from ladies, which was unfortunate, for he was attractive in a boyish way. Charming, to be exact, but he still possessed an innocent quality that would try on any person’s nerves. For a shepherd, he was clueless about the wiles of a woman and more so when he was being duped.

Belle continued her watch of the beggar until the barkeep came over to escort him out. The beggar did not resist and calmly left the tavern as he entered.

“It seems my ankle is much improved,” Belle said finally, altogether happy to end this ploy. “I thank you David for your gallantry. Alas, I must be on my way. Here… as a token for your kind gesture.” She pulled out a couple coins to cover the drinks and another for him and his mother. It was a small penance for tricking him and she insisted he take it or she would be insulted. Eventually he did and slipped the money into his pocket. Then, for a good measure, Belle bent over to give him a chaste kiss on the cheek. She offered him a parting smile and took her leave.

Now she only had to wait.

xxXXxx

Returning to the Jefferson’s was not an option anymore; Belle found lodgings in a meager hotel and almost signed the ledger under her real name. She knew if she had then it would be evident that she was onto Tempus all along. Her hand wrote Rosa Avon and it was not long before she was in her room, readying herself for bed.

Unconsciously, her eyes strayed to the reflection of the door. She was hoping Tempus would make an entrance but there was not even a sound from beyond it. Once she finished brushing her hair and prepared the rest of her toilet, Belle was starting to feel bereft that he had not barged in. Did he discover her ruse? Was he toying with her like she had with David Nolan?

She thought Tempus would have come by now unless that beggar was not Dove as she originally believed. If not, then she made a righteous fool of herself.

But she had been so certain…

Realizing it wasn’t going to do her any good obsessing over the matter, Belle drew back the bedcovers and blew out her candle. If Tempus does not come to her, then she will have to decide what to do for money. She had plenty to keep her in the hotel for the next several nights, but if Tempus did not come… she will have to spend the money on passage elsewhere. Going back to the Jefferson’s and asking to be taken back when she had left was not an option. She knew they would offer her old position to her, but Belle could not. It would not be fair to Grace, especially if Belle had to leave again. It was best her goodbyes were done the way they were for all of them.
She fell into a restless slumber.

**xxxXxx**

At some point, Belle was flitting in and out of unusual dreams. She had dreamt that Tempus did in fact murder his son and that the young boy she thought was Baelfire was an imposter. Tempus laughed at her naivety and gullibility and she had no choice but to run away again. In another dream she dreamt Will came to help her and Tempus found them. Tempus had a pistol and threatened to kill Will if she did not come with him. Belle managed to wrestle the pistol away from her monstrous husband and shot herself. The next one had her waking up in a mental ward where Tempus had committed her until she decided to come back to him and then she could be released.

In all these nightmares, Tempus was still the manipulative and evil-hearted man she had believed him to be since she found that grave. There was nothing redeeming about this Tempus and Belle had to remind herself that this dream Tempus was not real. She knew the truth. She heard the truth from Baelfire’s own lips and she recognized him as the real Ignatius she had known. He was not an imposter. Tempus fooled everyone for his son’s sake and she could not fault him for wanting to keep him safe. It was rather unfortunate she had mixed herself into this mess. Her wild and romantic fantasies and notions got the best of her. Instead of confronting Tempus, perhaps, she could have saved them all this trouble if she had in the first place.

As consciousness started to take form, Belle soon began to realize she was not alone in the room.

Fear did not enter her breast. There was no reason for such an emotion.

“Tempus.” Her voice was soft and airy, a breathless sigh.

“Aye,” came the low-pitched reply. As he had the first time he found her, Tempus was sitting in a chair near the foot of the bed. His fingers were interlaced and pressed delicately to his lips as his gaze at her evenly.

Belle noticed that his hair had grown longer, the curls much wilder, and with only a new candle burning, she could see how weary his countenance seemed. However, despite the physical changes, Tempus did not lose the acute stare in his dark eyes. If he thought he could frighten or intimidate her into submission, then he was in for a surprise.

“Why didn’t you tell me?” she demanded. “This chase as you so fondly called it could have been avoided. Why did you insist in making me believe you were a murderer? What were you hoping to gain from this charade?”

Whatever he thought she was going to say, this clearly wasn’t what he expected from the look of astonishment flashing on his expression. “How—?”

“Ignatius… or I should say Baelfire told me. I’ll repeat my question: why?”

“What were you doing with that man?” Tempus bit back.

“You’re not in the position to want answers,” Belle argued, glaring at him. “I deserve to know the truth!”

“Very well,” he said. “But I want you to answer my question first. Why were you with that man?”

Belle chuckled with no humor in it. “You didn’t figure it out? To get you to reveal yourself to me. Now, answer my question, Tempus.”
“That was not a very nice thing to do, dearie,” he told her.

She shrugged. “It worked, didn’t it? You owe me an explanation dear husband. I want to know why you lied to me and why you would continue to force me to leave.”

“And if I don’t answer in a way that is satisfactorily?” Tempus inquired. “Would you leave me?”

“Perhaps,” Belle replied cryptically. “Then again, it depends on you. You enjoy pulling strings on people. Why should I be any different? After all, you have been pulling the strings since the moment I first met you. I never once lied in our courtship or our so-called marriage. Why would I want to be with a man or have a husband who would rather be deceptive than honest with the woman he claims to love?”

He got to his feet and Belle watched as he took a turn around the room. She certainly struck a nerve within him. Good, she thought. Let him suffer. He started this. It’s only fair he should feel how I felt.

“Belle, I…” It appeared this would not be easy. Belle surmised this might be the situation. So a little payback was well warranted.

“I often thought about Will,” she said. “He’s handsome and sweet. For a thief, mind you. But he was an honest thief. He never misled me, intentionally that is. He made me laugh and smile in a way I never thought I would ever again. He was a true friend in my time of need. And when I needed comfort…” Here, she trailed off as she watched Tempus’ back stiffen. “He is the second man I ever kissed. It was pleasant and soothing. Not demanding, not cruel. He was quite mindful of my feelings and only took what I was willing to give. I often wondered what it would be like if I stayed… I think we could have been lovers. We would have fled the convent, find a little place to live, and rebuild our lives. It would have been the happily ever after ending I always wanted. To have a man who loves me and who worships me with every inch of his—”

“Enough!” Tempus growled, clenching his fists tightly to the point where blood was drawn. “I don’t want to hear this! You are my wife!”

“Wrong, sir!” Belle interrupted as he turned to her. “You have a wife but I am not her. I never was your wife. In the eyes of the law and God, I will never be your wife. The only thing I can be to you is your mistress, and I refuse to humiliate myself! You leave me with no choice Tempus. Will Scarlet will be a better husband than you could ever be. In fact, he is the better man in every possible way. Now, I want you to tell me why. Why me?”

Tempus trembled, from what Belle could not discern. Was it out of anger? Jealousy? Fear? Whatever he decides to say will impact their lives. So he must tread carefully.

Returning to his seat, for it provided some stability and he doubted he could stand for any much longer; Tempus met her cool countenance and swallowed thickly. “I made many bad choices in my lifetime. Some that I deeply regret to this day, but I will never regret marrying Milah. She gave me my son, Bae… I could never regret him.”

“Indeed, you should not,” Belle conceded. “He is a lovely boy. And I know he will grow into a good man. But to say he should reflect his father… that is another story. Go on.”

“I mishandled Milah. I know that. I was a fool but I was a desperate fool. I should have faced the scandal and exposed her for the type of woman she was: greedy, selfish, vain… She was not meant to be a mother and the world deserved to know about her betrayal. But I had not known… I never knew I would be able to love again until I met you Belle.”
“Love?” She could not help the derision in her tone. “If that is love Tempus, then I feel sorry for you.”

“It’s true!” he insisted the vehemence in his declaration and in his visage spoke volumes. “I never intended to fall in love with you or any woman. But when I saw you… I knew I needed to be with you. You were with my salvation, my redemption. You brought light into my darkness and I was driven mad with greed to keep you close. I was no better than my wife. I purposely tricked your uncle into giving you to me and the chess game between us… I cheated so you would leave with me. I deceived you, lied to you, manipulated, and exploited you for my selfish purposes. I have sinned horrendously and I will be judged by God in the end and will more than likely be damned for all eternity, but I love you Belle. I have always loved you. I wanted to give you the world and the freedom and the life you have always wanted. And we were happy for a time. Weren’t we?”

“Yes,” she said softly. “We were happy.”

“Then Milah returned and I knew if you ever found out… you would leave. I couldn’t lose you, Belle, do you not see? I needed you. But I could not let Milah have Bae either. So I did want needed to be done. I faked his death with that grave and I sent him away with a new identity so Milah would never find out. I never intended you to see the grave. You were not supposed to know. I would have you believe that Bae ran away and provided some evidence to show he was in good health so you would not worry. You have such a loving, pure heart. You would want to know he was safe and we would have continued living our beautiful and wonderful life.”

His voice started to shake but Tempus did not stop. He was exorcising his demons at last, confessing to the one person who had the power to give him the solace his soul needed or the condemnation that he rightfully deserved.

“When you left… I was a mess. I was frantic with worry and fear that Milah somehow got to you and I could not have that. I went to her you see… I had to know if she spoke to you. She was startled that I found her but I have my resources as you know. No one can be hidden unless I wish them too. I threatened her. I shook her. Yet, despite my actions, she was adamant she had not seen nor spoken to you. So I turned to my trusted valet. Dove made the necessary inquires and he followed any leads that might have been you. It took months as you know but eventually one of the leads was true and I found you, my Belle, as Rose. I was going to tell you the truth that night. I was going to tell you that Ignatius’ death was a fabrication. But you had been so frightened… so full of accusations and disgust that when you told me that nothing I said or did would change your mind, I believed you. I thought I lost you and seeing no chance of defending myself… I decided to be the man you believed me to be. I played the villain if that would assuage your guilt but I could not bring myself to break away from you. I had to be with you regardless of your feelings of contempt towards me. I played with your body, your heart. But I could not take it further not without exposing myself. I left you Belle with every intention of letting you go. I did. However, you and I are cut from the same cloth. I could not stay away from you as you cannot stay away from me. But you were not ready to know the truth. You hated me. I thought time and distance would set things right. Little did I know how close I came to losing you…?

“That boy. He was everything that I couldn’t be to you. His soul was not laden with sin. He was worthy in a way I could never be. My conscience and heart were at war. I knew in my mind I could release you so you could be with him. I knew he would make a good husband. Any man who earn your smiles and laughter was worthy to have your hand. However, my heart won. I was unable to let you go. I loved you too much to let another be with you. I was wild with jealousy and that night in the convent… that was the devil in the room with you. As soon as you fell asleep I felt only remorse and disgust towards myself. I could not trust myself in your presence so I left. I knew you might have felt the same and I was resolved to let that be our final parting.”
Then with a self-deprecating grin and mirthless chuckle, Tempus waved his arms to show how fruitless that turned out to be. “There you have it, my dear. You can fill in the blanks yourself about why I am here. I know I am not a good man. I know I am not a God fearing man. I am vile and low and weak. I allowed my feelings to control me and due to my impulsivity… I ruined us. However, I can redeem myself at last. I pledge to you now and forever that I will not pursue you anymore. I will let you live your life as you see fit. I will also abide your decision to marry someone else if you wish. I will promise not to interfere. I will even write to your uncle if it is your desire to return to England. I will tell him about your innocence and how I kept you against your will when you learned the truth about my marriage. Yes, Belle, I will come clean and reveal to the world who I am and my crimes. I will acknowledge Milah as my wife so Bae will not have to be hidden. I will accept any punishment that will come my way (for I will be punished) and pay my dues to the eyes of man until I can be allowed to enter this world as an untarnished man free of guilt and sin. I will do this for you. All I ask in return if there is a possibility, a chance that you might be able to forgive me. If not, then I will accept it. I did not treat you with the proper care or respect, and for that I will not forgive myself.”

Belle was taken aback with his proposal. He would ruin himself… for her? He would let her marry another? All she wanted was the truth and Belle received that and more as Tempus bore his soul to her. This was unexpected and yet… she could not bring herself to loathe him. Did she pity him? To a small degree, she did. Did he do wrong and should be punished? Yes, of course. No man was above God and Tempus needed this lesson on humility.

So what was she going to do?

Without making a sound, Belle removed herself from the bed and tip-toed to him as he prostrated himself in order to wait her will. Standing over him, she felt this headiness sense of power. She never understood why men craved it so much, but now she had a good idea why power was so alluring. In the palm of her hand she held this man’s fate and it was incredibly intoxicating to know she could break or heal him. She knew she could make him pay for all the trouble and heartache and that Tempus would bear it for that would be her wish.

Raking her nails into his wild mane, Belle forced him to tilt his face towards her. Watching him on his knees… looking at her with adoration and trepidation… Belle made up her mind. She knew what she wanted. She knew how he should be punished.

“I am the mistress, understood?” Belle told him without question, without debate. “I have the power to break you, my dear husband. I want you to repeat that.”

Licking his lips, Tempus obeyed. “You are my mistress. You have the power to break me.”

“Good.” With her hand still curled in his hair, Belle brought her free hand to her nightgown, bunching the fabric, as she lifted it up. “I want you to atone for what you have done. You will pleasure me and receive no pleasure in return. If you want to honor me right, you will do this or else I will walk out that door and you will never hear from me again. For you see, Tempus, this is the kind of game that you cannot cheat. I will win every time, do I make myself clear?”

And he proceeded to make sure she won.

Chapter End Notes

I have a second and a much happier prompt for this verse afterwards. Hope you enjoyed this!
9 A Long Fatal Love Chase Rated K

Chapter Summary

Prompt: A year has passed and there have been many changes. (Rated K)

Chapter Notes

A/N: Here’s my final prompt for A Long Fatal Love Chase. Of course, I can always be persuaded to add more if you like… ;) ;) This is, of course, a happier version than the novel but I highly recommend reading it if you’re in a mood for a good Gothic story.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A Long Fatal Love Chase

Belle took a deep breath of the salty sea air and smiled as the misty breeze teased her curls. She heard her husband murmuring as he showed Bae how to set up his fishing pole. Dove was somewhere on the yacht, more than likely getting the icebox ready for any catch his young master might obtain. When she opened her eyes to observe, she was pleased that her husband no longer appeared haggard as he had a year ago when he came to her room in the middle of that fateful night.

Back then she wanted the truth and she received the truth from him and more. Tempus had done wrong and Belle was not ready to forgive so easily. He had proven himself that he was up to the task to earn her forgiveness and her cheeks flushed warmly at the memory. He was a man with many talents and his tongue was very talented. She had been too weak in the knees to extract herself from the room, and she was quite happy that Tempus worn her out thusly. If she had the slightest bit of energy, then she would have left him. But given the opportunity to prove himself worthy… Tempus succeeded in the first of many steps.

They left the room together and Belle was with him when he collected his son. It was time for all of them to stop running away and she could never forget the look of joy in Baelfire’s face when he saw his father and her. Of course, they could not be a family right away. There was still the impediment of Tempus’ wife that had to be dealt with and Belle was adamant that if she was going to be with him, then he would have to contend with Milah.

For that reason, Belle was resolved to return to England. She reminded Tempus of his promise to write to her uncle that would not put a cloud over her name. He had not forgotten and wrote the letter in her presence until she was satisfied with the contents. The letter was sent post-haste so she would be welcomed by the time The Dark One docked. Unfortunately, when they arrived, Belle was not met by her uncle. Her uncle’s solicitor was waiting and with it the news of her uncle’s passing. He had died a few months back from a heart attack, but the solicitor speculated it was more out of guilt for his inexcusable actions towards his niece. Her uncle lost favor with many of his acquaintances, but the only decent thing he had done was to keep his debts paid off so Belle could inherit his manor.

She never thought she would be happy to see the place that she had for so long viewed as a prison. But seeing the mansion brought tears of happiness and Belle was determined to return the stately
place to its former glory. As for Tempus, she told her uncle’s solicitor (now hers) that she was not going to press charges against him. She also commanded that as her lawyer now that he would not speak ill against him either or reveal what his letter shared. The solicitor understood as Belle set fire to the letter that would criminate Tempus Gold.

From there, she offered Bae a place to stay. She was going to need help restoring the mansion and the boy was all the more willing to accept. Tempus was happy to see his son excited about staying with Belle, but he was also saddened that he was not welcomed. Belle assured him that she would not keep Bae unless he wished it. After all, Bae was his son not hers. But she wanted to give Tempus the time he needed to rectify his errors and he could not do so if Bae was going to be a distraction. Tempus relented for he knew she was right. And what better place for Bae to stay than with her?

So Baelfire was left in her charge and care as Tempus sailed off on _The Dark One_. They kept in touch through letters: Belle’s constant updates about the mansion and Bae’s health (for he was growing taller and stronger every day it seemed!), and Tempus shared with her his penance. She told Tempus he could come back once he fulfilled his atonement towards her.

Initially, Belle did not believe he would be gone for long, but he had remained on his path to redemption for six months. In that timeframe, he found Will Scarlet and aided him in his quest to find his love Ana. Tempus had attached a letter from the former thief himself to tell her how things had been and how nothing was the same when she left the convent. Will did not blame her or did not sound upset that she had flown off without a goodbye. He had expected this since it was evident that she was on the run from someone. However, he harbored no ill will towards her and that when her husband told him what happened... Well, he admitted he did throw a punch and it was possible that Tempus sported a black eye. However, the two men managed to form an alliance that enabled them to work together to track down Ana. They found her and it would seem she was waiting for Will to come back. She never felt right about how they left things between them and she was sorry for her behavior and for making him leave. She was a coward not to follow her heart.

Belle was overjoyed with happiness the two lovers were reunited. Will told her they were going to marry and hoped they could cross paths again someday.

She hadn’t expected Tempus to do this, to help Will the way he did. But he did and in that moment... she forgave him for everything. This was a grand gesture she had not thought possible; however, she knew asking him to return was not an option. Tempus still had the matter with his wife. Until he found a resolution with Milah... he and Belle could not be together as husband and wife.

It was about three months ago that Belle received the letter she had been waiting for from him.

He found Milah.

Or what was left of her.

She had died penniless and friendless. The house she had been living in was in such squalor condition that Tempus learned she had been a squatter, trying to hide from her debtors. Her death did not appear suspicious but he admitted that these types of men knew how to cover their tracks. It was possible that Milah was murdered to satisfy the debt, but there was no way of knowing for certain.

While Belle felt awful for what happened to her, there was a tiny part of her... no, a larger part could not help rejoicing at the meaning of her death. Tempus was no longer bonded to her. He was a free man and he could come home.

As soon as _The Dark One_ came to port, Tempus and Belle were married. Again but this time it was
completely legal and proper. Belle also adopted Bae officially so she could be his mother and Tempus no longer felt compelled to hide him. Bae was introduced as Baelfire Gold and the little family could not have been happier to know they could live in the light and not in the darkness.

Yes… everything was as it should be.

In fact, as Belle continued to watch the men that she loved, she placed her hand over her belly. She had not told Tempus yet but she was thinking tonight would be the perfect night to reveal the new addition to the Gold family.

Chapter End Notes

As I said, this is a nice little short for this verse. While for the most part I am ending this set of prompts, you my dear readers, can always make a request if you wish. Please don’t forget to review!
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Princess Belle ponders over what lies beyond the border to the Dark Forest. Meanwhile, the Dark King makes a royal decree. (Rated K)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own anything of Strange Magic. It all belongs to George Lucas.

A/N: This has become one of my new favorite movies alongside Beauty and the Beast. It is loosely based on Shakespeare’s A Midsummer’s Night Dream and it contains a lot of great songs from Elvis Presley to Lady Gaga. I highly recommend watching this movie for its cuteness and… you will see how easily Rumbellable it is!

A/A/N: For now, I’m only to make this the last of the four prompts that introduces a new verse. I’m only going to focus on the verses that are already established and wrap them up. As for new requests for AUs that are not currently found in here, I still have them in a notebook and will revisit them once I have some other stories written. Thank you everyone for reading and reviewing as well as your suggestions!

Strange Magic

It was a little known secret that the fairy princess Belle was obsessed with the Dark Forest. It was a forbidden place—a dangerous one for all the fairies and elves and the other wee folk in the Light Fields. Since birth, they were warned never to enter the Dark Forest for if they did… they will disappear forever. So it was because of the impediment that drew Belle in.

For years, she tried to uncover the Dark Forest’s secrets by searching the many scrolls, texts, and books of her people, hoping the ancient and historical documents would shed some light. Belle knew the Forest was where the goblins and the other unnatural inhabitants and nasty creatures lived, but what she wanted to know was their customs, their cultures, their state of beings. One day she will become Queen and rule the Light Fields and it was only fair she knew more about the neighboring kingdom.

Alas, her research was fruitless in it yielded more questions than answers. She tried asking her father but King Maurice insisted she cease this nonsense and focus on important matters like her upcoming nuptials to the Captain of the Guard—Sir Gaston.

However, try as she might, Belle couldn’t get the Dark Forest out of her mind.

“C’mon Belle! Get your head out of the clouds and come help me decide on the floral arrangements!” shouted her younger sister, Emma.

The perky blonde fairy with wings of soft pinks and blues tapped her finger on her chin while her
pixie handmaidens revealed their work. They were all beautiful with their bright colors and representing different meanings when it came to describing Belle and Gaston’s love. Of course, it would be easier if the bride-to-be was involved.

“Belle! I can’t decide which ones for the theme!” Emma shrieked again, and this time her sister flew in and landed next to her.

“Sorry Emma. I was busy…” Belle began to say.

“You’re always busy. This is your wedding! I know I’m the wedding planner and all, but I do need your input once in a while.”

Belle looked down at the dozen different arrangements. The pixies certainly outdid themselves as Emma’s group looked up at her with abated breaths. Belle’s handmaidens buzzed above her head, chatting all at once over which ones they liked. Finally, Belle pointed to the apple blossoms, blue bells, and the marsh marigolds.

Emma clapped her hands with glee. “I was thinking the same one! Okay, girls, the bride has spoken! These are the ones we’re going to use for the ceremony and centerpieces and we will need these colors for the tablecloths and such.”

As Belle spread her wings, she jumped into the air and was quickly seized by her ankle.

“Emma…” she sighed.

“I want this to be perfect for you. I know how much Gaston loves you and you him, but I can’t help get this feeling that something is bothering you.”

“Oh Emma,” Belle softly gasped, floating back down. “I’m sorry. It has nothing to do with the wedding, I promise. It’s just… I’m going to be Queen in a few years when Dad steps down and despite all my training… I can’t help but feel like I’m still unprepared. And I have all these ideas twirling in my head—“

“I’m sure they are wonderful ideas!” Emma gushed. “You will make an excellent Queen, Belle. Why, just the other day, Baelfire and I were talking about how fantastic you’ll be. Plus, you’ll have Dad to guide you and the Council of Elders and Gaston!”

Baelfire was one of Emma’s best friends and an elf. Belle knew from him that the elves had some concerns about trade and such, and she certainly was going to make it a priority. In addition, she knew like every other citizen of the Light Fields… everyone was worried about the Dark Forest. Even with the line of primroses serving as a border, some of the residents were fearful that it wasn’t enough to keep the goblins from invading if they choose to.

This went back to Belle’s pondering about the Dark Forest itself. She figured the only way to prevent all this worry and fear would be to open relations with the goblins. Even though, she did find a truce dating as far back as two centuries ago that stated all Light Fields citizens will stick to their side and the Dark Forest creatures will stick to theirs as long as no one trespassed on either side. It was a strange sort of peace treaty, but it was in place all this time and there haven’t been any wars to everyone’s relief. However, the potential threat was still very real and the goblins could change their minds about minding the treaty.

Gaston believed they should strengthen their armies and have the best weapons just in case the goblins decided to invade. But Belle was concerned if they were to build up their arms, then the word would get to the goblins and they might retaliate if they believed the fairies posed a threat.
Yet, during all this time, neither side had broken their word. So if there was to be an invasion…
wouldn’t it have happened already? And the last thing she wanted for her people was for a war to
start over a misunderstanding.

No…

Belle wanted to open the doors and call for diplomacy between the two kingdoms. If the fairies and
the goblins could work out some kind of agreement that would allow their people to travel into each
other’s territory without retribution, then that would end any speculation of a possible invasion or
worse. Not to mention the advantages they could both benefit from if they were allowed to trade.
There were all sorts of plants and flowers that lurked in the darkness that the fairies could harvest and
possibly use for medicinal purposes. And she was certain the fairies had something the goblins might
want for whatever they need. So basically it was a win-win situation.

Of course, whether or not she could get the Council on board with the idea was another thing.
Although, as Queen, Belle might be able to push for negotiations and revise the treaty to suit the
current needs and demands of the people.

“I know I’ll have their support, but when it comes to something big! Something extremely
important… will they have my back?” Belle quietly asked.

“You don’t know until you try,” Emma told her. “Now, let’s get started on the wedding dress. And
don’t you say it’s too soon. Four months from now you will be happy to know you have the perfect
dress picked out beforehand.”

Belle smiled as she stretched her wings and followed Emma back into the castle.

*I’m positive their king is probably thinking the same as me. Something needs to change.*

What the two princesses didn’t notice was a stalk of primroses being cut down.

xxx

In the darkest depths of the Dark Forest, there stood a wizened oak tree choked with vines and
weeds with a skeletal possum head opened wide as an entrance to the Dark King’s domain.

A vicious roar shook the foundation as several creatures scurried out of the lair as quickly as
possible. But there was one voice pleading for mercy that fell on deaf ears as the King seized a staff
with a bluish white globe and captured the wailing creature.

“It’s not my fault! Just listen to me—“

“Take the prisoner to the dungeon. Make sure no one has access to the cell,” growled the Dark King
to his two most trusted henchmen—Hatter and Whale.

“Right away DK!” Hatter chirped, taking the glowing staff and holding it out in front of him as he
and Whale ran to the dungeon below.

The Dark King stoically sat on his throne, his piercing amber eyes swept across his throne room
where the few braver goblins remained and awaited their ruler’s next orders.

*Something needed to change,* he thought and with a sharp and twisted grin he knew exactly what the
change needed to be.

“Hear this!” he commanded. “Let it be known from now on in the Dark Forest that love is to be
banned forever. There will be no mention of the word and anyone who is caught creating or using love potion will be jailed for the rest of their miserable lives! And to make certain no one is tempted… destroy the primroses. Starting immediately.”

xxXxxx

It didn’t take long for word to spread about the destruction of the primroses. Bad enough, everyone knew that primroses were the most important ingredient needed to make love potion and the only person capable of doing it was the Blue Fairy.

Furthermore, it was also discovered that the Blue Fairy herself was being held captive under the orders of the Dark King. Apparently, something had gone awry or… she trespassed.

Unfortunately, there wasn’t a single fairy willing to brave the Dark Forest to find out why or even attempt to rescue her. As it were, the Blue Fairy technically did not live in the Light Fields so her imprisonment was not in direct violation to their treaty. The Fairy Kingdom was not responsible for her and if someone were to seek an audience on her behalf… then you were on your own.

So one night, while stargazing out her window, Belle wondered what would become of the Blue Fairy. Even though her kingdom had no allegiance to her, Belle still felt imprisoning her was wrong. Surely the Dark King could come to a sense of reason and excuse her for any offense she might have committed. After all, the Blue Fairy travels to all the realms and probably did not know about the history of the Dark Forest or the agreement.

Instead, all Belle could hear was her father’s voice in her head: “The Blue Fairy knows the rules despite not being from this land. It’s not our concern or our business.”

Translation: If we undermine the Dark King’s order in any shape or form, then we are asking for war.

Somehow, Belle’s reign couldn’t come fast enough.
Prompt: After Princess Belle called off the wedding due to her fiancé’s infidelity, she is determined never to fall in love again. It is a rather unfortunate situation to be in during the Elves’ Spring Festival. (Rated K+)

Strange Magic

There was a time when Belle loved attending the many balls and festivals that were hosted across her kingdom. Ever since Gaston cheated on her and irrevocably broken her heart, Belle could not find the joy she once had for these gatherings. One went to these things with a date or in the hopes of finding one, which Belle undeniably had no interest in anymore. She was better off by herself, including ruling as Queen.

Of course, her father wanted her to find a husband before it happened. Not that he believed she could rule alone, but he wanted her to have someone at her side like he had with her mother. In other words, she had to fall in love and Belle wasn’t willing to risk her heart again to have it crushed. Gaston only loved her for the crown, not for who she was, and like she told her father: “If I find a guy out there who takes my hand and looks me in the eye and I don’t want to hit him, then I’ll consider getting married.”

So far, that guy didn’t exist. And Belle believed that it was impossible because every guy she has ever met (besides Baelfire) was a jerk in some way. Or shallow. Or stupid. Or vain.

Belle was aware with these faults unlike her sweet baby sister Emma. The girl was boy crazy and it was her duty to make sure her sister didn’t suffer the same heartache as she did… Meaning, Belle would have to watch her during the Elves’ Spring Festival.

As it were, the royal family stood side-by-side with each other and Belle conspicuously had her hand resting on the hilt of her sword every time a guy began to approach Emma. The silent message was sent as the male fairies, including several knights either flew away or walked in a different direction. Belle did earn a reputation for her sword-fighting abilities so it put a relaxing smile on her lips as each suitor high-tailed it out of there.

Emma sighed sadly as yet another really cute boy kept on moving past her. Glancing at the corner of her eye, she caught Belle giving another boy a glare with her teeth bared threateningly that the young fairy put her hands on her hips and hissed, “Belle!”

“What?” Belle asked innocently.

“You got to stop doing that!” Emma said.

“Doing what?”

“You know! Being all snarly and antisocial. How can I get a date let alone a dance partner if you keep scaring them away?”

“Emma, trust me, you can do so much better than these guys,” Belle told her resolutely.
She groaned. “Belle, I love you dearly big sister. But this overprotective streak has got to end. I’m a big girl. I can take care of myself.”

“Oh Emma… I know you think you can and I believe you, but men… they are not always want they seem to be. Take my advice. Stand your guard and if they really want to be with you, then they wouldn’t run away.”

Emma rolled her eyes. “I don’t think making threats will make them daring to try.”

“That’s the point!” Belle exclaimed. “If they can’t toughen up, then they are not worth it.”

The blonde fairy merely shook her head in exasperation, but cheered up when she saw Baelfire take the stage.

“There’s Baelfire! I’m going down there!” Emma said, dashing off to be front and center when her friend was going to sing. And maybe, just maybe… find a dance partner without Belle present.

“Emma—“ Belle began and stopped. Well, at least it was Baelfire. Come to think of it… if there was one guy Belle could trust to be around her sister, it’ll be him. Visibly relaxing, Belle knew there was no way her sister could get into trouble.

“Hey, my little dumpling.”

Belle closed her eyes and uttered a soft curse as she looked over her shoulder to find Gaston behind her. “Gaston,” she warned.

“All right! Booties—prepare to be shaken!” Baelfire shouted as he shook his backside before turning back around and began singing, “I say hey, I’ll be gone today!”

The rest of the elf band was rocking out as Baelfire danced around the stage, hopping to the beat of the music, as he sang his song (and Belle noticed) looking at Emma.

Speaking of the devil, Belle spied Emma being twirled by a boy. She didn’t like his looks or where he was putting his hands on her sister.

Wings flaring up, Belle was about to intervene but Gaston blocked her. It became a dance as every time she tried to take a step away from him, he was there in front of her.

“Now, now darling,” he said. “Can’t we be friends? Just one dance is all I’m asking.”

“That’s too much to ask me Gaston,” she told him, gritting her teeth. “And no. We cannot be friends. If you excuse me—“

“I told you it was a silly mistake I made. I promise I have seen the error of my ways.”

“Oh really?” She arched her brow. “Well, I know I made a mistake too. Saying yes to marry you. Now if you’ll go bother someone else, then I—“

During her exchange with her former fiancé, Belle hadn’t noticed that creeping along the edges of the party were goblins of all shapes and sizes. Quickly, each elf bandmate was replaced with an amphibious or a mole-looking goblin, taking the elf’s instrument and playing off-key or chewing the mouthpiece. Then there was a shout and a scream, which captured Belle’s attention as she shoved Gaston away and saw Baelfire struggling with some kind of weird white creature as he held a vial in his hand with a glowing purple liquid.
“Love potion!” Belle gasped in terror as the container went flying and the potion went right into the eyes of her sister! “No!”

But it was too late.

A large, bulging goblin with pointy teeth came up behind Emma and threw a sack over her head, tying the ends up as he swung her struggling and screaming sister over his back.

“Emma!” Belle screamed, jumping into the air with her sword drawn.

All around, the knights and even her father were stopped by the swarm of Dark Foresters as the elves and remaining fairies looked for places to run and hide.

With a war cry, Belle charged the goblin that held her sister but was instantly yanked by her wing and slammed into the ground, effectively knocking her sword out of her hand.

“No!” she cried softly as another creature picked up her sword and pointed it at her chin while its buddies crowded her, holding her in place so she couldn’t escape.

“Where’s my potion?!” came the roaring demand as the goblins on stage began plucking their instruments with an intro to a rock song as smoke flashed across them.

Belle coughed as the smoke cleared away, her eyes widening as the new goblin took front and center. He was tall and gangly with gray and golden scales covering his entire body, hard and sharp-looking like armor. They reminded her as reptilian with the way the scales sheened under the light from the lanterns and moon. However, he had wings that were certainly very much like a dragonfly’s that were folded against his back. Reptile or insect it was hard to tell what he was supposed to resemble, but he did have a full set of scraggly, long hair in the same colors as his scales. It was probably the only thing about him that looked soft in contrast to the rest of his body. Yet, she couldn’t look away from his menacing onyx eyes with a twinge of amber that seemed to burn in their sockets as he looked all around at the captured party-goers. In his hand was a staff that was as long as he that held a stone that matched the hue in his eyes.

Letting out a shrill and deafening laugh Belle knew this could be only one person… The Dark King.

There was a collective gasp among the crowd, but Belle couldn’t stop staring at this imposing figure. The Dark King… the Dark King from legends told was here and she couldn’t wrap her head around this.

Love potion… he was asking where the love potion was and Belle did a quick sweep and couldn’t find the vial or the white creature that was fighting with Baelfire over it. But when she heard the rattling of his insect-like wings, she noticed they were tattered-looking as he landed inches away from her.

He pointed to the sky to the goblin that still had her sister trapped in the bag as a dragonfly swooped in and he crawled on top to take off with Emma.

“No!” Belle screamed, finding that ounce of strength and adrenaline as she jumped up from her captors. “Release my sister you scaly-backed cockroach!”

The Dark King turned towards her, his brow furrowing as he faced her completely. Her wrists were held down, but she stood there defiantly glaring at him. As he drew closer, she ripped her arm away and landed a deft punch at the Dark King’s jaw.

Once the blow was done, she could feel herself falling back as the goblins slammed her to the
ground for injuring their king.

Expecting the worse, Belle geared herself for an attack from the goblins, but to her astonishment, she heard the Dark King tell his people let him see her. She was jerked forward and was once more face-to-face with the Dark King, whose penetrating orbs bored right into her skull.

“Someone thinks they’re a tough girl,” he sneered.

“Why don’t you free me and I’ll show you how tough I can be,” Belle growled. Who did he think he was crashing the dance and intimidating everyone and kidnapping her sister!? Vanished was her previous notion about diplomacy and Belle wanted nothing more than to kick his butt.

He tossed his head back and laughed. It wasn’t humorous but a condescending one. “Hear that boys? This wee fairy thinks she can take me.”

An uproarious laughter erupted from the goblins, but Belle refused to be baited or mocked as she continued glaring at the fearsome Dark King. “What’s the matter?” she taunted. “Afraid I might actually defeat you?”

The laughing continued as the Dark King wiped away a tear. “Why don’t you tell me where my potion is?”

“I don’t know where it is!”

“That’s too bad. You have until moon-down to bring it back or—“

“What!?” she cried incredulously. “You have no right coming here taking my people hostage and forcing a deadline on something we don’t have!”

“Oh? Then I take it’s all right for your people to trespass on my territory and steal from me? Not really fair is it princess?” he spat.

She had no clue what he was talking about, but she had a sneaking suspicion it had to do with Baelfire judging from his guilty expression. However, she wasn’t going to call attention to her friend.

“If you feel you need to take someone prisoner for this slight, then take me instead of my sister,” Belle announced.

“Belle, no!” exclaimed her father as well as few other elves and fairies.

The Dark King smirked. “You would take her place?”

“Yes.” The look of conviction said it all as she stood there without fear, without doubt.

His lips curved into a twisted grin. “Deal.”

Then all Belle saw was darkness.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Trading herself for her sister, Belle is taken to the Dark King’s lair and makes a startlingly discovery. (Rated K)

Strange Magic

It was a rough journey back to the Dark King’s castle, but then again, Belle was trapped in a sack. Regaining consciousness after being knocked out, Belle found herself bouncing around, which is judging from the buzzing noise, she was on a dragonfly with a goblin.

Her hand instinctively went to her sword before realizing she had been disarmed. Grounding her teeth, she let out a soft growl that she was now defenseless and clearly in the mercy of these fiends. Well… She wasn’t going to play the damsel in distress. These goblins hadn’t seen anything yet and she will make them sorry for what they did to her people.

At long last, they arrived.

Belle grunted as the goblin carrying her began walking and she felt every jerk and flounce from every step. There was a groan like a door opening and she could hear what appeared to be victorious cheering before a distinctive voice rang out.

“Bring me the prisoner!”

“Hmpf!” Suddenly turned upside down, Belle fell to the ground on her hands and knees. Shaking her head, she lifted her gaze as the Dark King loomed over her with that despicable jeering smirk.

“Welcome to my humble abode, my fairy princess,” he said, the last word sounding like a curse.

If anything, the place wasn’t welcoming or humble in Belle’s opinion. She could tell they were inside a tree from the decomposing bark to the green moss and mold on the walls. The throne where he sat upon was made from some kind of animal bone, which the back was smooth and curved, and the armrests stuck out with a sharp end. Not a very comfy seat but then again… the Dark King wasn’t the type for comfort. However, there was a skylight and the moon was full, which provided a sliver of comfort and relief to the bedraggled fairy.

Pushing herself up so she could stand on her legs, Belle wavered until she found her balance. Then crossing her arms, she fixated on the Dark King.

“Is that customary to treat another royal with such crass? I gave you my word that I would come with you. I have wings in case you didn’t notice. I could have flown with your men instead of being thrown in a smelly bag by the way.”

Bingo, she thought with a triumphant smirk as the Dark King’s expression faltered. Whatever he expected from her… it wasn’t that.

“I, uh—“ Realizing she put him on the spot, his wings bristled as he banged his staff. “Like I can believe a word of a fairy? Sorry, princess, but I wasn’t taking any chances of you running off.”
“Allow me to ease your mind—I have no intentions of going back on my word. I said I’d come and I will stay until your terms are met.”

He chuckled darkly. “And who said I will release you?”

Now it was her turn to flounder. “You said you wanted your love potion back. That was your terms.”

“Oh aye. I want the potion back in exchange for this collateral.” He motioned behind her and it was then Belle saw the other bag slung over another goblin’s shoulder.

“You see… tough girl,” the Dark King went on. “I was more than insulted and disrespected. I have kept and followed the terms that were set by our ancestors, and twice now your people have set foot on my territory. I cannot tolerate such mistreatment or callous disregard without some recompense. I will free your sister when the potion is delivered; you, on the other hand, will stay for as long as I see fit.”

With a flick of his wrist, Belle was once again seized by his men.

“Take her to her accommodations,” he ordered.

“You can’t do this! This is not the deal!” Belle shouted as she was being dragged away.

Minutes later, she found herself below the main level in her so-called accommodations aka a prison cell. She was unceremoniously tossed inside by her handlers. Belle quickly marched over to the bars, her small fists clenching, as she glared at the snickering goblins.

“I want to speak to your king!” she demanded.

“Sorry. The king’s not taking any requests from you,” the big, fat one told her.

“Yeah,” his comrade, a smaller elf-like one, echoed.

With their laughter bouncing off the caverns, Belle watched as they climbed the spiraling stairs up. Sighing, she rested her forehead against the bars. On the flip side, she noted, she should be grateful that she had a mushroom she could rest on and wasn’t stuck in one of those iron cages suspended from the ceiling.

It was then she saw something that caught her attention.

If the King wasn’t going to talk to her, then she’ll get his attention some other way, she thought gleefully, reaching for the stray twig. *Man, it’s a good thing I keep a dagger in my boot.*

It didn’t take long for Belle to craft a makeshift pick that allowed her to pop open the cell door. Pocketing the twig, she kept her dagger out just in case. Now, what she needed was a sword and so far… she noticed that the goblins had rudimentary weapons such as stones and spears. She supposed a spear would do. After all, the Dark King broke his word about her sister so it was only fair that she break the rules too. She’ll fight her way out of here and find that stupid potion herself if she must.

It was also a good thing her wings were dark colors—midnight blue with swirls of deep purple—so she didn’t bring too much attention to herself as she crept along the corridor.

She purposefully avoided the throne room for the time being. As luck would have it, she heard the
voices of a couple of goblins and quickly plastered herself against the ceiling as they came closer. Belle tilted her head as she watched two rather small goblins trotting along and one had her sword!

The fishlike creature was actually dragging it from behind while the other wore a top hat, criticizing the other for being too slow.

“You sure your name isn’t Sloth? Cause DK wants us back pronto once we put this in the armory.”

“It’s heavy!” the other complained. “You try it.”

“And ruin these newly polished claws? I think not.”

“Well, I’m moving as fast as I can!”

“If you stop panting, then we would have been there by now!”

“Then take the damn thing!”

Belle waited for them to pass her and she dropped down without making a sound. Creeping up behind them, she knocked their heads together and grabbed her sword as she zipped off in lightning speed.

The two goblins rubbed their aching heads and looked all around for who did it, but couldn’t find no one.

Hatter sighed. “Looks like we can head back to the throne room now.”

While Belle was busy, she had no clue about the commotion that occurred in the throne room. It wasn’t until she was flying outside the Dark King’s lair that she heard Emma singing at the top of her lungs.

Flying over the skylight, she peered down just as Emma was being carried out by her feet in the same direction as the dungeon. It wouldn’t be long for those goons to discover that Belle was missing.

Knowing she had to act fast, Belle blew a wayward strand of hair out of her face and braced herself as she flew higher up. This was the time for her to take a stand and show them all what she was really made of.

The Dark King was alone. Her lips curved. Excellent.

Flapping her wings, Belle gained speed as she charged towards the skylight, releasing a battle cry, as she broke through the glass with her sword raised above her head. To her credit, the Dark King was caught off-guard with only seconds to react as he grabbed his scepter and held it up just as her sword came crashing down. Sparks flashed as her sword clashed with the staff, the infuriated fairy glaring at her prey.

Good.

“How did you—?” the embattled King muttered then shook his head. “Never mind.” Pushing her back, he stood up to his full length with his staff ready for the next attack. “I’m really starting to hate you fairy princesses.”

Belle cackled. “Let’s go then. I don’t have all day.”
With a roar, the Dark King swung his staff towards her. Belle ducked and blocked his next move and the two began swinging their weapons as they flitted across the throne room using anything in sight to slow or disable their opponent. But nothing seemed to work as the two royals kept on fighting with each other.

Hatter and Whale, hearing the commotion, rushed into the chamber and immediately froze as their King and the supposed prisoner were now locked in an epic battle by swinging on suspended chandeliers, kicking and clashing their weapons.

“Is it just me or does it look like they’re dancing?” mumbled Whale, watching as each movement was practically precise and in tune with the other as they flew, crashed, banged, and deflected.

“What I want to know is how come he’s not using his magic,” Hatter pointed out. “He could have put that fairy out like a light five minutes ago. This fight is completely moo.”

“You mean moot.”

“No. I mean moo.”

“Moot.”

“Moo!”

“Watch out!” Whale cried as a piece of bark began falling towards them. Both goblins jumped out of the way in time as the bark landed, shaking the entire chamber as the Dark King and the fairy princess continued fighting with her somersaulting in the air to avoid his scepter.

“You fight well. For a fairy,” the Dark King taunted, as he blocked her sword.

“Too bad I can’t say the same about you,” Belle rejoined as she counteracted his next move while looking at her nails. “I was expecting… more.”

That rendered the Dark King speechless as the sound of laughter interrupted the mood as the two both looked sharply down at the two goblins.

Hatter jabbed Whale to stop him and the two minions looked at their King sheepishly. “Need any help sire?” they asked in unison.

“No!” the Dark King bellowed as he and Belle continued evading and delivering blows.

The two bewildered goblins stole glances at each other before finally the feuding royals began to grow weary and exhausted since it was clear the other wasn’t going to yield. At last they came to an impasse as they were breathing heavily and staring each other down.

Lifting her sword so the point was poking him in the chest, she glowered. “Well?”

“Go ahead, kill me, but you won’t get your sister.”

Groaning, Belle lowered the sword. “Now what?” she asked.

A high pitch voice began ringing out in an off-key love song. The Dark King flinched as he slapped his claws over his eyes.

“Oh no…” he murmured.

Recognizing it was Emma, Belle couldn’t help the visible shudder at the awful tone. Why in the
world would she be singing…? She recalled the love potion and let out another groan. “What did she fall in love with?”

“It’s better if I show you,” the Dark King said reluctantly. “Follow me.”

He propped his staff up and began walking to the dungeon. Belle trailed after him once she sheathed her sword.

Hatter and Whale looked at each other. “Are you thinking—“

“—What I’m thinking?” The two grinned.

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The singing grew louder as they descended the stairs and Belle couldn’t help clapping her hands over her ears to block it out. Unlike the cell she had been in, Emma’s had doors leading into it.

Setting his hand on the doorknob, he turned to Belle. “I hope you have a strong stomach.”

Twisting it open, he stood back so she could peek in. To her jaw-dropping surprise, Emma was hanging onto the cell doors with her arm stretching out to touch… The Dark King?!

Slamming the door closed, Belle leaned against it as she looked at him. “You?”

“Aye,” the Dark King mumbled.

Isn’t that just great? Belle thought gloomily.
Strange Magic

Never in her whole life had Belle imagined something like this ever happening. Emma… poor Emma was doused with love potion and the first person she laid eyes on that activated the magic was the fierce-some Dark King. Now, her baby sister was head over heels and singing really bad love songs on top of it. Even the Dark King appeared to be uncomfortable with the situation as he couldn’t stop wringing his hands and his wings were thrumming softly.

Thankfully, he hadn’t wanted this to happen either and agreed to help her restore her sister back to her normal self. What they needed was an antidote and the only one who had such knowledge was the Blue Fairy. Of course, being locked up and ignored for so long had her stir crazy for attention and with Belle’s new face… the Blue Fairy could not stop yammering until the princess’s patience snapped and she shouted for her to shut up.

Her outburst startled the Dark King himself as he looked at her in shock. He always assumed fairies were all sunshine and friendliness, but this particular fairy… She had a temper and a decent right hook—attributes one did not contribute with these colorful and light creatures. This princess was a head-scratcher. She did not cower before him and she escaped her prison cell to fight him—him—and here she was standing next to him as if the last five minutes hadn’t happened. He had to admit the fight had been exhilarating. She gave everything and more, exhausting him in a way that no creature—goblin or other—could. And… if he had to be honest with himself… He was rather intrigued.

Belle took a deep breath, calming herself, and gently beseeched the Blue Fairy once more. “I need your help. My sister… She can’t stay like this. If you can tell us how to make the antidote, then the Dark King will set you free.”

“Free?” the Blue Fairy repeated.

“Free?!” The Dark King gaped at Belle who only gave him a cutting look that said he better or else. Sighing, he faced the annoying blue ball. “Aye. I’ll set you free.”

The Blue Fairy screamed for joy as she clapped her hands and flew around her bubble cell with high speed. Once she expended the energy, she became serious and business-like as she began reciting the supplies she was going to need.

Waving the closest goblin to come over, the Dark King ordered him to get whatever she needed and be quick about it. While that part was over, the Dark King and Belle were alone and standing somewhat awkward by each other. Somehow, neither knew what to say or do next until he cleared
his throat and gestured upstairs.

“This could take a while. Perhaps… we should return to the throne room and discuss matters, yes?”

Belle frowned, not sure what other matters they might discuss, but at least he wasn’t planning on throwing her back in the prison cell. Following his lead, the two left the dungeon to return to the chamber. Of course, when they arrived, they froze in their tracks in utter disbelief and horror as the room suddenly transformed into a pink and red nightmare.

Hearts. Paper hearts were everywhere: draped over the throne, on the walls, on the floor; streamers with hearts hung over the chandeliers, and even an arch covered in ribbons and more ungodly hearts were above them. They couldn’t have been gone for long… ten, fifteen minutes… but the entire throne room was decked out in these horrid decorations with a small table arranged in the center with candles burning brightly.

The two goblins Belle had seen earlier when she was making her escape stood in front of the table with silly grins on their faces. They seemed to be quite pleased with themselves, which meant they were responsible for this mess. It didn’t take long for their sire to reach that conclusion for himself.

“Hatter! Whale!” the Dark King bellowed. “What is the meaning of this?!”

“Your majesty, we thought with the princess and you getting along now—” began Whale.

“—You two can get to know each other a little bit better,” finished Hatter.

This left their king dumbfounded as the two scurried away to give the two royals some privacy. The Dark King scarcely glanced at the fairy beside him who was also just as silent as he. Finally, they looked at each other and quickly took a step back away from the other.

“So…”

“Um…”

Neither knew what to say to the insinuation that the goblins were getting at. After what felt like hours stretched on, Belle decided to break the silence.

“Why would they think we would like this stuff? Who does?”

“I don’t,” the Dark King answered quickly.


“Well, I hate it more!”

For the first time in their acquaintance, Belle and the Dark King smiled genuinely at one another. She reached up to grab one of the hearts and with a sharp tug; she pulled it apart as she ripped it in half.

“Love is for fools,” she said, letting the two halves flitter to the floor.

“Always rushing in,” the Dark King chimed as he took a heart himself and ripped it into a dozen little pieces.

“It’s crazy how people just let themselves fall so easily without any rhyme or reason,” Belle continued as she went around the room plucking the hearts she could get her hands on and leaving behind a trail of destruction in her path.
“It’s downright insanity!” the Dark King agreed, mimicking Belle’s actions.

Together, they were a tour de force as they wiped away the hearts. With every tear and rip they couldn’t help the relief flowing through their veins.

The fairy princess had so far exceeded his expectations. She wasn’t a dainty lass and she had just as much pent up anger as he did. They were clearly of the same mind when it came to the ridiculous notion of love and what it pertains. Funny. He didn’t think a fairy could be against the emotion as much as him.

Belle, surprisingly, was having fun with the decoration massacre. There was something so cathartic about destroying these hearts. She let out a giggle and captured the Dark King’s eye. They couldn’t help the smiles that stretched across their lips and as quickly as it did… the quickly it vanished as they nervously looked away.

One thing for certain, they knew that love can be dangerous. It was best to ignore the possibility of it coming to fruition.

Chapter End Notes

Next prompts will be One Night Stand and Indecent Proposal.
Chapter Summary

Readers Prompted: After months had passed since that one night, Ryan Gold and Belle are finally face-to-face once more. (Rated M for language and naughty thoughts)

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! I’m bringing back a fan favorite and I hope you enjoyed it!!! Don’t forget to review!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

One Night Stand

Bae ran ahead of him and Ryan was doing his best to keep up despite his limp. It took him a couple minutes longer, but by the time he got to the children’s section he overheard Bae talking to the enigmatic Miss Belle.

“He’s really good at it. There he is now.” The boy pointed as she turned around.

Ryan Gold immediately felt a swift punch in his gut as he gazed into the blue eyes of the woman he had called Rose months ago.

As for Rose herself (no… her name is Belle, his mind corrected itself) she looked as if she ate something incredibly sour. He had no doubt she was thinking the same thing as him, which was holy fucking shit. Because right at that moment, his thoughts were stuck on a replaying loop of holy fucking shit holy fucking shit holy fucking shit.

He didn’t know what to say. What should he say?

Uh, hi. I’m the man you had sex with in that motel. We were each going through a rough spot and decided a meaningless and no strings attached fuck was exactly what the doctor ordered. By the way, that had been the most life-changing night in my entire life and I tried looking for you but no such luck. Yet my boy here found you and I was wondering…

What? They could try it again? Maybe actually go on a date this time and get to know their real selves as oppose to the fake identities they decided to give each other?

Then it dawned on him.

She was Miss Belle and she was pregnant. That was the whole point in Bae wanting to give her that blanket. She was probably with a young man who was thrilled in becoming a new father, and here he was an old, crippled man who was desperately hanging onto to this dream vision with the hope that it meant something more and that she might feel the same thing as him. He was a fool to think she would give him another thought or even wait around to see if by chance that fate would bring
them together again.

It shouldn’t have hurt. He hardly knew anything about this girl, but seeing her standing beside Bae and with that tiny bump that contained a new life… It hurt. It hurt so goddamn fucking much. Because he was selfish and greedy and wanted to be the father and with Bae they could be a family.

Of course, it was crazy talk and Ryan was being absurd, and if she was smart, then she would run for the hills. Lord knows he wasn’t exactly having sane thoughts at the moment.

However, Ryan put on a friendly (and indifferent) smile and held out his hand.

“It’s nice to finally meet you Miss Belle,” he said, shaking her hand. He noticed how limp the handshake was, and she was trembling but he figured it was the shock she was experiencing. After all, he was a nervous wreck and he was squeezing his cane’s handle to keep himself upright. “Bae has told me a lot about you.”

She swallowed hard. “…Yes… Bae talks about you too.”

It took everything not to close his eyes and savor the sweet sound of her voice caressing his ears.

Giving her a curt nod, Ryan added, “Thank you. Bae really loves coming here. It’s all he ever talks about and it has helped him out of his shell too. I honestly don’t know what I would have done if he didn’t.”

“It’s been my pleasure. Bae is a joy to have around. He’s a great helper, right Bae?”

“Yup!” Bae chimed in.

Ryan chuckled sheepishly. “That’s good to hear. I expect nothing less.”

An awkward silence fell upon them and then suddenly she said, “Thank you for the blanket. It’s really beautiful. You handmade it?”

“Yes.” Ryan could feel the heat creeping on his face. “Everything was handmade.”

“Wow.” She was impressed. Really impressed. Her eyes softened as she ran her fingertips across the soft wool. “Thank you.”

“…And congratulations too. Is this, uh, your first?” He asked.

“Um… yes.” She blushed and it was a lovely shade of color that Ryan briefly recalled how that blush also extended to her breasts.

He swallowed thickly and tried to avoid looking at the said area, but his eyes were drawn to them anyways. They were swollen and he wondered how far along she was and if her milk was already leaking…

*Stop that Ryan! What the Hell is wrong with you?!* His mind scolded him and he cleared his throat, focusing his attention on the bookshelf behind her.

“That’s… good,” he replied. “Boy or girl?”

“I thought I would keep it a surprise.”

“Oh.”
And like that he had run out of things to say. Well, he knew what he really wanted to say and he had so many questions, but Bae was right there and they were in a public place. Not quite the appropriate place or time to bring up anything too adult.

So, Ryan was resigned to play the role of two people meeting for the first time.

“We should be going. It was nice to meet you. Officially.” He added the last part because it was nice to meet her and know what her real name was. He hoped she might feel the same too.

“Same here. Mister…?”

Realizing he never introduced himself, Ryan quickly amended it. “Ryan Gold. But Ryan is fine.”

“Ryan,” she repeated, trying it out.

It was pure euphoria to have her say his name.

She smiled and this time she didn’t have that anxiousness about it. “It was nice to meet you too.”

Chapter End Notes

We have plenty of stories left for these two crazy kids. If there’s something you want to see happen or a point in time you want me to fast forward to… please feel free to prompt me!
5 Indecent Proposal Rated K+

Chapter Summary

Prompt: Belle adjusts to married life and the reactions from her friends. She finds herself defending Gold. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

I loved this verse and I hope you guys enjoy this one too!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Indecent Proposal

It was several days since the practiced kiss that stunned her in his shop and a couple days since she discovered the preserved bedroom of his son. Everything that Belle thought she knew about this man was suddenly on a tilt. He had been so gentle, so full of concern that she didn’t know how to fit this information in with the Gold she had known. The ruthless, deal-maker who targeted helpless souls who were so desperate they would do anything to make ends meet. While she didn’t want to consider herself in that category, Belle had willingly entered into this deal nonetheless.

And now…

Now she was torn.

Altogether, she was seeing a side to Mr. Gold that no one in this town has ever seen. She was seeing that he did have a kind nature beneath the cold exterior and a considerate disposition that it almost had her forgetting his motivations for this deal.

Almost. Not quite.

Belle was anxious to get the deal over and done with, yet Mr. Gold explicitly stated over and over how “authentic” they had to make their marriage appear for this family friendly businessman. She figured by the week’s end this person would show up and see how happily wedded Mr. and Mrs. Gold were, offer the contract, sign it, and be gone. However, Mr. Gold chuckled and told her that he wasn’t expecting this person to come for at least another two weeks.

Two weeks?!?!

The last thing she expected was for the charade to continue that long. On top of it, he also told her that after they meet with him, then they would have to be married for a while longer. There will be negotiations before the signing that would require Mr. Gold and this future partner to travel back and forth until everything is settled. He expected Belle to go with him on these trips so she could be her charming self and make him look all the better. And even after the contract was finalized, she would still have to be Mrs. Gold for at least three months afterwards.
The first month would be marital bliss, the second will introduce marital troubles, and the third and final will involve the divorce after a suitable number of proper attempts to make it “work out.”

To make it look legit, of course, and not a farce.

Not that her contract with Gold spelled all that out. Instead, the fine print alluded to the marriage and the business deal would take the necessary and appropriate time required for it to be fulfilled and for the marriage to dissolve naturally in its course.

Had she known how long this was going to take she would have been more forceful with her refusal. Of course, at the time, she wanted to get it over and done with quickly so she and Grayson could move on with their lives. She wondered if her fiancé even knew about this…

Not that she could ask him.

Of course it did lead to her and Gold having an argument about it. But as much as she wanted to rage about it, she knew she only had herself to blame. She should have insisted on clearer and specific language so she would have known what she was getting into.

Well, she made her bed and had to lay in it until everything about Gold’s business was concluded. She just hoped that Grayson understood the sacrifices she was making for him and their bookstore. He better appreciate it because this was the most difficult thing she had to do.

Furthermore, she had to endure the alienation from the local residents.

She was forewarned by Gold that this was going to happen, and she had this conversation with Grayson as well. Since Gold was so determined to be the most unlikeable person in Storybrooke, he succeeded in his goal and as his wife she would have to face the fact that she wasn’t going to be well-liked either.

Grayson assured her that it wouldn’t be too bad.

“They know you Belle,” he told her. “They know you’re a loving, warm, and caring person. Even if it seems that you’re married to Gold… they know the real you. That won’t change.”

Except it did.

She would get these looks from the customers whenever she entered Granny’s. Of course, they weren’t exactly looks but it was the-not-giving-you-any-type-of-look look. And she would hear their whispers behind her and she knew their words were anything but nice.

Any time she was out in public, this was the type of reaction she was starting to expect. She wished it didn’t sting as much as it did, but the truth was… it hurt so much.

It was like everything she had done previously was suddenly erased. She was a stranger to her town and despite her best efforts to make it seem it didn’t bother her… she couldn’t always hide the tears.

Mr. Gold never commented about it, but she knew that he knew how upset it made her. And that was the other strangest part too. She was getting to know how to read him as he did with her. If she had a bad day in town, he would make her a cup of hot chocolate and hand her favorite book to her so she could curl up with it and get lost. He wouldn’t ask her any questions or try to pry it out of her. He would leave her in peace, which was exactly what she needed.

Grayson had never figured that out. If she was upset, he would want to talk about it or he would tell corny jokes until he got a smile out of her. It got to the point where Belle would smile to stop him
and make him think he made her better, when in fact, she wanted him to leave her alone. Grayson’s heart was in the right place, even though it wasn’t what she needed.

But Mr. Gold knew. He knew.

Likewise if someone had tested him or if he had a run-in with Mayor Mills, then Belle would make a cup of tea for him and serve it with two brown sugar and honey cookies. She had made them once and he couldn’t stop eating them so she made certain there was plenty in the cookie jar. Like her, Mr. Gold also enjoyed his solitude and she was respectful in that regard until he was ready to seek her out for her company.

It was an arrangement they were willing to live with and it wasn’t that bad. If anything it was a little bit scary that she was finding herself becoming more and more comfortable with him. It was growing difficult to hold onto that earlier resentment.

In addition, Belle reached a startlingly revelation about her and Mr. Gold.

It was one afternoon and Belle was leaving the library for her lunch break at Granny’s. Since she couldn’t work at the bookstore (Grayson was still running it and they were to avoid contact), Gold had arranged it where she could work at the library instead. She was still surrounded by books and it was something for her to do rather than sit around in the Victorian house all day. She thought he would insist she help him in his pawnshop, but she liked this alternative more. At least the books didn’t judge her. They were the true friends she could count on at this time.

She arrived at twelve-thirty and took her spot at the counter. A couple seats down from her sat Leroy and Tom Clark, the town drunk and pharmacist respectively. They were already eating and barely acknowledged her, which she was growing used to. She saw Ruby and raised her hand to wave hello. Her best friend returned it although the greeting didn’t reach her eyes.

Yet, Ruby did approach her for her order and Belle mourned the knowledge that their friendship was strictly professional now. As Ruby turned around to get Belle her iced tea, the reluctant Mrs. Gold heard Leroy say loud and clear:

“You better be quick Ruby with her drink. You wouldn’t want Mrs. Gold to be the reason your rent was raised.”

Belle froze at the animosity in his tone and for a second she forgot how to breathe. Did he really think that? Did Ruby?

Apparently her friend did as Ruby delivered the iced tea so fast it would have sent her head spinning. Belle didn’t want them to see how their words affected her, but she couldn’t prevent the slight tremor in her hands as she raised the glass to sip her drink.

But the abuse didn’t stop there.

“Seriously, why do we have to take this? Gold rarely comes in here because he knows he is unwelcomed. But does his wife get that? No! And you want to know what sucks? I used to like her. She was a real lady and now she is no more than a cold-hearted bloodsucker like that husband of hers.”

Belle flinched as if those words hurtled were actual bullets. She should say something. She wanted too but the words were clogged in her throat. She did get a glimpse at Ruby and the waitress was growing furious at Leroy. It made Belle feel a little good that Ruby cared enough to be upset for her.
“All right Leroy, that’s enough,” Ruby said coldly. “Belle is sitting right there. I’m sure she gets it. We all get it about Gold, but enough is enough.”

“I don’t think so,” Leroy went on. “I’m not done. Why should we cater to them? Is it because they’re rich? Or because Gold owns half this town? We all know why they married in the first place. She wanted money because her fiancé wasn’t doing well with that shop and he wanted some young tail to keep his bed warm—”

“How dare you!”

The other diners all stopped what they were doing, even Ruby, as they all looked at Belle. She hadn’t realized the outburst came from her until all eyes were on her. But Belle was standing right there with her fists clenched and her eyes shooting sparks at the ignorant man beside her. Even he was shocked!

“How dare you!” Belle repeated again, her voice sharp and chastising. “In all the years I’ve known you Leroy… that is how you think of me? How this whole town seems to think?! Let me tell you this once and for all: you don’t know a damn thing about me or my husband. If you had any sense at all, then you would know that his money is not something I’m interested in having. I rather work to have my own and my husband respects that about me. He knows I care little about wealth. And for insinuating that he married me for one thing… My husband and I married because we care about each other! But you wouldn’t know about that because you never stopped to ask how we’re doing or see there is nothing licentious in the way he treats me! My husband is a good man despite what you think. And you should be ashamed that you think you have us figured out when you don’t have a single clue. Do me a favor and keep your ridiculous thoughts to yourself!”

She turned her back on Leroy (whose jaw had dropped), set money down for her drink, and left. She was nearing the crosswalk when Belle heard Ruby shouting her name.

She stopped, surprised to see Ruby chasing her, but was even more surprised at what Ruby said next.

“Belle, I am so sorry. I want you to know that I never thought that about you or Gold. I know you’re not that type of person, and the sad thing is… everyone knows that. Leroy was shooting his mouth off because he’s stupid. But… I will admit I did think Gold had less than honorable intentions when you told me the news of you getting married.”

“And now?”

Ruby inhaled. “Well, you seemed pretty intense that he isn’t a pervert and I know you pretty well to know that you wouldn’t be with him if he was. But I have to ask. Is he treating you well?”

“Yes. I couldn’t have asked for a better husband,” she answered.

“Are you happy? Really happy with him?”

Without giving it another thought, she replied, “Yes I am.”

Ruby nodded. “That’s a relief. Oh and here.” She handed Belle a paper bag with her cheeseburger and fries and the cash she left behind. “Your lunch shouldn’t be ruined. It’s on the house. And before you say anything, I insist.”

Wordlessly, Belle accepted the money and food. In that moment she realized that she and Ruby were good once more. She beamed at Ruby and thanked her.
“I’ll see you around Belle!”

On that day, Belle realized she defended Mr. Gold not only to the townspeople, but also to herself. Regardless of her feelings about this fake marriage, Mr. Gold really has taken the steps to ensure her comfort and never push her for anything in return. All he wanted was to score this business contract and nothing else. Any other man in his position might try to get her into bed, but not Mr. Gold.

Telling Ruby that he was the best husband and she was happy with him… none of it was a lie or an act. She really was happy with him. Content, even. Grayson hadn’t figured in her mind. For the first time since she made this deal, Belle didn’t give her fiancé a fleeting thought.

And Belle never felt more conflicted or terrified over what this admission could possibly mean.

Chapter End Notes

Ooh… Belle might be rethinking her future plans. Feel free to prompt me for this one if you want to see something in particular, especially when that businessman comes to meet Gold and his wife!
Chapter Summary

Prompt: The Blue Fairy reveals the antidote to the love potion, which brings back terrible memories for the Dark King. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

I thought I would throw in a new one for this verse too! A lot of you guys seemed to like it and this is one of my favorite moments from the movie itself. Enjoy!

Strange Magic

“Sire! We have the antidote!”

Both the Dark King and Belle looked at the same time as the goblin’s henchmen, Whale and Hatter, came running in with the Blue Fairy trapped in her spider-web like prison. As Hatter approached them, the Dark King snatched the staff that held Blue and barked: “Where is it?”

Belle looked over his shoulder and saw nothing resembling an antidote within the fairy’s cell. Only the Blue Fairy was there floating about with a knowing smile on her lips. With all the materials she needed… Belle wondered if this was a trick of some kind.

The Dark King had the same idea as well as he gave the Blue Fairy a good shake. “I’m warning you… if this is some trick I’ll—”

“You’ll what?” the Blue Fairy taunted. “You’ll lock me away forever? Forgive me your majesty but you’ve already used that threat.”

The Dark King sighed in frustration. Belle knew they weren’t going anywhere with this back and forth and she really wanted Emma cured from her lovelorn attachment.

“Forgive him. We’re all a little impatient,” she said, in the hopes to appease or the very least placate the Blue Fairy. Taking the staff from the goblin, she carried it over to the table and set it down. “But do you have the antidote to help my sister?”

“I do.”

“Great! What does it look like?”

The Blue Fairy giggled. “It’s a riddle!”

“A riddle?!” both Belle and the Dark King sputtered. “What about all those things you wanted?” he demanded.
“It’s hard to shop when you’re in prison!” the Blue Fairy retorted. “Now, are you ready to hear what the antidote is or not?”

“Yes!” Belle exclaimed.

“Very well. The antidote is something more powerful than the potion itself.”

“Something more powerful than the potion?” Belle repeated. “What could be more powerful than a potion or any spell?”

The Dark King smirked. “Usually another potion or spell.”

They looked to Blue for confirmation, but she zipped her lips and shook her head.

Belle tapped her chin as she slowly walked in a circle. “Something more powerful than the potion,” she murmured. If another potion or spell didn’t work, and it was a love potion, then something more powerful would have to be the opposite to counteract it. “I got it!” she cried. “It has to be hate. Hate is stronger than love. After all, it helped me get over any romantic feelings I once had for this guy. So we just need to get Emma to hate you and it is over!”

“I can do that,” the Dark King said, bobbing his head. “It shouldn’t be that difficult to break a wee fairy’s heart.”

“Wrong again!”

The two whipped their heads towards Blue. “How can it be wrong?” Belle questioned.

“Look… I’m getting tired of this guessing game. So I will tell you the antidote in the form of a story.”

Nearby, Hatter whispered to Whale, “Did she say ‘antidote’ or ‘anecdote’?”

“Now, it all begin on one fateful day—” Blue started.

Alarm filled the Dark King’s countenance as he roared: “No!”

Belle saw he was reaching for the staff and she quickly snatched it before he caused any damage. However it didn’t stop Blue from her storytelling.

“The Dark King fell in love—”

“Stop!” he bellowed but his orders fell on deaf ears as Belle listened avidly to Blue. Her mind was focused on learning what the antidote was to save her sister that she didn’t pay attention to the anguish pleas of the Dark King.

As for the Dark King himself… he was already lost in that moment when his life and his kingdom changed for the worse…

xXx

Milah had been the most beautiful creature he ever beheld. She was different from most goblins in that she took great pride in her appearance. Her hair was as black as a raven’s with two bulbous green eyes and lips as red as the inside of a Venus fly trap.

He was infatuated with her the moment he laid eyes on her.
He had to make her his queen. No one else would do.

His attempts at courtship went unnoticed and his gifts he would leave for her were ignored. Nothing he did seemed to please her or give him the opportunity to bask in her beauty and attention.

It was as if he didn’t exist in her eyes.

Even invoking his kingship didn’t have the desired affect he had hoped would transpire.

So it left the Dark King with only one other option.

He called for the Blue Fairy.

It was no secret her specialty was making love potions for anyone who came to her. Even someone as dreadful as the Dark King deserved to have love in his life so she did not hesitate when he requested her presence.

All he needed to give her was a primrose.

Thus, the Dark King sought one and promptly delivered. His heart was full of Milah and he couldn’t wait for the moment for her to return his love.

It didn’t take long for the Blue Fairy to make and she gave him two simple steps to follow:

1. Dust the eyes of the person you love.
2. Be the first to stand in front of them.

Whispering those two steps to himself, the Dark King went searching for his precious Milah. He soon found her lounging on the banks of the swamp, her midnight hair fanned out over the leaves and fungi. She looked so peaceful, so happy that he didn’t want disturb her. But he reminded himself that she will be his queen soon and the sooner the better.

Taking a deep breath, he approached her with the love potion behind his back. He had to time this perfectly for it to be a moment worth remembering for the rest of their lives.

As he drew closer, he removed the cork from the bottle and stood over her. His shadow casted itself over her face as her nose scrunched up for being interrupted. As her eyelids began to open… the Dark King quickly sprinkled the love potion on them.

She coughed and closed her eyes, rubbing the potion deeper into them.

This was it!

The Dark King stood close so his would be the first face she sees. As she once more began to open them, he held himself with abated breath.

Milah blinked as she gazed into his amber eyes almost dreamily.

He saw his chance and poured his heart out to her. During his declarations, her expression changed from being dazed to alarm to finally disgust.

“What are you doing?!” she cried, pushing him away from her. “I never told you I loved you or wanted to be with you! How can I? You might be my king but you’re too ugly for me to love. Go away and leave me alone!”
The Dark King’s heart ripped in half as Milah ran as fast as she could away from him. The potion didn’t work... the potion DIDN’T work.

And her words echoed in his ear... too ugly too ugly too ugly too ugly too ugly.

The potion failed because he was too ugly.

With a hideous howl, the Dark King flew back to his castle where the Blue Fairy was waiting to hear the results. Seeing his outrage, her brow hitched in confusion but it was too late. He ordered his men to seize her. She tried to speak but he silenced her.

“Take the prisoner to the dungeon. Make sure no one has access to the cell.” Once the Blue Fairy was out of his sight, he made the following creed:

“Let it be known from now on in the Dark Forest that love is to be banned forever. There will be no mention of the word and anyone who is caught creating or using love potion will be jailed for the rest of their miserable lives! And to make certain no one is tempted... destroy the primroses. Starting immediately.”

xXx

Love was dangerous. Love destroyed people. And now the Dark King was wallowing in the misery he wanted so badly to forget.

Belle looked at him with a new sense of understanding. She wasn’t the only one to be burned by love. A sudden urge to go to him and put her arms around him flitted in her mind, but Belle kept her distance. She doubted her need to comfort would be well received as the Dark King turned his back on them.

“She couldn’t love me even after I used the potion,” he whispered. “I’m too ugly to be loved.”

“You’re not ugly,” Belle said.

A jolt went down his spine as he faced the fairy princess with a bewildered look. She flashed him a tender smile and he felt himself returning it.

“But that’s not why the potion didn’t work,” Blue told them, seizing their attention. “She was in love with someone else.”

Both the fairy and the goblin’s eyes widened in astonishment as the antidote became clearer to them.

“The only thing powerful than the potion…” the Dark King said.

“...is love itself,” Belle finished.

Chapter End Notes

Now they finally know how to help Emma, but who does she love? Would a sister’s love work? Stay tune and keep prompting my lovely readers! I know the next prompt I will certainly add will be from The Lost World, but please feel free to prompt me for any of these preexisting story verses!
5 The Lost World Rated T

Chapter Summary

Sage_of_Earth prompted: It's been two years since the explorers have been lost on the Plateau. While out searching for a way home, Belle and Rumpton come across a fissure in a mountain. Within they find a quaint little village but are almost run done by a fugitive outlaw who Belle is mistaken for as the culprit. Inspired by the episode 2x16 The Outlaw. (Rated T for violence)

Chapter Notes

When I got this prompt, I literally squealed for joy. This is another episode that is a favorite between Marguerite and Roxton, and naturally was screaming to be Rumbelled. I hope you all enjoy!

The Lost World

It was another lovely day in paradise.

The sun was shining, the foliage was healthy and vibrant, and the roar of a T-Rex was far off in the distance but not close enough to cause alarm.

Yes… it was truly a perfect day.

Even Belle French could not find reason to complain about today. Her usual litany and barbed words were curtailed to the bare minimum, which was a record for the heiress, especially in the company of a certain handsome Scottish lord.

If she had to admit… Belle was quite enjoying the company of the rugged hunter.

Even Lord Rumpton was pleased with how today was turning out to be. Not only was the weather bright and sunny, but also he had the good fortune of Miss French joining him on his latest expedition to look for a way off the Plateau. She didn't need much encouragement (which was a first) and he didn't mind that she tagged along only to escape garden duty with the others.

Truthfully, any time he can be alone with her… he welcomed it.

Ever since they first met, Rumpton had been intrigued with her. Belle French was an accomplished woman but also full of contradictions. She could run cold and hot in a split second; make it appear she was betraying her friends only to help them in the end; greedy and selfish when it came to gems and money but be compassionate and generous when she needed to be. She was also an enigma. The fact she only needed to hear a language spoken to become instantly fluent, she had an uncanny sense of direction, and she would often tease about certain aspects of her life in a way that one can either believe happened or believe to be a joke. David Nolan was usually at the receiving end of such jests but she would often taunt Rumpton about becoming the next of her long parade of husbands.
She would laugh. He was seriously contemplating it.

Somehow during the course of the two years they have been stuck here… Rumpton had fallen in love with her. And he believed she may have developed feelings for him too.

Regardless of her teasing, Belle has shown more often than not emotion whenever it came to the hunter. Like the one time he had turned into a vampire. Belle could have easily killed him or given up on him, but she refused to let him become a monster and shot dead his maker. And the other time when Belle orchestrated for him to fight again as a gladiator with the lizard-man Killian as his partner in order to save his life. Even when he, Nolan, and Reginald had fallen off the bridge and were thought dead… Belle held onto his hat, making dents into the fabric with her nails from clutching it too tight. And the sight of her misty eyes of relief when she saw he was alive.

It was moments like those and many others that the snobbish woman would show heart.

But she could turn around and deny everything. He never forgot how their deliriously happy "twins" were planning their wedding and she vehemently denied having any kind of feelings for him. She claimed her double must have suffered a stroke or a brain aneurysm to confuse Rumpton's double as a desirable husband. Or how she had apologized to Nolan after going too far in her ruthless editing of his journals, telling him he was like a brother to her, but swore death if he told anyone.

Indeed, the explorers and the jungle princess Snow have become a family of sorts. There was always the occasional squabble and bickering that would accompany them, but when it truly mattered… they had each other's backs. A long time ago that may not have been an objective for Miss French, but she has proven herself to be as resourceful and invaluable as a team player for survival. Of course, Miss French's way was not always acceptable with the others, especially Snow. The two were constantly at each other's throats in the beginning, but have cautiously become sister-like. They never fully agree on anything but have reached a mutual understanding.

Then again, nothing was ever easy with Miss French. Just when Rumpton thought he had her figured out, Belle would throw him a curveball as Nolan might say. She kept him on his toes all right and Rumpton wouldn't change a single damn thing about her.

Well… he would prefer it if she opened up more to him. The woman was always guarded, always suspicious of his motives. Sarcasm and insults were her defense mechanisms and he couldn't help but wonder what made her that way. What happened to Belle French?

And that, dear friends, was a mystery worth solving even if it took a lifetime.

"What are you smiling about Lord Rumpton?" Belle asked her suddenly quiet companion. Usually the hunter would not shut up about the Plateau or asking her trivial questions about her life. Silence was not a good fit for Lord Rumpton and that smile could hold promises or trouble.

"Oh, I was thinking how nice this is with the two of us together. Walking, exploring."

They came upon a stream and Belle bent down to fill her canteen. Rumpton followed suit as he looked at her hopefully and hesitantly for a response. It was sweet he was being considerate and not pushing for something out of her. He knew how skittish she could be whenever an intimate remark was made and she appreciated he wasn't pressuring her. Her third husband was not as considerate. But Belle was feeling relaxed and quite at ease and… playful.

"Yes this is nice." She flashed him a soft, tender smile that had the hunter returning it with vigor. "Although a refreshing swim would be nicer!" Using her arm, she splashed a torrent of water at his face and shirt, laughing carefree as Rumpton sputtered from the impromptu shower.
After shaking the excess water off him, he narrowed his eyes as Belle could not stop grinning ear-to-ear. "How is it?" she asked innocently.

Those brown eyes had a glint of mischief in them as he kicked his own wave at her and chased her with his canteen. She shrieked and tried to get away before she was soaked but the hunter soon cornered his prey against a tree.

"Do you surrender?" He smirked.

She shook her head, biting her lips. "Never."

"Too bad."

Before Belle could block him, Rumpton poured his entire canteen over her head. Her curls were completely drenched and her blouse was sticking to her, but she knew when she had to admit defeat.

The expression on his face was simply endearing and boyish. Despite his tragic history, she was happy to see him behave so childishly and without the burdens hanging over him. He needed the lightness to soften the dark and lately Belle has been the one to make it happen.

The light-heartedness of the moment soon paused as Rumpton looked up and excitement spread over his features.

"What is it?" she inquired as she stood next to him.

"There. It looks like a cave in that mountain. Maybe it could lead us to a way home." Rumpton turned on his heels to quickly refill his water and picked up his rifle.

"You want to check it out now?"

"Why not? Up for an adventure?" He wiggled his eyebrow teasingly.

"On this Plateau... every second is an adventure," she muttered.

xxXXxx

"Look! I'm getting a signal!" exclaimed Nolan as he saw the sun's reflection of the signal mirror from Belle and Rumpton. Whipping out his notepad, he began to write out the message and then translated it to Snow and Reginald. "Found fissure. Going to check if there's a passage."

"A fissure? That's incredible! Excellent news." Reginald was beyond thrilled at the prospect. Snow, on the other hand, appeared uneasy.

"I know the cave they're talking about. It leads into another swamp filled with very nasty and hungry dinosaurs."

The two men were disappointed at the news, but they knew the others had to be warned about the dangers. Reginald handed Nolan the signal mirror and the reporter quickly sent the message. Minutes went by and there was not a reply from the heiress or the hunter.

"Damn. They must have left," Nolan said.

Reginald looped his rifle's handle over his shoulder. "We better go after them. If what Snow says is true... they'll get out real fast."

xxXXxx
"I don't like the looks of this cave," Belle said, her eyes darting about nervously as she stayed close to the hunter and his torch.

"There's nothing to be frightened Belle. See? There's a light at the end." He pointed to the end of the tunnel where a white light was seen ahead.

"That doesn't look ominous at all," she mumbled.

As they drew closer, Rumpton didn't see the need to carry the torch and tossed it to the side as he went through. Belle reluctantly followed knowing if anything happened to him, then she would be blamed.

_The man has a death wish I swear_, she thought as she automatically shielded her eyes from the intensity of the bright light. Belle couldn't see her companion or anything in front of her. She called out his name with a tinge of panic in her tone (much to her dismay) and was relieved as Rumpton answered her.

"Take my hand," he ordered and she quickly obeyed. The light grew brighter with each passing step and it was difficult to tell which direction they were heading. A very loud and distinct booming sound ricocheted around them until they finally emerged from the other end where they were able to get away from the light's aim. Once Rumpton was able to see clearly, he pointed to a rock that was across the valley. "Look Belle! It's reflecting the sun like a mirror."

"Fascinating," she grumbled indifferently. "Where the Hell are we?"

"I don't know but it doesn't look ominous," he teased her, reflecting her earlier choice of word when they entered. "See?" He pointed to a village that was at the bottom of the mountain. "Looks rather peaceful, don't you think?"

Belle shrugged. "I assume we are going down there."

"Don't be so glum. This is an adventure, remember?"

"How could I forget?" she murmured sarcastically as they began to follow the trail below.

From where they stood above the village didn't seem far away, but as they reached the lower terrain they realized they weren't as close as they had thought. Belle was quite content to turn around and call it a day, but Rumpton wouldn't hear of it. They already came this far and what's a few extra miles?

The hike ended up being lengthy and after an hour Belle needed a break.

Sitting against a tree, Belle took a long and thirsty drink from her canteen. "How much further do you think it is?"

Rumpton looked over his shoulder and couldn't help but notice how the sun seemed to catch her hair. She was a sight of beauty to behold even though she would scoff and comment how she was exhausted and sweaty and don't patronize her. Yes... she was his temperamental beauty and he couldn't help strolling up to her and leaning his arm against the tree.

"What's the hurry?" His voice dropped a couple of octaves, his brogue practically purring.

Belle saw her hunter was on the prowl. She couldn't help the little curl of her lips as she pushed her feet up so she was almost eye-to-eye with him. Arching her defiant brow, Belle replied sultrily, "What do you exactly have in mind _Lord_ Rumpton?" The sharp emphasis of his title was something
she took delight in doing, and the way his nostrils and pupils would flare and dilate always gave her a thrill. She had him under her thumb and she suspected he rather enjoyed submitting to her when they engaged in their flirtatious banter.

"I can think of a thing or two," he murmured as he closed his eyes and began to drift towards her welcoming lips.

A loud whinny surprised the couple as Rumpton whirled around to see a horse and its rider nearly on top of them. As the horse dropped its legs down, he espied the rider wearing a black cape and mask covering the nose and mouth. Instantly, his hand drew up his Webley and aimed it at the interloper.

"I wouldn't," he warned the rider and with another whinny they were gone. But the shock of seeing the explorers must have frightened the horse enough that a bag attached to the saddle fell as soon as it galloped away. Replacing his pistol back in its holster, Rumpton picked up the bag and frowned at the weight.

"What the Hell was that about?!" Belle cried.

"I don't know but that person looked like an outlaw to me," he told her, holding up the bag and shaking the contents.

The chiming jingling of coins captured Belle's attention as she ripped the bag from Rumpton's hand. Looking inside was exactly what she thought it was… Money. Loads of money.

Her rapture was suddenly gone as the hunter snatched the loot away from her. "She probably stole it from the village. We should return it to the rightful owner."

"No way! She almost ran us down. I say we keep it for our troubles." She reached for the bag, but he held it up higher so she couldn't grab it.

"Belle…" he warned. "For all we know this money could belong to someone who was depending on it for rent or food."

"Fine." She spat, crossing her arms and pouting. "I still say finders' keepers."

"I know you do," he said grinning.

At last they had arrived in the heart of the village. The clothes were outdated on its residents almost eighteenth century, early nineteenth century. It was a rustic village with farm animals roaming about and the people milling about house to house and bartering. It was also very noisy as far as the couple was concerned.

However, no one seemed to notice or care the outsiders passing through.

"This doesn't seem like a bad place," remarked Rumpton.

"Compared to what?" Belle looked around. "Well, since you are so hell-bent on finding the owner, where do you suggest we look?"

Before he could respond, they couldn't help but overhear a woman shouting:

"Come back when ye can stand straight!"

She was an older woman with silver, frizzy hair but she wasn't messing around as she gave the
obvious inebriated man a left hook. Satisfied, she rubbed her hands together and waltzed back into her establishment… the tavern.

Noting her companion's look, Belle whispered, "Care for a drink?"

He smirked. "It's been a while since you bought me a pint."

"Oh really?" The laughing tone was back in her voice as they headed towards the pub.

They heard piano music playing over the uproariously chatter and laughter as they came closer. As soon as they entered, the music and talking ceased as everyone stared at the strangers. It was a complete contrast compared to how the other villagers didn't seem to care and Belle and Rumpton exchanged looks as they brushed it off and walked up to the bar.

The woman they had seen punching the drunken patron was already behind the counter and polishing it clean. She stopped as she noticed the two new customers and gave them a disdainful once-over.

"Can I help ye?"

"Um, yes, we are hoping you can," Rumpton said, placing the bag they found on the counter.

"Granny! How about another round?" shouted someone.

"Shut yer trap Roy!" Granny barked as she eyed the bag suspiciously. Lowering her voice, she said, "Look here. If ye don't want trouble ye put that away if ye know what's best fer ye."

Rumpton frowned. "We only wanted to return it."

"Yeah. The woman who almost ran us down dropped it," Belle added.

"Sure she did," Granny said not believing them.

"It's true," Rumpton replied adamantly.

"Oi! What's that?"

The explorers turned as a tall man with dark brown hair and a beard stood close by. The stench of stale ale on his breath had Belle making a face as he leered at her.

"What a lovely thing ye are," he said, his gray eyes flashing lasciviously.

"Oh stop," Belle retorted with an eye roll, yet Rumpton moved a little bit in front of her. He didn't like the way the man was staring at Belle as if he was undressing her with his eyes.

The man sneered at Rumpton but the look on his face changed when he looked over his shoulder. Without warning, the man pulled out a flintlock pistol and half-cocked it. "Where did ye get that?" he demanded.

"Nottingham ye fool!" Granny said sternly. "Put that away! I don't want any more shootings."

"A'right Granny but I'm just gonna to put these two under arrest."

"Arrest?" Belle scoffed. "For what?"
"Stealing," the Sheriff said as if it was obvious.

"We didn't steal anything," Rumpton explained. "The woman who did almost ran—"

"That's enough! Yer coming with me."

A few minutes later the couple found themselves behind bars and their weapons and supplies taken. All the while they protested their innocence, but were only met with derision and ridicule. No one would listen or even care what they had to say.

"I'm telling you, you have the wrong people! The real fugitive is out there and could be halfway to Peru by now!" Belle cried, wrapping her hands around the bars.

"Right and she gave the money to ye," Nottingham mocked getting a few chuckles from his deputies.

"See? This is what happens when you try to do the right thing," Belle glared at Rumpton who hardly said a word since their arrest.

At that moment a new visitor arrived. His clothes were a better stylish quality compared to the others in the village. If anything the older man oozed power and wealth as he strode over to the Sheriff's desk and picked up the bag.

"Good work Nottingham. Appears I have it all back," the gentleman said after looking inside.

"Hey!" Belle called and succeeded in getting his attention. "We returned that money back to you. The least you can do is free us and give us a reward."

"Reward?" The owner of the money approached her. His features were anything but friendly. "It looks to me you're right where you belong."

Belle's reaction was comical. "What do you mean…?"

"For months you have robbed, threatened, and mocked me," he accused. "The decent thing you can do is grovel at my feet."

Rumpton got to his feet and walked over. "I'm sure Belle is guilty for many things, but there is no way she did any of those things to you."

Belle nodded. "My friend speaks the truth."

"You honestly believe I wouldn't recognize my own tormentor?" he spat. "No… You both will face the judge tomorrow and justice will be swift."

Turning on his heel, he ordered Nottingham, "Make sure our outlaw and her accomplice receive the proper hospitality that they so kindly bestowed us."

"Yes sir Mr. Spencer." Nottingham saluted.

Groaning, Belle turned and plopped herself on the bench. "Could this day get any better?"

Late afternoon Belle and Rumpton were taken out in chains to the village square where a table and
judge sat with the gallows behind him. Already two nooses were set up in dangling anticipation.

"Looks like we know the verdict," Belle muttered to her companion. There was a twinge of despair in her voice that Rumpton tried to placate.

"I won't leave you for the hangman's noose," he promised. "Now roll over."

"What?" Belle hissed as Rumpton did a quick survey and slammed his shoulder into Belle so she would fall. With all the attention on her, Rumpton took off running to find a place to break his foot chains and find a weapon so they could get the Hell out of there.

He hated leaving her, even for a moment, but he had little choice if he wanted them to escape with their lives intact. Once he freed himself he would be in a position to help Belle, which he prayed she would understand. He found the smithery and used the hammer to break the chains in two. His handcuffs would have to wait for now but at least he wouldn't have to worry about tripping.

Hearing Nottingham and his goons searching for him, Rumpton hid until he was able to hit the Sheriff over the head to take his gun. Now armed, the hunter was able to go back for Belle. When he caught sight of her… the image had his blood running cold.

Spencer had a gun aimed at her head.

Moving slowly so not to give Spencer reason to shoot, Rumpton went towards them. "Don't do this," he told Spencer. "Just let her go. You have your money. We'll leave and never come back. You have my word."

"A thief's word is useless," the older man rejoined. "Now drop your gun or I will put her down." Then to throw salt into the wound. "You know I can't miss from here."

Belle looked at him imploringly. There was genuine fear in her blue eyes and Rumpton couldn't risk having her hurt or worse.

So he dropped his gun and kicked it away.

Spencer moved away from Belle. "Thank you." He pointed at Rumpton and fired.

The bullet slammed into his shoulder, the blow taking him off-guard as Rumpton fell. Belle's screams filled his ears but there was nothing he could do as the searing pain ripped through him. All he could think was I failed you Belle. I'm sorry.

He wasn't dead but he wasn't exactly ready to fight back. He was lifted by his arms and dragged back to the jail with Belle being pulled behind. While it hurt like the dickens to be dragged, Rumpton knew the bullet passed through and was thankfully not trapped in him.

He was roughly tossed back into the cell and managed to catch his balance so he could fall on the bench. Belle was thrown in as well and she immediately went to his aid, putting her hands over the wound to stop the flow of blood. Tears were streaming down her face as she beckoned the others to get a doctor. He tried assuring her that he was all right, but even the hunter knew that if the wound was left untreated… his chances of survival were slim.

Belle marched to the cell door and once more demanded that a doctor be called in to help Rumpton. Spencer was unmoved by her emotional pleas until Belle got down on her knees and begged for her friend's life to be spared.

Spencer smirked. "That seems to be a bit better. If you want him to be treated, then you will do it
Belle’s jaw dropped. She couldn't believe what Spencer had said but time was running out. She would have to cauterize the wound or Rumpton would bleed out.

A poker and a bucket of embers were provided. Belle sat beside Rumpton until the poker was hot enough to do its job.

"You need to make sure you keep it there until all the blood vessels are sealed. Is that understood?" Rumpton asked her.

She nodded wordlessly. Never in her life had she done something like this. Belle had seen her fair share of injuries, even assisted in bandaging her party if someone was hurt. But never did she have to cauterize a person. And worse? It was Lord Rumpton she was going to have to do it too.

"It's all right. It's going to hurt me more than you," he teased despite the seriousness of the situation. It didn't do much to help Belle's nerves, but she appreciated it nonetheless.

Once she had the poker in hand, she stood over Rumpton as she moved his shirt aside so she could see his wounded shoulder. She couldn't fall apart on him when he needed her the most. So Belle pressed her lips firmly together as she lowered the poker and held it as the skin sizzled and burned. Rumpton did his best to muffle his screams but a couple slipped out until he passed out.

Meanwhile Snow, Nolan, and Reginald were approaching the fissure when a horse and its rider went full speed ahead towards them. All three leapt away in time to avoid being run over but that didn't stop the rider. She slid off her horse and with a pistol in hand, she ordered: “Give me your weapons.”

Snow wasn't one for intimidation and kicked the pistol out of robber's hand. Nolan and Reginald each took an arm and held the wriggling thief as Snow pulled off her mask to reveal… Belle!

"Let me go!" Belle shouted but her voice was different… Even her accent was unusual. Not to mention her clothes were not what she wore when she left the Treehouse that morning and Rumpton was nowhere in sight. "I swear you will be sorry!"

The woman may not be dressed like Belle but she certainly threatened like the heiress.

And since she came from the fissure… there was a good chance this lookalike might have seen their friends.

"Who are you?" Snow demanded. "Where are our friends?"

"I don't know who you're talking about," the woman spat.

"I think you do. There were a man and a woman traveling together and she happens to look like you." Snow pulled out her trusty knife from her boot and flashed it in front of the woman's face. "I would start talking if I were you."

"You heard her," Nolan advised. "Snow is really good with that knife."

The woman looked around and saw there was no way out. Sighing in defeat, she relented. "My name is Lacey. I saw your friends head towards my village but there's no use in looking for them. They are probably dead already."
"What is that supposed to mean?" Reginald gave her a good shake.

"If you must know… I robbed a truly horrible and evil man. He has ruined my life and so I was returning the favor. I was making my escape when I ran into your friends and unfortunately dropped one of the bags of money I stole. Spencer doesn't take kindly to strangers. Especially with those who have his money."

"There could be a chance they're alive," Snow said. Looking at Lacey with a grin, she continued. "Our friends don't give up as easy so you're coming with us."

When Rumpton came to, he found Belle kneeling on the floor by the bench with her fingers gently threading through his hair. The ministration was sheer bliss that he didn't want it to end. However, sensing he was awake, Belle stopped so she could check on his wound.

The bleeding stopped and it didn't look infected. All good signs in her book as relief flooded her countenance.

She had lost count the times they have come close to death but with Rumpton… he courted Death on a regular basis. One of these days his number would be up and Belle knew she didn't want to be around to witness that day.

Rumpton's finger came up to delicately trace her lower jaw as he offered her a tender smile. "You saved my life."

"You promised you wouldn't leave me for the hangman," she told him.

"Is that the only reason?"

There was no question the vulnerability between them. In particular with Belle as she couldn't shake the image away of seeing Rumpton shot over and over again. For so long she has guarded her heart and now… Now she could see how things could change in a split second and she didn't want him to die. Not now, not ever.

"No." Her answer came out softly.

It must have been the answer he wanted as Rumpton drew her closer and she willingly went as their mouths brushed over the other gently. As they pulled away, Rumpton sighed happily.

"I should get shot more often."

A few hours later the two switched places: Belle was on the bench, sleeping; and Rumpton was walking around the cell. His shoulder still had the dull throb from the bullet and cauterizing, but he was feeling much better. He could even move it around a bit.

Rumpton was feeling gratification for his recovery since Spencer seemed disappointed he did not die. However, the latter did comment, "I suppose the rope won't go to waste now."

"Why are you doing this?" Rumpton tried asking again. "You have to know that Belle and I are not responsible for the theft."

To Rumpton's shock, Spencer revealed this surprising admission. "I know you didn't. But the people… the Masked Bandit is a fine catch. They like a good public execution and as the public servant… I must give them what they want. Even if I have to pass your friend off as the Masked
Bandit, then so be it."

"All at the expense of the innocent?" Rumpton shot back. "This didn't have to go that far. You did that. Your people could forgive you if you didn't give them the hanging they wanted. Besides, what about the real thief? What then?"

Spencer gave a half-hearted shrug. "I suppose she's long gone. Or she will be soon. At sundown tomorrow whatever lies beyond the fissure will be gone forever."

"What are you talking about?" Rumpton looked at him with confusion.

"Every year for two days the sun hits that group of rocks in the valley and we are transported to a different world. Last year was the desert, the year before a frozen wasteland. Then afterwards we go back to our normal way of life."

"We have until sundown tomorrow to leave. I think we can make our escape."

Spencer snorted. "You can certainly try but there will be no escaping the hangman. You might as well try and get some well-rested sleep. We can't have you looking haggard to the good people." Then rising, Spencer told Rumpton to have "a good night" and left the hunter to ponder.

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At the crack of dawn, the explorers were aroused from their slumber with the Sheriff banging a cup against the metal bars.

"Time to wake up and smell the rope," Nottingham said in what he thought was witty.

Belle could only shake her head in disgust but even more so as the Sheriff gave her a wink.

"Ye know... I might be able to put in a good word that ye repented if ye—" Before he could finish that sentence, Belle sauntered up to the bar with a seductive smile playing over her lips. Then her expression changed to revulsion as she spat into his face.

"How's that for repentance?" she asked sweetly.

"Son of a—" The Sheriff wiped the saliva off him and was about to reach through to grab her, but Rumpton intervened.

"If you lay one hand on her... I will kill you." The look in his eye was no joke and the Sheriff audibly gulped. Then he recalled he was the one in charge and ordered his men to get the chains ready.

Once more, Belle and Rumpton were back facing the gallows.

"Boy, this really brings back déjà vu," Belle said sardonically.

Spencer stood beside them as he read off the list of charges to the judge. A noise arose from the crowd as Spencer had to stop and to the explorers' joy... the others showed up with the masked woman in toll.

Snow pointed to her. "Here's the real Masked Bandit! Now release our friends or—"

But the Masked Bandit wasn't going to be apprehended as she elbowed Nolan in the stomach and quickly took his gun from his side. Chaos erupted as Snow gave chase and Reginald and Nolan (now recovered) began to fight Nottingham's men to save their friends.
Rumpton tackled Nottingham, disarming him in the process, and slapped the man hard across the face. The blow did knock Nottingham out so Rumpton was able to fish through his pockets for the key to the handcuffs and chains. He quickly freed himself and turned to free Belle, but saw that she was being hauled off by Spencer. Before he could go after them, Rumpton was attacked from behind. Turning around, the hunter fought back as the rest of his friends did what they could to fend off the deputies.

"We need to have that woman here!" Nolan shouted.

"Where did Snow go?" Reginald yelled.

The reporter was able to see the jungle princess running towards a tavern of sorts. "I see Snow!"

"We're getting outnumbered," Reginald warned, as he and the other two men knew they had to come up with a plan and quick.

Rumpton looked at the gallows when an idea took root. "I have an idea. You guys go with Snow and I'll meet you there with Belle. Hurry!"

They split up as Reginald and Nolan charged towards the tavern. Rumpton had a promise to fulfill.

As soon as she saw their friends, Belle knew they were saved. However she hadn't expected everything to go to Hell the way it did, but once everyone was fighting, she turned to fight her guard. She managed to knock him to the ground, but Spencer grabbed her around the waist, his pistol digging into her rib.

"You're coming with me!" he growled and began dragging her away from the others.

She wanted to call out for Rumpton but he was too busy with Nottingham and by the time he noticed she was gone… he was already distracted with another deputy. It was up to Belle now and she had to come up with something fast if she wanted to save her hide.

"This is going to end now!" Spencer seemed hell-bent on getting rid of her that Belle blurted out the first thing that came to her.

"If you shoot me now, then you're going to have an angry mob on your hands."

That stopped Spencer in his tracks as he looked back at the throng of people. Gritting his teeth, he let out a frustrated sound, which Belle couldn't help but smirk. She was right and he knew it. Considering how badly he wanted to execute her… Belle knew he would be denying his adoring public the thing they wanted most.

Muttering a few curses, Spencer turned and pulled her back towards the hangman's noose. She thought Rumpton would have been freed by now but Belle's face fell the instant she realized her friends were completely gone. On the other hand, Spencer was practically gloating when he saw the look of despair and horror that she was truly alone now.

Belle began tugging on her restraints, yet Spencer kept a firm grip as he managed to get her to the noose and the executioner. One look at the figure all in black and Belle couldn't prevent the tears. This was not how she pictured her death to be. Not when she had so many unanswered questions left. How will she ever know the truth about—?

"Any last words?" Spencer interrupted as the hangman slipped the rope around her throat.
Feeling the coarseness of the rope, Belle knew there was no use in fighting. "Damn you Rumpton," she said.

"Very well." Spencer took a step closer. "Goodbye whoever you are." He stepped down from the scaffold.

Belle closed her eyes and breathed in deeply. This is it, she thought miserably.

"Careful Belle. I might be tempted to leave you after all." The whispered voice in her ear had Belle jumping as she twisted her face at the hood-covered man. The voice was gruff but there was no mistaking the Scottish accent underneath.

Rumpton winked at her through the eye-slit when Spencer realized he hadn't started his duty.

"Get on with it!" Spencer ordered. "Hang her!"

Removing the hood, Rumpton gazed down at the dumbfounded mayor saying, "Sorry but not today."

Using the keys he pilfered, Rumpton removed the cuffs and took off the noose. "Run to the tavern," he instructed her and jumped down below. Belle followed suit as they fought and ran their way to the meeting place.

Once they were safely inside the tavern, Nolan and Reginald barred the doors and took their positions at the windows to shoot at Spencer and his men.

"I made a trip for these," Nolan told Rumpton, throwing the hunter his trusted Webley's. The Scottish lord couldn't help kissing his precious babies as he smashed the window with his elbow so he could have a clear shot.

Belle found Snow holding down the real Masked Bandit and marched over there to see who this woman was for getting them into this trouble in the first place. Snow tried to warn her but Belle didn't listen as she ripped the mask off.

The heiress was floored at seeing the identical woman. It seemed her twin wasn't at all surprised but Belle saw only red as she lunged at her.

"This is all your fault!" she screamed, smacking her across the face. "I could have hanged for your crimes!"

"Belle, stop!" Snow cried as she stepped in to stop the two women from pummeling the other. Lacey managed to get one over Belle as she pinned Belle's arms to the floor. Belle squirmed and tried to buck the other woman off her, but Snow was losing patience as she pulled Lacey off her friend and stood in the middle of them.

"This has to stop!" Snow told them. "Your enemy right now is out there, not here. Now Belle… you have a right to be upset. I don't blame you but you have to listen to Lacey here. She's as much a victim as you."

"Really?" Dripping with sarcasm, Belle placed her hands on her hips and waited for what the woman had to say. In her mind it better be good or Belle was going to hand her personally over to Spencer.

As for Lacey, she saw she had no choice. "Spencer and I go way back, unfortunately. This tavern was originally owned by me and my husband. We had been doing well and Spencer's greedy little
paws wanted a hand in our business. He propositioned me in the hopes I would sell the place. I refused. The next thing I knew we were being sabotaged. Our barrels of ale were being replaced with water or moldy barrels. We were even robbed on more than one occasion. Eventually, my husband was killed and I was forced to sell the tavern. After losing everything, I made a vow that I would ruin Spencer the way he ruined me. I am sorry that you and your friend got mixed up in all this. It was never my intention for anyone to be involved, but I was in a hurry to leave this village forever that I kept running, not wanting to look back."

The shootout with the men suddenly came to a halt as Nolan told the others he saw the deputies lighting up torches.

"If we're going to do something, then we better do it fast," the American warned everyone.

"No doubt they're going to try and smoke us out of here," Reginald explained.

"Or burn us," added Lacey.

Rumpton looked around and spotted a ladder leading to the roof. "We might be able to get out of here by crawling on the roof."

"Excellent plan Rumpton," Reginald told him. "Let's go."

"Wait." Belle stopped Lacey. "I have another idea."

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"Burn it down." Spencer gave the direct order to Nottingham. "They will have only one way to escape and we will be ready for them."

"Yes Mr. Spencer. You heard him! Light it up!" the Sheriff shouted.

As the deputies were about to throw their torches, the door opened and the Masked Bandit emerged.

"Don't!" she called out. "I'll surrender if you let the others go free. They are innocent Spencer and you know it."

The men looked to their mayor as he stared at his adversary for so long. "Come here and we'll negotiate a deal for your friends."

"As long as they can walk out alive Spencer, then you have a deal." She moved towards him as Spencer gave an imperceptible nod to his Sheriff. Spencer seized her just as Nottingham and his men threw their torches into the tavern.

"NO!" the Masked Bandit cried but Spencer laughed.

"You were a fool to think I would make a deal with an outlaw," he said.

"Actually…" She hit him in the groin and took his pistol from him. "I was hoping you wouldn't."

Realizing she played him so he would set his own tavern on fire, Spencer glared at her in silent fury. Pulling down her mask, Belle smirked as Spencer's eyes widened in astonishment.

"I thought…" he started.

"That I wasn't your Masked Bandit?" she finished for him. "My accomplice told me that. Well guess
what? You were right all along. And this is your final punishment for all the wrongs you have committed and will ever think of committing."

Without warning, Belle whipped the pistol across his jaw and quickly whistled for her horse. As the animal came charging in, she grabbed the reins, hopped on, and started galloping before Spencer or any of his men could stop her.

She rode hard through the jungle until she came to the fissure where the others were waiting for her. Her smile and infectious laugh could not be contained as she told them about Spencer.

"You should have seen his face when he realized I tricked him."

Sliding off the horse, Belle took the reins and handed them to Lacey (who happened to be wearing Belle's blouse and skirt). "He shouldn't bother you anymore."

"Thank you. I don't know what else to say," Lacey began.

"Keep robbing Spencer. It's the least you can do for a mutual friend," Belle told her.

Lacey snickered. "I believe that can be arranged."

"I hate to break this up but we should be leaving," Reginald announced, nodding to the cloister of rocks. Already the sun was starting to go down and soon their window for escape would be gone too.

"What about your clothes?" Belle asked Lacey.

"Keep them. They look good on you." She stuck out her hand as Belle shook it.

"Good luck," Belle said.

"Thank you. You too."

After a quick round of good-byes, the explorers quickly ran the trail up to the cave and went inside before the portal was finally closed. The roar of dinosaurs and the melodious chirping of birds alerted the group they were back in their world much to their relief.

Just another day on the Plateau.

_The adventures are never done for these guys. Next... One Night Stand._
Chapter Summary

Grace5231973, Luna Myth 11, and Rosefairy15 prompted: Ryan and Belle talk. *At last.* (Rated M)

Chapter Notes

This was such a popular request that I had to do this first. Thank you so much for reading and enjoy!

One Night Stand

Ever since that fateful day when Ryan and Belle unexpectedly returned in each other's lives, both couldn't stop thinking about the other. One had thoughts of bittersweet joy; the other was full of anxiety. One wanted to see the other again; the other wanted to curl into a ball and disappear forever.

Ryan had been thinking of reasons to see Belle again. (Belle… He couldn't get enough of her name. It was so lovely, so real. Not the figment of his imagination like Rose had been.) Of course he felt they were lame excuses and made him come off as desperate and maybe even a little bit creepy. He didn't want to use his son to get to know the pretty librarian. The pretty pregnant librarian.

For all he knew the father of her child could be very much in the picture. He didn't want to ruin any domestic bliss and make anything awkward for her. In his self-deprecating mind, he could see how it would look—a middle-aged male with a limp, gray hairs and everything, chasing after a young beautiful woman.

He was kidding himself, plain and simple. Though he couldn't stop thinking about her. Perhaps if he had the chance to talk to her, to get some things out of the open, then… maybe… he could feel better. Maybe he could put this phantom to rest at last.

As for Belle, she was a tangling mess of knots. Never had she thought she would see him again.

See Rum.

But he wasn't Rum.

He was Ryan Gold. Father of Bae Gold the cute little boy who visited her children's section all the time. She had a one night stand with his father who made this wonderful blanket for her baby.

His baby.

She really wanted to crawl into a corner and beat her head against the wall. She could have told him right there, but with Bae standing there, she didn't want to bring it up. How could she explain that she only meant to have no strings attached sex? Or his father having to tell him he spent the night with the nice lady and whoopsie you're a big brother!
Not to mention… Since Ryan already had a child—who's to say he would want another one? And with a total stranger?

Never had she felt so screwed. Quite literally.

Part of her knew he might want to talk, especially if he suspected he could be the father. It was one thing when she thought she would never see him again. It was a whole other ball of wax to see he was part of the neighborhood.

True… there was a time long ago that Belle wanted to find him. She had every intention if they crossed paths, then she would tell him she was pregnant and if he wanted to be involved then that was fine with her. If not… she could live with it. Over time, however, her resolve had dissipated as the reality of her situation became more apparent. She was going to do this alone; she didn't need anyone to support her.

But now things have changed. He was back. He was living in Storybrooke and there was the possibility they would see more of each other.

Was it so bad she didn't want to see him with that fear he wanted to talk? She already accepted her world was going to change, and she didn't want anything else to mess it up.

Then again, why not get it out in the open? At least she wouldn't have to worry or fret or stress out about it. Whatever Ryan chooses to do, she wouldn't be cruel and deny him seeing his child if he wished it.

But the real reason she was concerned: what if he wanted to take the child?

He owned his own business, knew how to raise a child… He was more put together than she was. What qualifications does she have to be a mom? It didn't matter she came from a single parent household. She had her own insecurities and seeing Ryan increased them tenfold.

Despite her misgivings, one thing she knew with absolute certainty: she loved this baby. Once the shock was over, Belle fell in love with the future and what this little life would be like. She already could not imagine life without this child. But the dream was threatened with the risk that Ryan would find out and she didn't want to lose this baby.

She could only pray that it was the last she saw of Ryan Gold.

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However, fate had other plans.

One morning Belle was feeling restless and decided to go on a stroll. Walking always seemed to be the best medicine, and she had a favorite trail that usually would put her in a good mood. Plus it was the best kept secret for her since hardly anyone used the trail to the Wishing Well.

Belle took the familiar path and wasn't long before she was approaching the stone well. It was an old relic, well-preserved, and it had a story. Supposedly if a person threw in a coin they would meet their True Loves. Typically teenage girls would take part in such childish romantic fantasies but in the early dawn Belle had it all to herself.

Many years ago she had participated in the same rite of passage, but the idea of True Love no longer existed. Yet it was a wishing well and she had a wish to make.

She tossed a quarter inside and closed her eyes, silently moving her lips her wish.
"It's pretty."

Her back went rigid when she heard a Scottish accent. And there was only one person in this whole town that had one…

Turning around, Belle concealed her surprise and inner panic because this was the thing she wished wouldn't happen. "Come again?" she asked.

Ryan motioned behind her. "The well. It's pretty."

"Yeah." Her mind was officially blank. What should she say? Right now, her vocal chords were only capable of monosyllabic responses. "Yeah," she said again.

The whole scene was awkward. She was barely looking at him, electing to look away, with her hands in her pockets. He was standing there quietly, probably trying to think of something to say, his weight shifting as he, too, wasn't looking at her but at the ground. Belle would have laughed if there was something funny to laugh at, but she suppose the real humor was the fact they were able to make the sex arrangement without any problems but the aftermath was difficult.

Finally, Ryan cleared his throat.

"I had no idea… Well, I hope you were, but not to say I tried looking I did almost every day. No that came out wrong. What I mean to say is that—fuck." He was royally messing this up and he didn't know how to fix it. Running a nervous hand through his hair, he tried again. "Belle. Can I call you Belle?"

"Sure."

"Belle," he sighed in relief. "Do you mind if I start from the beginning?"

She shrugged. "Go right ahead."

"Hello. I'm Ryan Gold." He held out his hand.

Whatever she expected him to do, she didn't expect another introduction. Taking his hand, she gave it a firm shake. "Belle French. Now that we got that over… again…"

That earned her a chuckle. "I want you to know that I did try to look for you. That night was one of the best nights of my life."

She looked at him sharply. "It was?"

He nodded. "As you know, I was in a bad place and you helped me."

"Yeah… So was I. In a bad place too," she clarified.

"This may sound forward but I hoped to find you again."

Belle didn't know how that made her feel, but she found herself grinning in spite of herself. Ryan was actually sweet and awfully terrible at expressing himself, which wasn't off-putting or weird or anything. There was something genuine about him, trustworthy. She felt safe around him. Of course this shouldn't come to her as a surprise. She felt that way when she first met him in the bar so many months ago. It was why she readily accepted his proposal in the first place.

She kicked at a tiny stone. "I hoped the same thing too," she admitted shyly. "It was a great night. Probably the best one for me too."
That perked him up. *He has a nice smile, she thought. Makes him handsome. Really handsome.*

Not liking where her train of thought was leading, Belle lowered her gaze. "But now…"

"Yes, of course," he said quickly. "You're a beautiful woman. There weren't any expectations so I shouldn't have thought… Anyways, he is a lucky man."

At first his mention of a "he" threw Belle off until she realized he was referring to her baby's father. *He didn't know.* She didn't know if she should count her lucky stars or what, but Ryan didn't suspect he was the father so that left her with a huge decision to make.

Despite how nice he seemed or how she felt around him, Belle didn't know him. She didn't know how he would react to the news or if he would take a drastic recourse of action. Truthfully, Belle didn't want to know. So she did what she thought was best in that moment.

"He's… not in the picture," Belle said. At his look of astonishment, she continued. "Don't feel bad. He wasn't… father material. In fact, this works out for the best."

"How?" Ryan questioned. "A man should—a real man should take responsibility."

It was amazing how easy the lies came, but Belle was able to inject some truth to it. After all, if Gary had been the father… it wouldn't have been a total lie. He would have done exactly what Belle told Ryan.

"My boyfriend had these grandiose ideas. Honestly, I sometimes wonder why I stuck with him as long as I did, but we were high school sweethearts and I don't know... Everyone had this faith in us and I guess I thought so too. Anyways, Gary had this dream of becoming this world-class hunter. He competed and won a lot of awards and he was pretty good. I'm not much of a hunter. I don't see the thrill in it like he does, but that was his dream. I supported him as a dutiful girlfriend is supposed to do. He wanted to travel the world and so did I. Kids… they didn't factor in yet. At least not for another five or ten years.

"So Gary had this opportunity of a lifetime. He was going to hunt big and exotic game in a series of competitions across the world. Then I found out I was pregnant. He wasn't happy; he went as far to blame me for ruining this for him. We got into a huge fight and I told him that giving up this baby wasn't an option. I told him if he didn't want it, then he didn't have to be in its life. He could live his dream without having to worry about me or the baby dragging him down.

"This was my decision too. I realized that we were growing apart. We had different interests and we were together just to be together. Gary saw this too. So we decided to end things. He's living his life, and so am I."

The breaking up part was true. Gary did receive this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. He wanted Belle to tag along but at that point she knew she had to come clean. The whole time she was keeping her pregnancy a secret, going to doctor visits out of town, just to avoid the hassle until she was ready. And like she told Ryan, Gary and she were drifting apart way before she chose to go with Ryan to that motel. They were together, to be together. The Homecoming and Prom King and Queen… sweethearts forever. But there was trouble in paradise. Belle knew Gary was cheating on her, and while two wrongs didn't make a right, she wasn't heartbroken over it.

So when he told her about this competition, Belle knew it was right to tell him the truth. To say Gary was upset was an understatement but as soon as the initial shock wore off… he was pretty calm. He was honest with her and how things between them weren't what he wanted either. So they made the mutual agreement to end their relationship and go their separate ways.
Before Gary left, he did admit he was relieved to hear he wasn't the father. "You know I'm not ready for that," he told her. And she did.

But Ryan didn't feel it was the right thing.

"I'm sorry Belle but your boyfriend is a bastard," he said. "Dream or no dream, you don't abandon your child. He should have stepped up and offered to help."

"It's okay Ryan. Really." She hadn't counted on him being so angry, but Ryan was downright furious.

"No it's not." He shook his head. Outrage, contempt filled his facial features. "He should have stayed at your side and be the father. Nothing in this world matters except the little boy or girl that is going to come into this world. He should have stayed."

Ryan couldn't believe how nonchalant she was or how disinterested she was in that the father of her child refused to take responsibility. Then again, he had no right to tell her what to do or how to live her life. They were strangers after all.

But Belle did seem content. He didn't know this Gary so maybe she was right in saying that it was for the best for the father not to be in the picture. But his sensibilities and own sense of righteousness told him this wasn't fair. She should have someone to rely on during this time. He knew how pregnancies could go what with Milah and Bae. So even Ryan surprised himself with what he said next:

"If you need anything Belle, and I mean anything, I hope you can count me as a friend to help you."

She didn't want him to do anything, but maybe it was guilt that had her replying, "I'll do that. Thank you."

Oh Belle... Why did you have to do that? Well, I have a few more prompts for this couple so the next one should give you a lot of fluffy feels.
Chapter Summary

Twyla Mercedes prompted: Belle has this sudden craving for watermelon. She calls Ryan for help and he goes on a late-night hunt. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

I absolutely adore this prompt! I hope you guys will too! Some fluffiness after a crazy week.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

One Night Stand

There was no way this was happening, but when Belle woke up at three in the morning, she only had one craving:

Watermelon.

It was totally out of the blue but the hunger and the urgency to have it right at that moment was overwhelming.

And naturally she didn't have any in her apartment.

For the most part, her cravings had been pretty subdued. Plus, she never experienced anything this strong before. Yet nothing in her cupboards or her refrigerator would satisfy the demand for watermelon.

So she did what she could think of in this state of emergency.

"Hi Ryan? It's Belle. I'm fine; we both are. But I was wondering if you could do me a favor… I know it's late but I need watermelon. Yes that's right. You could? Oh, thank you! Thank you so much!"

She hung up with a bright smile. Resting her hands on her belly, she murmured: "Hang on. You will have your watermelon soon."

xxx

The phone call in the middle of the night startled Ryan, but as soon as he heard Belle's voice… his nerves instantly calmed. The fact she called him, needing his help… He didn't have the words to describe how he felt.

The truth was he didn't think she would ever call him. He thought she agreed to be nice since his offer did come out of nowhere. Yet she called him and he couldn't have been more overjoyed.
He knew how these late-night cravings could be. Milah had some pretty unusual ones. There was one time she had to have bird's eye chili peppers and peanut butter. The lengths he went to find that elusive pepper made her very affectionate and grateful. Not to say he expected or hoped Belle would show her gratitude in some way... He was only too happy to help out a friend.

Ryan dressed fairly quickly and stopped by Bae's door. He hesitated and decided it was best to let the boy sleep. He didn't think he was awake enough to explain to Bae about why he was leaving in the middle of the night to buy watermelon for the librarian.

He made sure all the windows and both the front and back doors were securely locked before Ryan got into his car and drove off.

First, he went to the 24-hour pharmacy and mart. To his dismay, Ryan couldn't find the watermelon. The clerk on staff looked at him oddly and said he wouldn't get more until six when the delivery truck came. Well, waiting for three hours wasn't going to work for him.

So Ryan got back into his car and drove out of Storybrooke to the next store. The second one he went to was also out, but they had plenty of cantaloupes, honeydews, and even Santa Clauses. He had no idea what kind of melon a Santa Claus was, but he couldn't believe they carried that one but not something as common as watermelon.

The third store ended up being a charm. They had the beautiful, succulent watermelon—the holy treasure on his quest. Ryan almost cried tears of joy but he managed to hold them back as he took his purchase (he bought a dozen... no point in risking the possibility of Belle not having any at a drop of a hat) and drove back to Storybrooke, back to Belle.

It took him longer than necessary but when he saw the elation on her face... it was worth the headache to go as far as he did.

At least... until he cut into it for her.

Her delight turned to sorrow as tears started to form. Ryan couldn't understand what made her upset as he pulled out a handkerchief to give to her.

"What's wrong Belle? I thought you said you wanted watermelon..."

"I did, do. It's just that... they have seeds," she explained in a dishearten voice.

"That's all?" Ryan was relieved. He thought it was something else. "It's okay. I can fix it."

Then he proceeded to grab a spoon and he began to scoop out the seeds. He was able to remove the ones he could see right away, but as soon as he cut a slice for her he continued to pick out the seeds so she could have a seedless watermelon.

Belle didn't have the words to tell him how she felt with what he had done. He didn't have to take out the seeds for her, but he did, without her asking. Once more her eyes welled up and she wiped the tears away. Her lips quivered and she had the truth right at the tip of her tongue. All she had to do was say...

"Ryan, this child is yours."

But Belle bit down and swallowed the truth along with the juicy fruit.

One of these days... she will find the courage.
Aww! Ryan to the rescue! And such a darling for basically being her hero and taking out those seeds for her. But Belle is still scared. What will it take? Stay tune my wonderful readers.
My dear readers.

The recent turn of events had been extraordinary, and frankly speaking, indescribable. Sometimes I don't know what to do or how to behave or even what name to go by.

But I am getting ahead of myself.

Allow me to backtrack to six months ago. It was around the time that Ms. French and I solved young Henry Mills's case of the missing storybook. He had been quite anxious to find his book, and it was with the brilliant deductive skills of Ms. French that the book was recovered.

What I didn't reveal were the events that occurred afterwards.

Once Ms. French and I returned to my shop to continue our friendly debate, Mr. Mills took it upon himself to purchase a bus ticket with his teacher's, Ms. Blanchard, credit card. This little excursion of his had been in the works for a while now, which didn't come to light until his purpose showed up.

As I mentioned in my last story, Henry Mills was adopted. I had assisted in the process much to my disregard for Mayor Mills. Sometimes I wondered why I had gotten involved, but writing this now with the current knowledge in mind, it makes sense. It was destiny.

Alas, I'm too far again. My apologies.

Anyways, the adoption was a closed one. The mother wanted no contact, which satisfied Mayor Mills. No doubt she didn't want to deal with the competition of a biological parent. Henry officially became a Mills and it was happily ever after. At least that is how Mayor Mills would have preferred. However, Henry is very perceptive for one his age and you did not need Ms. French's deduction to figure out he was adopted. Furthermore, the harmonious Mills household was losing steam and
Henry was prone to spend more time away from home rather than in it.

In addition, Henry Mills decided to look for his birth mother. How he was able to uncover the information despite the conditions of the closed adoption will be a mystery to me. Ms. French would say the computer age generation could find anything. I suppose a ten-year-old could outsmart the system. And he must have as the bus ticket was for Boston.

Henry Mills found his birth mother and he was determined to bring her back to Storybrooke.

Why is this important? What does a mother giving up her child have to do with this story? It happens all the time, you might say. How could this situation be different?

The answers to all these questions and more are… yes. This is important and this is different.

Thus our story truly begins.

It was Rent Day and as landlord it was my duty to go around and collect the monies from my tenants. I stopped at Granny's Bed and Breakfast first, and it was where I had the fortune to meet Henry's birth mother.

Emma Swan.

There was something oddly familiar about the name, but I brushed it off as something I must have heard somewhere. Ms. Swan was charming in a straightforward way and quite honest in her comments. There were no bars when it came to her opinion, and I briefly thought how Ms. French would find Ms. Swan's perspective refreshing. The other observation I made was her age. She was attractive with wavy blonde curls and young to be a mother of a ten-year-old. Not to say such a thing is impossible, but it did make me wonder if her decision to give Henry up was because she had been a teenager. If Ms. French was here she would have been able to determine her reasons.

As it was only I… I hypothesize that Ms. Swan was a daughter of a pastor. Given her air of defiance and rebellious glint in her eyes it made perfect sense. Growing up with limitations and restrictions she chose the ultimate act to demonstrate her recalcitrance that only a good Christian girl would do. As a result, her family put pressure on her to give up the child to avoid the scandal of a daughter having a child out of wedlock. It was possible the adoption was done with her parents' doing and the closed adoption made it impossible for her to make contact. So she left her parents' house as soon as she was able and has been living on her own.

Until her son found her.

Now she was in Storybrooke to get to know the son she was denied ever knowing. It would seem Mayor Mills had competition after all.

I wanted to impress Ms. French with my deduction and the only way to validate my theory was to ask the source. As I waited for Mrs. Lucas to gather the money, I told her I was very sorry that her family forced her to give up Henry. She looked at me unblinking while her forehead creased in confusion.

"Pardon?"

"This is a small town. Henry's disappearance spread like wildfire, and the only logical explanation was that he went searching for you. His biological mother. We don't often, I should say, ever get visitors in Storybrooke. Your presence clearly indicates you are the birth mother since he left with the intention in finding you. Furthermore, I would assume you to be in your mid to late twenties, which would approximately put you as a teenager when you've given birth. The adoption was a closed one.
and with such terms and conditions it is safe to say your parents had a hand in it."

She continued to look at me strangely. "That is quite an assumption you made Mister…?"


"You're kidding," she said. "Lord, your parents had a weird sense of humor. What does the 'U' stand for?"

"Ulysses."

"You had no chance in the playground, huh? Well, Mr. Gold, you have it all wrong. My parents didn't force me to do anything. I have no parents. And as for my reasons wanting a closed adoption was mine alone. Yeah the kid found me. Yeah I came here to drop him off. But I will be leaving as soon as I can check out."

I could not let my disappointment show that my observations were off. Although it was a pity she was leaving so soon, it wasn't my place to suggest she stay for the boy's sake. As fond of Henry as I am, I was thinking maybe Mayor Mills was the better option for him after all. His mother clearly had no interest in getting to know him and I felt sorry for Henry. No doubt he had built up in his mind how the reunion would have gone with his birth mother staying so they could have a relationship. If I ever had a son… I would want to spend every waking second with him.

Mrs. Lucas returned with the rent and handed it to me. "It's all accounted for," she assured me as I bowed my head in thanks.

I pocketed the money inside my coat and faced Ms. Swan. "It was a pleasure meeting you," I told her. "I do hope you change your mind. Henry is a terrific boy. Don't regret the chance to know him." I shook her hand and took my leave, all the while Ms. Swan continued to stare after me.

I didn't dally for I had other places to visit. As soon as I made my rounds, I stopped at the bank to make a deposit, and then I headed to the library. Normally, I would return to the pawn shop, but I wanted to speak to Ms. French and hear her thoughts about Storybrooke's latest guest.

When I arrived, Ms. French was at the circulation desk; her glasses perched on her nose as she scrutinized the book she was currently reading.

"Is it any good?" I asked.

"Define 'good,'" she replied dryly. "The plot is convoluted, the characters are not as fully developed as they should be, and I cannot understand the life of me as to why the protagonist fancies herself in love with this man when she clearly stated she knew him to be a cad. He even broke a woman's heart!" Closing the book, Ms. French shook her head. "I keep hoping it will get better. That somehow the author will redeem this off-the-wall storyline. I'm afraid I will be disappointed, but what kind of librarian would I be if I did not finish it?"

"Certainly a dedicated one."

She laughed. "Right you are Mr. Gold. What can I do for you?"

"Well, I was wondering if you heard about our guest staying at Granny's."

"I might have heard there was someone staying. But other than that, I don't know anything else."

So it would appear I knew more than Ms. French! I could not contain my smile. "She happens to be

As soon as I uttered Ms. Swan's name, Ms. French took a step back as her hand went to her head. "Are you unwell?" I asked in concern for she looked faint.

"I'm well. Really I am." She gave me a small smile of reassurance and I didn't know what to do other than stand there like a fool. "I'm all right Mr. Gold. Stop looking so tense."

"My apologies," I murmured.

"Ms. Emma Swan, huh? Interesting name."

"I suppose so," I said, unsure of Ms. French's meaning. "I've collected the rent for the day. Has anyone come to us with a case?"

"Not yet. I'm sorry Mr. Gold but something unexpected just came up. Perhaps we can postpone teatime for later?"

Teatime was always at two o'clock and it wasn't even half past ten. Whatever she had to do, she intended it was going to interfere with our tea. I acquiesced and bid her a good day as Ms. French proceeded to close the library. In all the years I have known her, she closed the library early only once and that was due to a sudden illness. I knew not what to make of her odd behavior, but I trusted her. She will tell me when she was ready.

I went to my shop and stayed there. I had a couple customers who sold a couple of trinkets but other than that the day was slow. I wished that whatever errand Ms. French was on would not detain her any longer than necessary. It was closer to six, four hours later, when Ms. French showed up for tea.

"Sorry for the late hour but I brought this to make up for it." She lifted a to-go bag from Granny's. One whiff and I instantly knew what it was: cheeseburgers and fries. Not exactly the kind of food one has with tea, but I certainly was not going to complain.

"I haven't set the back table up," I told her. "I didn't know what time you would arrive."

"It's no bother. Allow me if you don't mind starting the tea?"

We went to our tasks—I with the tea, Ms. French with setting the table and arranging our meals. The kettle didn't take long to boil and I poured out our cups with a little bit of cream and sugar for Ms. French, and cream for me. I set our saucers down and took my seat whilst Ms. French did the same.

"Were you able to get done what you needed to do?"

Her lashes flickered as she took her sip. "I'm sorry?"

"Your unexpected business," I reminded her. Ms. French gave a little chuckle.

"Ah, actually, I think it is a success. Time will tell I'm afraid."

"Oh? Do you mind if I ask what it is?"

"Let me ask you this, Mr. Gold," she said. "Have you ever noticed how the clock-tower hasn't worked?"

I frowned. "Truthfully it never has as I recall. Why?"

"Do you not find that strange?"
I shrugged. "I guess it might be. I assumed the repairs would cost too much."

"It's an old clock to be sure. But how come no one has seen you about searching for the best offer in parts? Antiques are your specialty and this falls under that category."

"I don't know Ms. French," I admitted. I was somewhat befuddled with this sudden interrogation. "To what is the purpose of these questions?"

"How long have we known each other?" she went on without answering.

"A long time but again I don't—"

"Do you find it odd you cannot pinpoint exactly how long it's been?"

Truthfully, I was at a loss. "Ms. French, I must insist on knowing your meaning here. I don't know how long we've known each other, and I don't think there is anything wrong with that. I like thinking we're such good friends that we don't need to assign a numeric passage."

There was a flash of dismay in her blue eyes and I felt the disappointment acutely. Whatever I was supposed to say I didn't. I didn't even know what she was getting at but I knew she was trying to tell me something important. Something I should have noticed or at least cared to question.

"Let's talk about Emma Swan," she said brightly, changing the subject. "She seems like an interesting person. And that name! I always thought Emma was a pretty name. It is one of my favorite Jane Austen's novels as you know." She leaned across the table, those inquisitive, keen eyes monitoring my reaction very closely. "Come to think of it… I believe Emma was also the name of the main character in Madame Bovary."

I nodded slowly. "Yes I believe you're right."

"Even Charlotte Bronte had a novel called Emma. It was incomplete though."

"You seemed to be fascinated with the name," I observed.

Once more, I was struck with the impression that I failed whatever it was that Ms. French was trying to do. She quietly sipped her tea and then took a bite out of her cheeseburger. After swallowing, she said, "I suppose I am. Perhaps if I ever get around writing that great American novel I will name the main character Emma."

I picked up a fry and busied myself with my meal. I wished I could have given her what she wanted, but Ms. French was inclined not to be explicit with her hints. However, I was not to be dissuaded.

"Have you met Ms. Swan?"

Ms. French nodded. "I did. A bit guarded with her words and body language. I have no doubt she had been hurt in the past. In fact, I believe she never had a single person in her life to support her. As for love… Well, she had a great love, and something tragic happened and she prefers not to be reminded of it. It explains her less than enthusiastic reaction when Henry found her. Such a shame, really. I know she was young when she had him, and I do believe her intentions had been honorable."

"Honorable? Ms. French, she gave up her child with no contact ever. Even though she drove him back home, she planned on leaving right away. This morning she said as soon as it was checkout time she was heading back to Boston."
She shrugged with a smidgen of a smile. "I believe Ms. Swan will not leave Storybrooke. We had an interesting conversation and I know she also met Henry's teacher, Mary Margaret Blanchard. Remember she was the one who gave Henry the storybook he was so keen on finding. And let's face it... there is something likeable about Henry. I saw in Ms. Swan's eyes she was starting to soften at the mention of Henry. Regardless of her guarded state of mind, she will do the right thing for her son. She did when he was a baby."

"I'm afraid that is where we will disagree. I cannot imagine giving up a child for whatsoever reason. I will do everything in my power to make it work. Even if I was in the poorhouse and living in squalor conditions, I will find a way to give my son anything he needs."

She perked. "You said 'son.' Why?"

"Well... I don't know. I always thought if I had a child it would be a boy. Girls are fine too, please do not mistake my meaning, but I fancied myself having a boy. I will get this picture in my head where I'm with this small boy with dark, unruly hair and the brightest smile I have ever seen. Almost like Henry's smile. But being a father has not been in the cards for me sadly."

Ms. French nodded in understanding. "I think you would make an excellent father. You have a big heart with the capacity to love wholly and patiently. You are loyal and kind and will make the necessary sacrifice to help your loved ones."

Her assessment of my character left me blushing for it was too generous and nice of her to say. I honestly would not know if I would make the "necessary sacrifice" that she alluded to. I never was in a position to sacrifice anything. Although, I would like to think I would step up and do the brave and noble thing if required. As for the rest of her estimation to my disposition, I do feel like I am capable of such feelings. I know that if anything happened to her... I would not hesitate to give her my last breath.

Of course, she is my only and dearest friend. That alone means I would do anything for her as she would do for me.

"You are very thoughtful Ms. French. I don't know if such praises are well-deserving, but they are appreciated."

"Why, Mr. Gold, I do believe you sell yourself short," she teased. "Now, did you acquire any interesting items today?"

Like that, we were back to our old and familiar camaraderie. Not another word was spoken about Ms. Emma Swan or Henry or the clock. I felt more like myself and confident as I launched into my story about my latest acquisition. The previous notion that I disappointed her still lurked in the back of my thoughts, but I was able to put it behind me for now.

Of course, what I did not know was that Ms. Belle French had set in motion a particular set of events that would change Storybrooke forever. As we sat in my backroom with our cheeseburgers, fries, and tea and bantered, Emma Swan was speaking to Regina Mills about whether or not she loved Henry. From there she returned to the inn and proceeded to tell Mrs. Lucas she was going to stay for a week.

Ms. French and I concluded our dinner and late tea. She helped me close up the shop and as we walked out the door with her hand on my arm, we heard the most peculiar sound. The clicking of gears echoed the quiet street and I lifted my eyes towards the clock-tower. To my complete and utter amazement, the clock's hand shifted from 8:15 to 8:16.
Ms. French's touch tightened as she looked up with excitement glowing in her features. "Just as I thought Mr. Gold. I do believe Ms. Swan is going to stay in Storybrooke."

"How do you know that?" I asked her.

She simply laughed. "Why… it's elementary my dear Mr. Gold. But I will explain it to you later when the time is right."

Unfortunately, the time never seemed to be the right one. Every time something would come to pass that Ms. French had inadvertently predicted or briefly commented she would have this knowing smile like she knew this great secret but was refusing to tell anyone.

Not even me.

For you see readers, Ms. Swan did decide to stay in Storybrooke. Her week visit became another week. Then another. Eventually, Mayor Mills was starting see she was a threat to her relationship with her son and was doing everything in her power to get her to leave. She had even forced Mrs. Lucas to remove her from the B&B due to a "no felon staying in public buildings" ordinance. I had never heard this ordinance before, but Ms. French told me that it was passed through within twenty-four hours after Ms. Swan was arrested by Sheriff Graham for allegedly stealing files from Dr. Hopper on Henry.

The lengths Mayor Mills was taking to force Ms. Swan to leave was incredible. Never had I seen her so determined, so hell-bent that I was worried for Ms. Swan.

"Do not worry Mr. Gold. Ms. Swan is built with sturdier skin. She will not back down from Regina," Ms. French assured me.

And Ms. Swan did not.

Within hours of being kicked out from the inn, she found a place to stay with Ms. Mary Margaret Blanchard. The two women hit it off from what I understand, and Ms. Blanchard even put up the bail for Ms. Swan when she was arrested. Ms. French, as was her habit lately, continued to smile that knowing smile as she was delighted when she heard the news.

"They have quite a bit in common," she said. "I would have been disappointed if Mary Margaret did not offer Ms. Swan to be her roommate."

If I questioned why, Ms. French would say, "Later Mr. Gold. I will tell you why later."

I normally don't lose my temper but I was becoming exceedingly frustrated with Ms. French and her infernal secrets! Ever since Ms. Swan arrived, Ms. French had been spending her time with her and Henry, and I even observed Ms. French visiting Mayor Mills! Now, she disliked the mayor as much as I do, but Ms. French was usually reserved when expressing her feelings. Now it was almost unrecognizable as Ms. French was taunting Mayor Mills.

Yes, you heard me.

Taunting.

This was not at all like the Belle French I knew for years. I was so shocked and stunned that I hid myself so she would not see me. I could not fathom these changes and I was becoming concerned that something foreboding was going on. After all, Ms. French had not enlisted me in any cases to be
solved since Ms. Swan's arrival. All her energy and time was dedicated to ensure Ms. Swan stayed in Storybrooke and goaded Mayor Mills in the process.

When Sheriff Graham had unexpectedly died of cardiac arrest, it was Ms. French who endorsed Ms. Swan as the new Sheriff much to Mayor Mills's chagrin. She campaigned hard for the newcomer and it was with the luck of certain circumstances that Ms. Swan became the newly elected Sheriff of Storybrooke.

I must admit I was feeling rather left out and a bit childish for not spending time with Ms. French. I missed our little adventures and trying to do them without her was no fun. I did not possess her intuitive abilities or logical skills. I fear I left more than one unhappy person with my meager attempts.

I wanted to tell Ms. French how I felt, but the words would not come to me. I felt rather silly and ridiculous and more like a petulant child whose favorite toy was taken away. As Ms. French was someone I highly respected, I was mad at myself for assuming she would always want to spend time with me. I could not assume that I was the only person in her life because I wasn't. She had other friends she spent time with and it never bothered me so why Ms. Swan? Why was this bothering me?

"Everything will make sense later. I promise."

I lost count the number of times Ms. French spoke those words. It became a point that her words were meaningless. I believed she was humoring me with her insistence she will tell me what was going on just so I would accept it and move on.

But I could not.

If Ms. French could not confide in me, then I was going to figure out her secret. I would not be kept in the dark no more.

One day I decided to follow her. It was not easy with my limp and cane, especially as Ms. French was moving as if she was on a mission.

First, she went to Granny's inn. I knew there was another guest that was staying in town... an August Booth. When she left, her forehead was creased as if she was deep in thought. She seemed troubled and I wished to reveal myself to find out what the problem was. However, I remembered my purpose and stuck to it.

From there, she went to the convent. She held back as Mr. Booth was leaving the building, and when he was gone, she went inside. She was there no less than five minutes and this time her countenance was queer-looking. She did not seem troubled or worried but rather curious and wary and hopeful. I could not discern why this myriad of emotions but whatever it was... Ms. French was on the trail of something. I pondered if this August Booth was responsible for something as I met him only once and he seemed to me more of a cad and imposter. I did not like him for reasons that were unknown to me so I continued my pursuit with interest.

It was getting dark so keeping up with Ms. French became more of an obstacle. But I managed to follow her into the forest where she met up with Mr. Booth. For a second, I was dumbfounded. This had every appearance of a clandestine meeting and I felt like an intruder stepping into something that was intimate. This pained me in ways I could not explain. This Booth character was a stranger and why Ms. French was meeting with him at this hour was beyond me.

I came to the realization that part of Ms. French's secret must be that she was interested in this man. Why else would she go through all this trouble to keep it private? I knew that I lost her because I was
a coward and kept my feelings for her to myself instead of telling her how I felt.

Indeed my readers. I came to the conclusion that I was in love with Ms. French at that moment. Such poor timing on my part that every inch of me wanted to flee.

Yet… something happened. Something amazing and horrifying.

"I found that picture of the dagger in your room. I was somewhat confounded how you could have possibly known about it until I spoke to Mother Superior. You're here to look for your father."

It wasn't a question but a statement.

"Yes."

"You had the chance to speak to him. I know because he told me how he met you in the diner. You did not give a good first impression."

"It's not easy. To look into his eyes and see no recognition." His tone was accusatory as if he blamed Ms. French for his father not knowing him. That was ridiculous if he thought she could have something to do with that.

"Believe me, this wasn't my intention. I tried to spare him the best I could, but you know how stubborn he is. He refused to leave my side."

"Yeah… just like before. He wouldn't leave your side then."

She flinched back with hurt. "That is not fair. I tried to protect you both. You were always dear to me as was your father. I loved you as if you were my son."

"I'm not."

"I know." She lowered her face. "Not a day goes by that I regret what happened. Your father was never the same since the incident. Please… whatever you do, do not blame him."

"How can I not? He chose you!"

"No! He tried to pull you out, he did! I tried to help as he was slipping too… Then he lost his grip and you—"

"I don't want to hear anymore. You have done enough damage already. He doesn't even know me!"

"He doesn't know that he has a son. It seemed like a kindness when this Curse was planned. But I see now what a terrible mistake that was." Lifting her face, I could see the shimmering trail of tears from the moonlight and I was struck how lovely she was even in her anguished state. But whoever this man was… this father… I could not help but feel pity for him and his son. Yet what they said made little to no sense at all.

"How can I make it up to you?" she asked.

"You can by returning his memories."

"I tried. The switch worked for me and it was supposed to work on him too, but something must have happened that bumble it."

"Well… there is one other thing. The dagger."
"The dagger?"

"If you really regret what you did to us, then you will give me the dagger as a sign of your trust. I'm sorry if I was harsh towards you, but you have to understand my side…"

"Of course. I do understand. But Baelfire—"

"No 'buts.' If you loved my father like you said back then, then you will do this."

Baelfire.

I couldn't understand why… but there was something about that name that struck a chord with me.

"Very well. But you need to do something for me in return."

"I don't think you're in a position to make a deal with me."

"It's not. All I want you to do is give your father another chance. He may not remember but he loves you. Maybe that could help restore Mr. Gold's memories."

A chill went down my spine. Mr. Gold… That was me!

I staggered back reeling from this shocking revelation. I have a son… How? How was such a thing even possible when I had no recollection? How could I forget?

None of it made sense!

And yet…

_Baelfire._

It was an unusual name but something about it had my heart tugging with longing. It was as if you remembered something from the past and you have this yearning for it. I could not explain why I felt a connection.

"Baelfire…” I whispered softly. I could practically hear the gears in my mind shifting, clicking in the hopes something would trigger a memory. But something was blocking it. Something didn't want me to remember.

I fought hard, pushed with all my might with _Baelfire_ repeating on a loop. The buzzing in my ears began to grow louder and then something at last shifted so a piece would connect.

And it did.

Like a light-switch, I was undulated with memories from a distant time in a faraway place, as if I was waking from a dream. And indeed, I felt like I had been asleep for almost an eternity.

There were so many images! I had to focus on the pieces coming back to me.

_Baelfire_ was definitely the forefront. And he looked like the dream child I had always wanted with this wild mane of hair and intelligent eyes. He was dressed in rags but he seemed happy, carefree. Loved.

I looked down at myself and instead of seeing my suit… I saw myself in rags too. My cane was a walking stick and my hands were calloused from spinning wool all day long.
A name...

I was trying to remember my name...

Not A.U. Gold… No. That man didn't exist, not really. R. I could see an R forming in my head. Then a voice. A gentle, lilting voice that caressed each letter of my name. A voice that sparked feelings of love, of passion, of lust.

It was Ms. French's voice!

*Rumplestiltskin.*

I silently mouthed the word.

*Rumplestiltskin.*

That was my name. That was me. I have a son named Baelfire. I am a spinner. I am a veteran of the Ogres War. That was where I obtained my injury. I lamed myself to be with my son who was only a baby. I was a disgrace to my village but I did not care. I had my son. Baelfire. I lost him. He went to another world. A world without magic.

Then Ms. French appeared in my memories but it wasn't Ms. French.

It was her but not her.

She had these scales covering her body. Only they weren't really scales but they looked reptilian-like. They were beautiful. Green that sparkled like gold. Blue eyes almost feline that burned brightly in the dark. Sad, lonely. She was the Dark One. She was my mistress. She saved me from being beaten to death when they tried to take my son away to fight. She took us in, gave us shelter, food, clothes. She was kind to us. She wasn't evil as the stories said. She was misunderstood.

I loved her.

She loved me.

She loved Baelfire.

Baelfire loved her.

Baelfire wanted to save her.

The bean.

It was becoming crystal clear what happened that night. Baelfire wanted us to become a real family, but Belle was cursed with dark magic. True Love's kiss did not work because the dagger would not free her. So he found another way. The bean would open a portal to a land without magic and Belle's curse would no longer have its hold on her. But it was a trick. The Blue Fairy feared Belle, believing she was a threat when Belle had done no wrong. Bae… he fell and I grabbed his hand but his hand was so small… slipping… he was slipping from me and I tried to hold him the best I could but my ankle… it gave out and I was falling but Belle… she caught me… she tried pulling us out but Bae… he wasn't strong… his hand slipped through mine and he was gone.

The portal closed.

My boy was gone and I couldn't hold onto him like I should have.
But there was a way back to him.

Belle said there was a Curse that could transport us there but she couldn't cast it. Someone else had to and then I remembered Regina, the Evil Queen, and her hatred and desire for revenge on Snow White. She cast the Curse that sent all of us to this world. So Belle and I could find Bae and be a family once more.

Then everything made sense.

Did Bae truly hold a grudge against Belle? It wasn't her fault but I could tell she held herself accountable for it. I wanted to tell Bae that if he wanted to pin the blame on someone it should be me. I was the one who let him go. Not Belle.

By the time I was cognizant, I realized that Belle and Bae were gone. Then I remembered he was asking for her dagger, which I found very odd. What use was there for him to have her dagger? Magic didn't exist here. Surely he wasn't planning on gaining control of her…

It dawned on me.

This wasn't Bae. My son wouldn't control her. And he would know he couldn't because that was the point of this land. No magic.

I feared Belle was in trouble. Whoever this imposter was he was preying on her guilt.

I tracked them down to a spot where at the base of a giant oak I saw Belle and the liar digging.

But it was too late.

Before I could call out to her, Belle had picked up the dagger and handed it to the imposter.

"NO!" I shouted half-running half-stumbling but I got their attention. Belle was startled and Booth could see this charade was over. I snatched the dagger from him and hobbled to Belle so she could have her dagger back. "You're not my son," I told him. "Bae knows you cannot control the Dark One without magic. And this world has no magic."

I heard Belle gasping and I knew that she knew I was my old self. As for the fake Bae, he knew he should come clean. For you see, dear readers, August Booth was actually Pinocchio. He was sent to our land before the Curse as was Emma Swan to be her protector. Unfortunately, he failed in his task and abandoned her as a baby. Grant it he was only a child but it took an unexpected wake-up call for him to return to make amends and help in breaking the Curse.

As for his deceit, well, August was turning back into a wooden puppet. He wanted the process to stop and he thought if he could control Belle she could turn him back into a human.

Belle did not get upset with him, but she did blatantly tell him that if she had her powers, then she would have helped him if he only asked. This tidbit gob smacked Booth and he realized how foolish his folly had been. But we did decide to work together as a team to help Emma fulfill her role as the Savior to break the Curse, restore everyone's memories, and return home.

Once Booth went his separate way, Ms. French and I were alone. Regardless of my formerly lost memories, I was still feeling internally conflicted. I was Rumplestiltskin and Gold. My perceived reality had been a constant for the last twenty-eight years (yes… I finally realized how much time had passed), and my actual reality was an intruder. It was difficult to discern who I really was when both sets of memories were warring for domination. In addition I was resorting back to Ms. French in my mind. I was torn on what to call her as she was my lover and my friend.
I could not look at her not because I felt she was responsible (she was not) but I was feeling timid. When I looked at her I saw those lovely scales quivering under my touch. I knew I was scarlet from the heated memory, but I didn't know what to say anymore. Where do I stand? Did she see me as a lover or just a friend? Then I remembered her words she spoke to Booth about having me forget my son out of kindness. I had no doubt she had good intentions, but it did fill me with a silent anger. I never asked for such a wish. When she had gone over the details of the Curse with me prior to the casting, she never said she was going to take the memory of Bae away. She said I was going to have a good life and that I was going to want for nothing.

She was right. I did. However, I did not have my son. Not even a ghost.

"Why?" I finally said. "Why did you take him from me?"

I could hear her sucking in her breath and I snuck a glance to see she had her eyes shut painfully. At last… she spoke. "Since that night, you were never the same. You were constantly pacing the castle restlessly and aimlessly. You hardly spoke, let alone ate. And late at night you would cry for him. It broke my heart because I looked at Bae as if he was my son too. I was aching, grieving. And though I know you never said it… I felt responsible for what happened. He was trying to break my curse. I was meant to be the one to go into that portal and be lost forever. Not him. I didn't want you to keep hurting the way you did. You were wasting away Rumple and it was my fault."

She broke down and wept, and I instantly took her in my arms. "Shh." I cooed, holding her to my breast, stroking her hair. "It's not your fault Belle," I told her. "If anyone has to blame himself, it's me. I let him go. I am his father and I wasn't strong enough to hold him. I was sad he was gone but I was angrier with myself for being the one responsible. That was why I couldn't eat. I didn't feel like I deserved to live. Until—" She lifted her tearful face as I smiled softly. "Until you told me there was a way to find him. That renewed my spirits. You saved me from my self-destruction Belle. And I know we will find him."

Belle sniffed. "I wanted to make you happy. I know I was wrong now. But can you forgive me?"

"Yes," I breathed. "I forgive you."

She closed her eyes again. This time relief spread across her forehead. "I'm sorry I couldn't wake you sooner. The key wouldn't work."

Ah, the key. Emma. Hearing her name should have awakened me as it did with her.

"I think subconsciously I wanted my life to be exactly like this Curse," I murmured. "It was easy to wish than know the real pain of loss."

"But what triggered it? If Emma didn't work…"

I chuckled. "Baelfire. Hearing his name helped me return. Of course, it's all very muddled. I know I'm Rumplestiltskin but—"

"But Mr. Gold is fighting to exist?" she offered. "I understand. I feel the same. It will take time to adjust I promise."

"That's good." Looking at her, I added, "Do you think we can still solve mysteries after this Curse breaks?"

Belle laughed. "If you like my dear Mr. Rumple. Now, we do have a Curse that needs breaking, a Savior that needs believing, and a son that needs finding. Are you up to the challenge?"
I bowed. "I am ready for anything that awaits us Ms. French."

xxxxxx

It was an arduous task, but we did it. Or more like Regina did it. If she hadn't poisoned the apple, then Henry wouldn't have ate it to convince his birth mother everything he had said was true. And Emma wouldn't have reached the conclusion that she was the Savior and she believed and loved Henry with her whole heart. Her True Love's kiss woke Henry from his sleeping curse, and it woke the town of Storybrooke with their actual memories.

We still have a long road ahead of us to sort out the real from the false memories and then decide who we want to be. I am currently in the midst of my identity crisis, but with Belle's help... I am putting together the man that I always wanted to become. The best of both worlds if you will. I'm sure there are many of you who are struggling with the same obstacles as I, but know this, you are not alone.

Furthermore, I have no doubt that this does not end our saga. Belle and I have a son to find, which we intend to do once I finish this story.

So I shall end this story in optimism that everything will work out. And I think I shall add my name that I selected. It is a mouthful but Belle loves it. Plus, it's the identity I had for so long and I could not part with it.

The End... for now.

Rumplestiltskin Adam Ulysses Gold

Yes... I'm keeping Ulysses.

Chapter End Notes

If you want more, then you know the drill. I hope you enjoyed the little spin and twist I added.
Chapter Summary

Twyla Mercedes prompted: Belle's car breaks down and Ryan steps in to drive her around. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

A/N: I have another prompt for One Night Stand that is a true testament when it comes to pregnancy. Enjoy!

A/A/N: Merry Belated Christmas and Happy New Year to everyone!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

One Night Stand

Out of all the lousy luck in the world, Belle couldn't believe her car decided to give up the ghost. And the timing couldn't have been more perfect since she was well into her second trimester. Of course, the baby decided not make things smoothly for the mother-to-be. It was like overnight that her body ballooned. Not only did her tiny bump become more pronounced but her ankles and feet had swelled. In addition, she was experiencing leg cramps if she was standing on them for too long.

Belle took the necessary precautions and followed the doctor's diet recommendations, including the exercise regimen to keep fit and healthy. While for the most part she was doing well… she still on occasion had a round of nausea. Her morning sickness cleared up but it didn't mean she was a hundred percent out of the woods.

This particular morning had Belle feeling queasy the moment she got out of bed.

She drank some hot tea with a ginger slice and ate dry toast with watermelon. It eased the nausea for the most part, but Belle was still feeling unwell. Unfortunately, she didn't have the luxury to miss work, and after she was dressed and ready, then she discovered her car problem.

"Damnit!" She laid her head on the steering wheel and lightly tapped her forehead.

She could call in but she couldn't afford to do that just yet. Walking was out of the question. There was no way she could make the trip in her state. The last thing she wanted to do was call Ryan again. He had been so kind and thoughtful the last time she had called with her late-night cravings that she didn't want to be the damsel in distress every time something comes up.

Not to mention she felt like she was taking advantage of him.

In a way she was. It was never her intention to call him for anything, but that one night she couldn't help it. The craving was too much for her to bear, and she never thought he would actually follow through. But Ryan Gold did. He went beyond the call of duty and took out the seeds in the
watermelon when it upset her. He stayed until she was full and sleepy.

The next morning he called to make sure she was all right. It was almost too much for her to handle so she fought back the tears as they conversed. She wanted to tell him the truth badly but the words were stuck in her throat. After she hung up she vowed never to call him again. At least not until she was ready to tell him that the baby was his.

However, Ryan didn't seem to get the memo to leave her be.

Both he and Bae would visit her at the library and he would bring her some sweets and mints in case she needed them. Bae would give her pictures he drew of her and the baby. There was no doubt that the young boy was enamored with her and Belle was with him too. How could anyone not? Yet the matter with the father was something she was uncomfortable with. She had no one to blame but herself; she wasn't going to deny that knowledge. But Belle wished he wasn't so damn wonderful.

Ryan Gold was a perfect gentleman and it was unbelievable how great he was. He was considerate in ways she never knew a man could be, not even Gary was as chivalrous. He would bring her lunch and sometimes he would talk to her. It was usually about Bae but now and then he would share something personal.

Belle never intended for anything to get this far. Since his visits started she didn't have it in her to be rude and kick him out. Ryan had every reason to be in the library like anyone else. And he was so charming in his awkward way. How could she not enjoy his company?

And she did. Much to her regret.

He told her about his divorce and how his ex-wife remarried. He told her how it was his dream to own his business and how he fell in love with this small town and decided to move here. He told her about his tough childhood and how he grew up with a con artist. He told her this and more.

And she shared things about her life too.

She told him about how her Mum was a single parent and that Belle's father was scarcely in the picture. She told him about how her mother was responsible in inspiring her love of books. She told him how she would love to see the world one day.

They became friends. She even introduced Ryan to Ruby when they ran into each other at Granny's. Naturally, Ruby had to tease her about the "silver fox" afterwards, but Belle insisted they were only friends. That was the first time she actually said it aloud, but she found that it was a good word to describe what they were to each other.

And through it all, she still couldn't tell him he was the father.

Furthermore, she didn't want him to do anything for her.

Getting out of her car, Belle slammed the door and thought she better start making the trek to her job. Even though the library wasn't far away, throw in a pregnant belly, and legs prone to cramps you had the making of a long journey.

Belle managed to walk ten feet before she realized she was going to be late if she took a break every two steps. Regardless how she rallied against it, Belle saw no other choice. She pulled out her cell and called Ryan.

Within minutes, Ryan showed up with Bae in tow. He was on his way to work too, and since it was a weekend, Bae wanted to tag along to help his Papa. Belle was grateful and she didn't miss the
concerned furrow of his brow as she slid into the passenger seat.

"You should have called me earlier if you had car problems," he told her as soon as she closed the door. "Do you have enough water? Your ankles—"

"I know and I do," she assured him. "It's okay Ryan. I'm stubborn and I thought I could make it there, but I was wrong."

"I have no problem driving you around. All you need to do is give me the word."

She smiled while inwardly she was cringing. Mentally she was planning on calling Ruby to help her take the car in to get it repaired and to do so ASAP that way she wouldn't have to rely on Ryan.

As the car rolled forward, Belle felt her insides tensed and her head pounding.

*Keep it in. Keep it in. Keep it in,* she kept repeating in her head. It wasn't Ryan's driving that made her feel ill, but the morning sickness that didn't want to leave.

She kept her mouth firmly pressed together and did her best to make it look like she wasn't going to vomit. Sweat began to gather at her temples and she could feel the heat rising in her.

When the car finally stopped, Belle couldn't hold it back. She lurched forward and her breakfast spewed out. Once the retching ended, Belle's face was flaming hot with embarrassment and she kept her face down so she wouldn't have to see the look of disgust on Ryan.

Bae, on the other hand, was impressed.

"That was a gusher!" he exclaimed.

She couldn't help it. Belle laughed because it was such a little boy thing to say. However she didn't know how an adult boy would say so she thought she better face the music.

"I am so sorry Ryan. I promise I will pay for any damage. I will clean it up too."

But he was smiling. *Smiling!*

"It's all right Belle. It's all part of the beauty of pregnancy."

Was he for real? "Really?"

"No. The morning sickness can be a…" Looking back at Bae, he changed his word choice. "…pain. Never apologize. It happens and I will do the cleaning. You get to work. My boss won't mind if I'm late."

Belle didn't know what to say. Was this man a saint in disguise?

"I'll make it up to you. And I don't want you to say no. Is that clear?"

Ryan nodded. "Have a good day at work."

And she did.

Chapter End Notes
The man's a keeper. Now… if we can get pass this friend zone. Next I have one more prompt for this verse per request.
Chapter Summary

Twyla Mercedes prompted: With Belle's car out of commission and Ruby busy, she calls Ryan to take her to her doctor's appointment. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

A/N: You knew this day was coming…

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

One Night Stand

"Thank you again for doing this. I know I've been saying it a lot… but seriously thank you."

Belle enlisted Ryan once more but this time she needed a ride to her doctor's. It was a routine check-up and since her car was still in the shop, Belle needed someone to take her. Her go-to person Ruby was busy at the diner and they were slammed and she couldn't afford to take a break to drive Belle. Her best friend was truly apologetic and Belle understood.

The only person she knew who might be available (she would never say available for sure because it would indicate she was counting on him to be available) was Ryan Gold. She started telling him if he was busy not to worry but Ryan wouldn't hear of it. And he wouldn't stand for her to have her appointment rescheduled.

Belle was eternally grateful for this man and she knew she had to repay him once the baby was born.

You know how you can do that. Tell him everything. You've known him long enough to know he's caring and honest. He won't take the baby from you. So tell him!

If only it were so easy.

And to make matters worse… Belle believed she was falling for him. She didn't know how it began, but ever since the day she threw up in his car she knew he was something special. He didn't get upset or yell at her. He was understanding, even made a joke. Her mother always said that if a man could tolerate a woman throwing up in his car for any reason… he was a keeper.

Mum was right. Ryan Gold was a rare specimen and she was fortunate to have him as a friend.

Since that night six months and five weeks ago, Belle felt a deep connection with him. She had known him as Rum, but he changed her life in that single moment in time and she didn't regret a single second. Even after she found out she was pregnant, Belle still didn't regret the choices she made. The only thing she regretted was not telling Ryan the truth.

For so long he has believed her ex-boyfriend Gary was the father. He was the perfect scapegoat as the absentee father and with Gary not around… she was able to maintain the farce. However, the
more she had gotten to know Ryan and his son, the more she felt horrible for keeping this secret from them.

But it wasn't something a person could blurt out. She was more than halfway through her second trimester and she knew she better come clean, but Belle was scared. She still had reservations that Ryan might want to take the baby from her despite getting to know him the past month.

She was a coward. Plain and simple.

Meanwhile, Ryan was enjoying being useful to her. Belle was the light he needed in his life. Bae loved her and even he was developing feelings for her. Of course, he already had feelings for her since the passionate night they shared six months and five weeks ago.

But who was counting?

Ryan wanted to ask her out, feeling secured that Belle had no feelings for her baby's father. It was always on the tip of his tongue, but he would become timid and he couldn't ask her. Even though they got along very well, Ryan didn't want to jinx their friendship. He also didn't want her to think he wanted to sleep with her again.

He did but not like that. He wanted to build a foundation with her. Become a family. But he felt it was too soon and he didn't want to frighten her away with his wishes. So Ryan decided to bide his time. Perhaps after the baby was born he would ask her out. That should give them plenty of time to get to know each other more.

With that in mind, Ryan kept a smile on his face.

Upon arriving at the doctor's office, Ryan intended to stay and wait for her in the waiting room. He didn't expect Belle to ask him if he would join her once her name was called.

"Are you sure?" he asked.

"Yeah." She smiled at him.

With such a lovely invitation, how could he say no?

So that was how Ryan ended up in the room with Belle, sitting beside her, as she laid in the bed waiting for her turn.

Then the moment arrived.

The ultrasound equipment was wheeled in and as they waited for the technician to set up, the doctor asked Ryan if he was the father.

"No," Belle answered quickly before Ryan could open his mouth. "He's my friend."

"Oh. Well, it's nice that Belle has someone here with her. Ready Mommy?" The doctor lifted up Belle's shirt and squirted the blue gel onto her belly.

Belle shivered at the cool touch but she gave Ryan a reassuring grin. He winked and settled back to see the image.

"Ah, there's your baby!" The doctor swiveled the screen so both Belle and Ryan could get a better look. Belle's eyes widened in amazement at how much her baby had grown since her last visit. She couldn't believe how detailed the image was. She saw the head, the arm, the little hand with five
fingers, the leg, and the five toes on one foot… The baby was so beautiful that a few tears leaked.

"Do you want to know the sex? I know you didn't want to last time, but did you change your mind?"

"No. I still want to be surprised," Belle told her.

Ryan couldn't tear his eyes away. The baby was beautiful. He was instantly transported back to when he had seen a similar picture with Bae. It was a habit but he counted all the fingers and toes he could find and just took in every second of it. He loved being a father and he felt the inklings of the desire to be one again the longer he stared at the ultrasound.

Without thinking, he asked, "How old is the fetus?"

The doctor grinned. "Twenty-seven weeks."

He frowned as he mentally calculated the time. Twenty-seven weeks would put the fetus at six months and five weeks. Exactly the time he had first met Belle.

The sharp intake of breath had Belle looking at him with worry. "Ryan… Are you all right?"

"Sir?" Even the doctor took note of his sudden pale features but Ryan assured them he was quite well.

"I was just remembering when Bae was that old. Sorry to cause any alarm," he said.

Belle nodded but the doctor didn't seem convinced, but who was she to judge?

The rest of the appointment went well and Belle was given high marks for keeping up with her vitamins and diet. The doctor reminded her that she should sign up for Lamaze's class soon and Belle said she would.

As for Ryan, he was quiet but when they got into the car, he was back to his usual chatty self. Belle had no reason to suspect he knew something.

Yet, Ryan could not stop hearing what the doctor said about the age of the fetus. And that meant only one thing…

Chapter End Notes

Yes, I'm gonna stop there. Muhahaha! Prompt me. You know what you guys want. The next couple prompts are requests for A Long Fatal Love Chase and Edward Scissorhands. You know the drill!
Chapter Summary

Rosefairy15 prompted: Belle tells Tempus about the baby. (Rated K)

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! I felt some fluff was needed and this came by reader's request! Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

A Long Fatal Love Chase

It was around dusk Dove announced supper was ready.

The day had certainly passed quickly with Tempus and Bae fishing, but Belle enjoyed watching them. A couple hours ago Bae had captured this gigantic sturgeon and Tempus declared they would feast on such a beauty. The fish was handed off to Dove for preparation and now it was time to eat.

Belle had developed a fondness for seafood since they decided to live on The Dark One and the wee one that was starting to grow found the idea extremely appetizing. She decided she would make her announcement after supper since this was Bae's moment to shine for catching dinner.

The Gold family took their rightful spots around the table, and after Tempus said grace (indeed… her husband has repented spiritually as well) they feasted on the main attraction—vinegar-poached sturgeon with thyme-butter sauce served on a bed of arugula and endive salad. Fresh baked bread and melted butter served as a side with a white wine.

Dove's skills in the kitchen surpassed Belle's, and she was more than happy to leave the menu details to him for he always knew what would satisfy his master and mistress. His uncanny abilities in observation led to Belle having a fillet bigger than the rest with a little bit of wine. Dove did not speak a word but Belle swore she caught the traces of a smile over his usual expressionless features. He knew.

However, her husband and son did not take notice. If they did, they did not comment. Of course Belle would not put anything pass Tempus. The man was as observant as his manservant and more than likely his silence was respectful to her wishes as it was her news she wished to reveal. It was very considerate of him if that was the case. Her love for her husband could only grow as the family conversed over matters of the day. In addition, Bae regaled tales of the past with a lighter note as he told his parents how he and Peter tried to go fishing. His companion did not possess the talent and actually ended up in the water with the fish!

Belle and Tempus laughed at Bae's impression of poor Peter trying to swim. In the end, Bae had to jump in to rescue him and managed to capture the sneaky devil that caused the mess in the first place.
Once supper had ended and the dishes were cleared, Tempus suggested his family might retire to the parlor for light entertainment in a game of charades.

Bae thought the idea was splendid as did Belle. What better way for her to reveal the baby?

As they were an odd number (Dove did not participate for he was not the sort to play games) Belle elected that she and Bae could be the ones to pantomime if Tempus would be so kind to be the guesser. Once it was settled, the game commenced.

Bae went first.

He held up his hand as if he was holding something and mimed a conversation with the object. Then he switched to someone being agitated and excited as he pointed to Belle to give the impression he was conversing with a woman. Then pointed to himself to show he was the woman and wept as he lifted his leg to indicate he was climbing into something and crossed his throat to show death. A swordfight followed where Bae was stabbed but turned to stab another and poured something into his invisible enemy's mouth before he, too, died.

The performance was impressive and Belle could not help herself as she applauded young Bae. Tempus had to agree with his wife as he also clapped.

"What am I?" Bae inquired from the floor.

"I shall guess and say such passionate actions could be only one thing that comes to mind… you are Hamlet."

"Yes!" Bae jumped to his feet and gave a bow. "Very good Papa! All right, Mother, it's your turn!"

Belle smiled as she took her place in front of her loved ones. She had all planned in her head she would act various subtle signs that will lead to the grand finale; however, gazing upon the faces of her precious son and husband, Belle could not prolong it anymore.

Pointing to first Bae, Belle made a motion about him being taller. Then she pointed to Tempus, then to her heart.

"I must admit… I am a little lost," Tempus said.

Belle's smile grew wider as her hand that covered her heart began to journey downwards until she rested the palm upon her belly. She kept it there as Tempus's eyes became larger with the dawning realization.

But it was Bae who ended the silence first as he leapt to his feet and hugged his mother dearly with a joyous exultation.

"I'm going to be a big brother!" he shouted. "I have to tell Dove!" Without waiting to be dismissed, Bae ran out of the room to search for the servant.

Belle could not hold back her giggles as she waited for her husband to embrace her. He did not disappoint as his arms curled around her waist, his eyes searching hers.

"Is it true?" he whispered. "Are we…?"

"Yes, my love," she whispered in reply. "You are to be a father. A child born out of love."

She knew he would be overjoyed but she had not expected the tears to come streaming down his
face as he fell to his knees and buried himself into her skirts.

"I prayed to God that He would grant me forgiveness for my past sins. I thought having Bae living in freedom and you as my wife was all I needed. But now… now I see was wrong. I want this child more than I can say. This child is my salvation, a symbol for how I could have lost everything, and I will do everything in my power to ensure I will be the man that is worthy of such a gift."

"Tempus…" Cradling his chin with both her hands, Belle lifted him up so she could gaze into his gold speckled eyes. "Please. No more dark thoughts, my love. The past is the past. You have learned and grown from your errors and you have become the man I always knew you were capable of becoming. You are everything to me my dear heart. And this child will be grateful to have you as a father."

There wasn't much Tempus could do but kiss her abdomen that held both his life and that of his unborn child's.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you loved this happy drabble. I know I did! I have other requests already written for the following verses, and if there's one you specifically would like to read next, then let me know: Rebecca, Indecent Proposal, Edward Scissorhands, Ravenous, Otherworld, The Best Man, Ghost Whisperer, Best Friends, and The Lost World.
Chapter Summary

Grace5231973 prompted: A crashing of a ship near Manderley leads to an emotional confrontation and reveal from Anthony Gold. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

This is by far the best piece of suspense I have ever read in a story where everything starts making sense. Again if you have not read the novel or watched the film... you need to. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rebecca

Funny how things can change so quickly.

One second Belle was standing on the precipice of life and death; the next, reason and sense prevail so life can reign. As Belle stepped down from the ledge, she turned to face her housekeeper Zelena West. The red-headed woman had the audacity to appear contrite after she almost tried seducing her mistress to commit suicide.

That was a mistake.

"Ms. West," Belle said coolly. "I believe it might be best if you return to your quarters and remain there for the rest of the evening until I call you. Is that understood?"

Zelena pressed her lips firmly together and nodded.

"Go."

After a quick curtsey, Zelena was gone and Belle staggered to the closest chair and clutched the top as she took several deep breaths. She could not believe how close she came to walking through the window and down to the sea below. And all because her husband did not love her.

"Never again," she vowed to herself. "I love Anthony. If he cannot love me, then as long as I can still breathe I will love him for the both of us. That will sustain me."

Then she heard the explosions.

xxxXxx

The following several hours were a whirlwind of confusion, panic, and chaos.

A ship had run aground and dozens were injured as a result. Anthony, his servants, and other able-bodied men went to the aid of the sailors. Belle tried searching for her husband to see what she could
do, but it seemed that every time she ran from the shore back to Manderley she missed him.

It was not until the harbor-master Captain Triton came with grave yet news of consolation. He had wished to speak to Anthony, but as her husband was indisposed, Belle listened to what he had said about a diver's discovery while searching for the cause of the ship's misfortune.

The news was astonishing to say the least. However, Belle believed her husband should find some comfort in it once he was told.

Belle was escorting the captain out when Anthony came home. Her husband was surprised to see the harbor-master, but Captain Triton immediately told him that they needed to speak. Belle wasn't given a second glance as the men exited to Anthony's study.

Perhaps he was still angry with her about the costume.

Belle fought back the urge to cry and instead chose to wait outside. When Anthony was ready to speak to her… he will come for her. Ten minutes passed and Belle watched as the captain went into his car and drove away.

It was done. He told Anthony what the diver found and her poor husband was still inside the house—no doubt he was in shock and grieving anew. As much as Belle wanted to hold onto her resolve to have her husband come to her, her heart ached and longed to be with him during this time of crisis. He could be waiting for her, calling out for her while she selfishly and heartlessly withheld her wifely comfort.

The heart won out as Belle scurried inside and headed into his study. While it was not what she imagined, Anthony was there, standing with his back to her, staring out the window, out towards the sea. His posture was rigid, his countenance difficult to discern from its reflection and darkness. However she knew her husband was strongly affected by the harbor-master.

He was lost to his own council, and Belle knew she must make the first move. She took his hand and pressed his fingertips to her lips. One by one she bestowed soft, gentle kisses before sealing another kiss on the back of his hand.

"My darling…" she murmured. "My poor Anthony. I cannot have you bear this alone. I am here."

He still did not speak, but what were words when actions were much stronger? Anthony put his arm around her and pulled her close so her head could tuck beneath his chin. His fingers stroked her lower back as he pressed her closer to him.

Belle closed her eyes in bliss. For so long she had gone without his embrace… This was heaven but he was very much stuck in hell. He needed her.

"You forgive me. You have no idea how happy that makes me."

"Forgive you?" Anthony gazed down at her. "I do not understand. What are you to be forgiven for?"

Belle's brow puckered in confusion. "Why, for last night. The costume. You were so very angry and thought I did it intentionally."

"Did I?" Anthony looked away. "I don't recall. I actually forgot about it. Was I terribly angry at you?"

She nodded. "You were."
"Ah." He said no more.

Belle knew it was time for her to act. To tell him what she always known along and to tell him how it did not change for her.

"Anthony, is it possible for us to start over? To face the world together come what may? You don't have to love me. I will not ask you for what you cannot give. All I want is to be your friend, your companion, your confidante. Nothing more than that is platonic."

Her husband inhaled sharply, his eyes snapping to hers. It was then Belle noticed the shadows lurking in him, the exhaustion. These past hours have been very trying, draining. No wonder Anthony looked ghastly pale.

"How much do you love me?" he questioned her. Desperation laced in his voice and the tortured pain that she wanted him to avoid was staring back at her. "Dear God above… it's too late. We've lost our chance for happiness."

"No Anthony. I'm here. I'm still with you," Belle said urgently, her hand resting on his cheek. "It's not too late. Please don't say such horrid things."

"It must be Belle. Everything is over. My worst fear has happened."

"What fear? Anthony…"

"It was the one thing I knew that would return to haunt me. I dreamt of this for too long. Every day, every night. It was always there and I thought marrying you would make some small difference in my pathetic existence. But I dared too much. I should have known not to find happiness. People like me we're not meant for it."

Baffled, Belle was uncertain what to make with her husband's cryptic remarks. Why could he not speak directly from the heart? Why these riddles? Why this mystery? Her heart was racing and she wished she could find the right words to assuage him, but her husband was in an awful state. He did not make sense, yet in his mind, he made perfect sense.

"Forgive my ignorance. I cannot pretend to understand you. What are you telling me Anthony?"

He broke away from Belle's grasp to put some distance between them. "Isn't it obvious? Cora has won."

Her blood turned to ice. Of course Cora won… Belle knew all along that the ghost of Manderley's former mistress was everywhere. But to hear it from her husband's lips… to have it confirmed… Belle should not have been surprised. Blinded with her misery, she almost missed Anthony's elaboration.

"…damn her. No matter what I've done she was there in the background ruining things for me. Even when I longed to hold you as I've just done, to kiss your lips, and to hear those loving words from your mouth… Cora had to get her claws into it. For as soon as I would feel myself getting closer to you… I would see Cora and I would remember my fear and I could not… My hopes and dreams were constantly being punished and I could not put her to rest. I remembered her eyes, her face, her devious smile. She knew Belle. She knew this would happen. She knew she would win. She always knew. 'I always win Anthony,' she told me. 'Love is weakness. Don't ever forget. In the end, I will be victorious.'"

"Anthony?" But he couldn't hear her as he covered his face with his hands.
"It's over. The boat. They found it. The diver found the boat," he moaned.

"Yes," she said slowly. "Captain Triton told me. Is this about the body they found as well? In the cabin?"

"Yes."

"Anthony, it's all right. Don't you see? It means she wasn't alone. She didn't suffer and die by herself." Belle knew how finding Cora's body all beaten and unidentifiable was traumatic for him. Nothing of his beloved wife was left thanks to Nature's cruel hand. She could not understand why this did not bring some solace.

"No…" He shook his head. "You don't understand. She was alone."

"Perhaps you thought so. But this could be a blessing. Cora wasn't alone."

"There was no one with her," Anthony reiterated. "Cora was alone."

Belle watched as he lowered his hands and looked into his eyes. There was nothing grieving about them.

"It is her body the diver found in the cabin. The woman I buried in the crypt is not Cora. She is an unknown, unclaimed. I said it was my wife and I buried her. There wasn't an accident Belle. Cora did not drown. I killed her. I shot her in the cottage in the cove. I carried her lifeless body to the cabin. I took the boat out to sea. I sunk the boat so I would never have to see her again. It is the boat and her body that they found. The crime I committed."

Moving towards her in act of distress, Anthony seized Belle by her shoulders and shook her once. "Will you look into my eyes and tell me that you love me now? Knowing I have my wife's blood on my hands? Will you tell me that you love me?"

Chapter End Notes

Hmm… does she? Prompt away.
Chapter Summary

jamie-wan-kenobi prompted: Belle is a medium who can talk to ghosts. She hears reports about a particular cantankerous ghost who haunts Storybrooke's library. She decides to put her gift to good use and discovers he won't crossover quietly. (Rated T for child abuse and some violent content)

Chapter Notes

I'm starting my Spring Break and I thought this was the perfect time to update some more prompts! I do want to share that I haven't really watched the show Ghost Whisperer, but I do know what the show is about. So I am going to do my own spin on the idea so if doesn't seem to follow the show at all…it's because it's not. I hope you all enjoy and don't forget to leave a review!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ghost Whisperer Inspired

"If I was going to pick a place to haunt, then this would be it," Belle murmured to herself as she shined her flashlight through the stack of books. She had to count her lucky stars that she was even allowed to do this. "I have to commend your choice. Passing eternity here will make it less boring."

Belle French had a gift that some may consider a curse. Others may say she was a fraud, especially if they were non-believers. The truth was… she had believed it was a curse until she decided to stop running and accept her fate—she could see and speak to dead people.

Yes. It wasn't a line or a joke but Belle had the ability to see ghosts.

Ever since she was a small child she was able to communicate with the dead. Of course she hadn't realized the people she spoke to were ghosts. Eventually she started to realize that only she could see them. Her parents thought she had a wild imagination creating these imaginary friends, but it was her grandmother who told them that Belle had been touched with the "gift of second sight." It was something that was passed on every couple generations and it was Belle's turn to inherit. Her father, Moe, thought the whole thing was a huge sack of manure but her grandmother was adamant because her sister had been gifted.

Tried as they might, Belle's parents had a difficult time accepting that their little girl wasn't normal. It was easy to pretend she had imaginary friends but seeing ghosts? And talking to them? It was a whole new playing level of parenting. It wasn't until Belle had an unfortunate encounter with a ghost who showed up in her bedroom with a gunshot wound to the head, screaming at the top of his lungs, scaring her that they finally decided to address that this wasn't ever going to go away. So the only thing left was to send Belle to her grandmother's.

Lillian Dover knew exactly what to do after witnessing her sister go through the same terrors. She
taught Belle everything she could about the spirit world and how they were people all the same, except they were in their spiritual bodies. She taught Belle that they had unfinished business that needed to be resolved before they could pass on. Of course it goes without saying that there were good ghosts and bad ghosts. She warned Belle to be careful on whom she decided to help and that doing so wasn't always going to be a simple task.

There were times Belle wished someone else had this gift. It made growing up a challenge and fitting in… forget it. The only time she could block out the ghosts was when she was reading. She could put all her focus on the story and pretend she was in a faraway land or time. It calmed her, soothed her. And it allowed her to think about her dreams and how she would one day want to travel the world.

She still wanted to but she found the calling to be too strong of a pull. What changed her mind about this curse was when she was visited by a child. He was about ten-years-old and he was lost and confused. Belle was able to learn that his name was Henry and that the last thing he remembered was hiding in his bedroom closet because his mother was looking for him. She made him soup and he didn't want to eat it so he hid, thinking he wouldn't have to. He told her how eating that soup always made him feel sick. But he was already sick and his coughing gave him away. She wasn't happy when she found him and she pinned him to the floor, forcing the hot soup down his throat. He said he was choking and then that was it. Darkness and before he knew it… he was outside and began running. He felt much better but he couldn't seem to understand why no one would talk to him.

It broke Belle's heart to tell him the truth so she did it as gently as she could. To say Henry was stunned was an understatement. He looked at her and asked her what he was to do now. So she told him she was going to help him.

And she did.

Digging up more information on Henry didn't take long. Belle uncovered his name was Henry Mills and he was adopted when he was only a baby. His mother, a single parent, devoted her entire life to Henry. She had told many people that he was sickly as an infant and no one wanted him but her. The years of dedication to make sure her boy grew up big and strong were for naught as Henry spent most of his life in and out of the hospital for ailments that no one could determine the diagnosis. At one point things were turning around and it seemed Henry was on the mend, but the last year had him back in the hospital.

Now this.

Belle didn't like Regina Mills the moment she laid eyes on her. There was something off about the woman and knowing that she was responsible for Henry's death confirmed Belle's first impressions. She thrived on people's sympathy for her plight and she lived up to the part of the grieving mother to the point she deserved an Oscar. Belle had to do her best not to point her out and denounce her as the evil woman that she was. She was there on a mission: to locate Henry's storybook.

It was fortunate that the house was full of guests paying their respects so Belle was able to blend in with no problem. She found the book in his room with ease (between his bed and mattress as he told her), and clutching the book tightly, Belle walked out of the house. Of course, she felt justice needed to be served. There was no way she could allow Regina to get away with her crimes.

She placed an anonymous tip, posing as a nurse, about how Henry's symptoms could be related to being poisoned. She recommended the police exhume the body and perform an autopsy to be certain.

A couple weeks later there was a story on the news about Regina Mills' arrest for the death of her son. Henry had been staying with her in her apartment and was reading his book when the story
captured his attention. Belle watched him as he stared at the screen with mixed emotions. She turned the TV off when she thought it was enough and asked him if he understood what happened.

He turned towards her. "I think so," he said. "Does that mean my Mom is going to jail?"

"Yes."

"Good."

He went back to his book, picked it up, and faced Belle.

"Thank you Miss Belle for helping me. I feel different—lighter really."

"I believe you had your unfinished business completed," she told him. "Are you ready to move on?"

"I think so. Can I bring my book?"

She chuckled. "I hope so. I can't imagine the Big Guy denying a kid their favorite book."

Then, like every other case she helped, Henry disappeared. The book too.

He was in a happy place and Belle knew right then and there she should stop running from who she was. There were ghosts who needed help and she was going to do her best to make sure they crossed over to the Great Beyond.

Now, bringing her back to the present, Belle continued to wander the silent library in search of her next client. Normally, she waited for them to come to her but this one was stubborn. She had overheard how the Storybrooke Library was haunted and looking into the accounts… it was very interesting.

There were the usual paranormal activities—lights flickering, loud tapping noises, flying books, a voice demanding people to leave—but it was the fact that it only happened in a certain area of the library. The reference section to be exact. This ghost wanted to make sure his or her research wasn't being interrupted.

So Belle thought she would check it out and see if there was some validity to it. If this was a ghost tormenting people, then she wanted to see if there was anything she could do to help.

Convincing the head librarian didn't take much effort. The older woman was all too thrilled to give Belle the keys and to make sure she told Mr. Gold to rot in Hell.

Whoever this "Mr. Gold" was… he wasn't one of the pleasant types.

"Hello?" Belle called out again. "Mr. Gold? I'm Belle French. I'm here to help you."

It was a good enough start and usually that would get the ghosts running to her. Depending on how long he had been in this library… he might be desperate for conversation.

"C'mon," she said. "This is your chance to speak. Just tell me what it is that you want."

"And what exactly do you think I want, dearie."

The voice tickled her ear, causing Belle to spin abruptly. She dropped her flashlight so she quickly picked it up and saw that the light was aimed at a pair of legs. Moving the light upwards, she began to see the shape and form of the ghost she was looking for. All dressed up in a very nice designer suit and leaning upon a cane with a golden handle stood the specter in his glory. He was an older man
with long dark and silver hair and intense brown eyes that nearly took Belle's breath away. There was no denying he was a handsome man, no doubt a heartbreaker when he was younger, and her heartbeat quickened as his nostrils flared as he stared down at her.

"Well?" he queried with impatience laced in his tone.

Slowly rising to her feet, Belle tucked back a strand of hair. "I'm Belle—"

"Yes I heard that part already. Belle French. Do you mind explaining what you're doing trespassing on my property?"

She sputtered. "Y-Your property?"

He rolled his eyes. "Yes. Property. I own this library like I own most of this town," he said as if speaking to a child.

Now that was rude. Belle glared at him. "That would be some incredible feat to own something when you're actually dead. I hate to tell you Mr. Gold but you do not own anything now."

"Perhaps not. But the way I see it… it's still mine. Even if I am dead."

This wasn't getting her anywhere. She had to try a different tactic. "Look. We're clearly getting off on the wrong foot. I'm a medium and I would like to help you complete your unfinished business so you can crossover."

Mr. Gold snorted. "Is that so? Thank you dearie but I have to pass."

"You mean you don't want to crossover?"

"Why would I? I know what's waiting for me, and frankly, I'm in no hurry to get there." He began to turn around but Belle was not going to be deterred.

"Then why are you haunting this place? Normally, ghosts who attract attention is really a cry for help."

"Not me."

Now Belle was getting the idea why the librarian, Mrs. Lucas, wanted her to tell him to rot in Hell. He was insufferable and pig-headed and his dismissive attitude was getting on her nerves.

"Well, you shouldn't have been making too much noise."

"I like my solitude and I don't want anyone poking around my business." Glancing over his shoulder, he narrowed his gaze on her. "Case in point. Why don't you be a good medium and bother some poor sod who does want to share their sob story."

He raised his hand and flicked his wrist in her direction. Before Belle knew it, she felt a rush of air slamming into her, making her fall back.

She could hear him laughing as she got back on her feet.

Looking around, she noticed he was gone.

If he hadn't been such an arse, then Belle might have left him to wallow in his ghostly existence. But Belle wasn't the kind of person to give up so easily.
Mr. Gold met his match.

Chapter End Notes

I am totally loving the possibilities this verse can go. I do have an ulterior motive for Gold's purpose in being in the library, but if you want to see Gold giving medium Belle a hard time… I am open to ideas! Next is one I am calling Best Friends.
1 Best Friends Rated K

Chapter Summary

jamie-wan-kenobi and belle'sdarkangel prompted: It's Robby Gold's first day of school. He is really nervous that none of the kids would like him. Then he met Belle. (Rated K)

Chapter Notes

I did get a couple of requests at different times for Rumbelle being friends. So I thought how cute would it be to start at the beginning of a friendship? I hope you all like!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Best Friends

"Here we are. You can find the office on your own."

No I love you or good luck, not even a have a good day. Not that Robby Gold expected that from his father. His Da wasn't really a "share his feelings" kind of person. He was straight to the point, sometimes brutally so, and lazy. The only reason Robby was now attending a new school was because his Da had to leave the last town they lived in. In fact, this was the third time they had to move in the last two years.

But this time Da said it will be different. No more moving.

Robby hoped so. He hated moving. He also hated being the new kid.

Of course, it wasn't like he had much of an opportunity to make friends. He was shy, painfully so. He barely spoke which made him prime fodder for the mean kids. Part of the reason he didn't like to speak was his accent. The kids from his last school teased him a lot when he accidentally dropped his American accent. He had wanted to fit in so badly that he thought if he sounded like the other kids then they would want to be friends with him.

It didn't work and Robby was determined not to lose his American accent this time. He would have to concentrate and speak slowly, but he knew he could do it.

Walking into the main office, Robby approached the secretary's desk meekly. He took a deep breath and said, "Hi. I'm new."

The secretary, a kind and older face, looked down with surprise. "Oh my! Hello my dear! Um, where are your parents?"

"My Da—Dad was running late to work," Robby told her. He set the paperwork his Da had given him on top of her desk. "This is everything."

The secretary—Mrs. Potts, said the sign plate—picked up the papers and shuffled through them. "They appear to be in order… Robert Gold is it?"
He nodded. "I like Robby."

"As do I." She gave him a little wink. "All right sweetie. Can you wait in that chair over there? We'll let your teacher know you're here."

Robby did as she asked, pleased with himself that he didn't stammer or lose his accent. Perhaps this time was going to be different.

It took ten minutes but Mrs. Potts came back with that endearing smile that felt so warm and welcoming. "All right Robby. Ms. Shirin is on her way to get you. Welcome to Storybrooke Elementary."

As promised, his teacher Ms. Shirin was soon in the office. Right away Robby liked her. She had this friendly smile and the prettiest brown eyes he had ever seen. Plus she smelled like honey and almonds when she knelt down and held out her hand in greeting.

"Hello Robby. I'm Ms. Shirin, your third grade teacher. Ready for your first day?"

He grinned. She was certainly the nicest teacher he ever had! No one ever greeted him like they were happy to see him.

"I am."

"Wonderful! Let's go." She stood up and opened her hand again so Robby could slip his hand in hers. Together, they walked out of the office and towards his classroom. Ms. Shirin was telling him about the school and pointing out the gym/cafeteria, the specials rooms for music and art, and lastly the library.

She paused as another affectionate smile overcame her lips as she shook her head to herself. "I see my little reader is already hard at work."

Robby looked over to see a little girl about his age with curly brown hair and two of the brightest blue eyes. She smiled wide with a tiny gap between her front teeth as she closed the book she was reading and stood up.

"Hi Ms. Shirin!" she exclaimed. "You were right! This book is so good!"

"Where are you at?" the teacher asked.

"The princess just met the prince but she doesn't know that it's the same boy that rescued her from the evil guard."

"That's my favorite part," Ms. Shirin said. Looking down at Robby, she told him, "I have a good idea. Robby, this is one of my students. Belle, this is Robby."

"Hi," Belle chirped. "Do you like to read?"

Robby shrugged. "I don't read a lot."

"That's okay. I bet you are a reader."

"Belle, do you think you can show Robby around? He's new and could probably use a friend," Ms. Shirin said.

Belle grin her toothy grin as she took Robby's free hand. "I think we're gonna be the best of friends."
Robby felt his shyness melt away as this strange little girl who loves to read books held his hand as she took over the teacher's duties and told him everything about their class schedule and other random things that popped into her head. Belle wasn't afraid to speak her mind and Robby found that he liked listening to her talk.

Once they reached their classroom, Belle nearly dragged him over to two desks.

"You can sit by me. That way if you have any questions, then all you need to do is ask!"

She slipped her book into her desk as she grabbed a piece of paper and a pencil. Robby followed suit as Ms. Shirin took her place in front of the classroom.

For the first time in a long time, Robby felt like he belonged. And he had a feeling Belle was right… they were going to be the best of friends.

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I can't stand this cuteness. Please feel free to prompt more!
Chapter Summary

Oncer4Life69Dearie prompted: Now that Scissor!Rum has a pair of hands, he can express his feelings for Belle. However, his shyness prevents him from telling her what he wants and he tries to tell her in his own way, but misunderstandings are bound to happen. (Rated M for smut)

Chapter Notes

It's been sometime since I revisited this verse and this seemed like the perfect prompt to get back into it. Hope you all like!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Edward Scissorhands

Rum could not believe how fast the months had passed. And why shouldn't they? Since Belle's father surprised him with the birthday present of a lifetime, having real hands was a magical experience. He could feel things he only dreamt about doing, touch things without bringing pain. He could lay his fingers upon his cheek and not meet with a sting or feel the trickle of blood running down his chin.

The first time he was able to touch a blossoming bud nearly had him breaking down in tears. The velvety sensation was such bliss to have such delicate petals between his fingertips that he lost track of time he spent stroking the rose. Now he understood why the flower had been Papa Jeff's favorite, and in turn, the same for Belle. He was able to bring the rose close to his nose so he could inhale the heavenly fragrance, even allow the soft petals to tickle his nose.

This… he could do this without a hint of guilt or fear he might accidentally destroy such beauty.

He knew he probably made quite a spectacle in the florist shop, but Rum did not have a care in the world. People take such simple pleasures for granted—not him. Not ever.

Belle understood, allowing him to take his time in enjoying the flowers and never once interrupted, even when the shop girl was getting a little uncomfortable about the man who would not stop weeping over the flowers. Belle merely pulled the girl aside and calmly explained to her that he had an accident and would have been unable to touch something so precious until a miracle happened. The girl (not knowing Rum once had scissors and knives for fingers) nodded wordlessly and allowed him to continue his supplication.

Rum knew he was fortunate to have Belle at his side. She didn't have to say anything to him. Her patience in him was unwavering and when he was ready to go, she held out her hand to him and he was once more enveloped in rapture to have her warm, silky palm in his.

They had stayed with her father in Sydney about four months now. The doctors and physical
therapist wanted Rum to stay close in case something should go awry. As it were, Rum's surgery was no ordinary one and everything had been documented and tested carefully. Maurice hadn't minded the houseguests since he was able to spend more time with his daughter, especially since her last visit was when he had been in the hospital from the car accident.

This time Maurice was able to have quality time with Belle that wasn't upsetting. And… it gave him the opportunity to get to know the man that his daughter was in love with.

Indeed, Maurice knew something was going on with Belle when she came to see him ages ago. While she had been worried and concerned over his well-being, she was also distant and would often look out the window as if searching for something. Even the sight of a rose would cause this small smile to grow but it would not touch her eyes. Belle was troubled, Maurice could tell, and when he asked her about it, her response was that she was thinking about a friend. She hadn't volunteered much information as to who the friend was, but that he didn't have many people who cared about him. In fact, Maurice didn't think too much about it until Belle called him up about Rum's birthday. Then… she told him everything about the man with the scissor hands.

Maurice knew as outlandish as it sounded could not be made up. Regardless how his Belle was a reader with a knack for storytelling, Maurice had no reason to doubt her and when she sent him pictures… he vowed he would do everything in his power that he could to help this poor soul.

Now, Maurice was very happy with the fruits of his labor. He was also happy over how much Rum was happy, which also made Belle happy. While the two did not share how deep their friendship went, Maurice wasn't blind. He knew damn well they loved each other and as far as he could tell… neither of them acted on it other than a few chaste and platonic touches or a quick peck on the mouth.

At the rate Rum and Belle were going, Maurice was looking at having grandchildren possibly in twenty years.

That did not sit well with him. He wanted these kids together and to cease this slow burn romance. All they needed was a little nudge in the right direction.

"You love her."

The blunt reply shook Rum as he turned wide eyes to her father.

"I-I don't know—"

Maurice snorted. "C'mon son. Any person with a pair of eyes can see how much you care about Belle. And to be frank, she cares a lot about you too."

Rum's cheeks burned as he thought back to the moment after the incident with Gaston and he retreated to his castle on the mountain. Belle came to him—a vision in white with those crystalline blue eyes swimming with tears and pink lips quivering. He had thought he would never see her again not with Gaston's blood on his hands, but Belle never accused him or cursed him or raged at him. She only wanted to be held and when he wrapped his arms around her so gingerly… she had whispered so quietly that he almost missed the soft utterance:

"I love you Rum."

Hearing those simplistic words (and with his name too!) Rum did not know how to respond or if he was supposed to even know. In that moment, silence was the best solution and he had held her to his
beating heart until Belle shifted. Then it had been over. Afterwards, Belle never brought it up again nor did she ever repeat those words to him again. Eventually Rum wondered if he was so starved for any confirmation about Belle's feelings for him that he imagined she had said them because he wanted to hear them. It hurt too much to ever dare hope that this beauty could love him the way he loved her. She was his angel, his salvation. He was selfish and greedy to want more than the friendship she had offered, and so Rum cast aside his heart so he could be content with their circumstances.

It wasn't as bad as it sounded. He found happiness in other things and having Belle close by meant the world to him. As long as she was happy with his friendship, then he would be too.

Rum didn't want to raise his hopes but Maurice sounded pretty confident that his daughter cared far more for him than she let on.

"What are you waiting for?"

"Excuse me?" Rum asked, not sure if he heard the older man correctly.

"You heard me: what are you waiting for? Ask her out. Take her on a nice, romantic date. Lord knows, you two have waited long enough."

"Well—I…" Rum licked his lips and swallowed hard. He wasn't sure how to explain to Maurice that it wasn't easy as he made it. For one, Rum didn't have much knowledge about dating or dates or anything romantic other than from the books Belle brought him. Papa Jeff never got that far in his teachings either. When it came to the opposite sex, Papa Jeff told him that women could be changeable but if he found the one, then he should treat her right. Of course, "treating her right" did not make a whole lot of sense. Rum knew he wanted to give Belle the world, but to complete such a feat was elusive to him.

"I don't know what a date is," Rum finally admitted. "I mean, I know a man and a woman spends time together, but what does that mean? What do you do? What do you say? My Papa never told me and the books I've read don't go into a lot of detail. I want to make Belle happy, yes, but where do I start?"

Maurice gazed at him with dawning understanding and even a little embarrassment. Belle had mentioned he was closed off from the world, but he had not realized how little Rum understood about people or interactions or even the basic social protocols.

Getting his daughter and Rum together was not going to be easy. Not with this kind of challenge.

Maurice wondered how much he should share, but the boy was so innocent and naïve that he didn't want to frighten him away. Then again, Maurice wasn't getting any younger either.

"I think we should have a drink beforehand."

Rum was a little confused but he nodded anyways. If Maurice could help him, then he might be able to work up the nerve to tell Belle how much he loved her.

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"That was a nice visit! I'm sad to leave but I do miss Storybrooke. What about you Rum?"

Rum started, not realizing she was talking to him until she set her hand on his arm. Just a jolt from that contact had him practically leaping out of his skin. He forced a grin for her benefit and agreed how he also missed Storybrooke. It wasn't a complete lie. He did miss his home, his gardens, and his
Papa's presence. But he was not looking forward in seeing the townspeople.

Belle assured him that Graham wasn't going to arrest him. The Sheriff was one of his biggest advocates and he was anxious to see Rum and his new hands. The same went with Ruby and Ariel.

Yet it didn't allay his anxiousness.

In addition, Rum was even more anxious after what her father told her about dates and dating a person entails. Was Belle expecting him to do those things? He thought kisses and being close was intimate already, yet Maurice shared more about the birds and bees than he cared to know. And the crazy thing was that it had nothing to do with birds or bees. Not that adding them would make it any better.

Suffice to say, Rum was shock to his core. He didn't know how he could look Belle in the eyes but Maurice clapped him on the back and told him that it should happen naturally and at that right time.

"Don't rush things or it would come back at you," Maurice advised.

Rum didn't want to know what would come back at him, but he thought he will take Maurice's words to heart. He didn't want to rush Belle into anything.

But as the plane landed, Rum decided he was going to have to do some additional research of his own. He didn't doubt Maurice's sage words but he knew he wasn't ready for what Maurice told him. The truth was… he didn't know if he would ever be, but if it made Belle happy… Rum would find a way to get over his fears.

As expected, Belle's friends were waiting for them at the gate when they got off the plane. Rum stood back as Ruby and Ariel embraced Belle. The girls were too busy laughing and talking at once to notice how he stood there fidgeting with the bag in his hands. Then Ruby happened to glance in his direction and his ears were instantly filled with her squeals.

Yes… Rum having actual hands became the gossip in town. The funny thing was how quickly everyone forgot the horror of his scissor hands and he was welcome back into the tribe like a long-lost brother. It was strange and unnerving, even Belle felt the welcome was over-the-top.

"I suppose we should be grateful they're pleased to see you," she told him. "Could be a lot worse."

Indeed.

Then in a snap, the attention was over. Rum was like one of them. No more the oddity or the freak. Just Rum.

And honestly, Rum liked it that way.

Of course, there were expectations now. People figured he would move away from the castle and get a job. But Rum loved his home and parting from it was not an option he would consider. Now that he had hands, Rum could fix the place up and do the repairs that had been neglected for so long.

It was part of his plan.

He was going to ask Belle out but he wanted to prove to her that he was worthy. Plus, it gave him the time needed to learn more about courtship and other dating rituals.

It didn't take long for Rum to decide the normal conventions were for him. If he was going to woo Belle, then he was going to do so in his unique way.
First, he really needed to spruce up the castle.

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Belle was glad that things with Rum had smoothed over. The people took him back in and the only person who objected to having him come back was Regina Mills. Yet, she was part of the minority and as long as Rum didn't cross paths with her… all was well.

Belle was grateful that Graham's investigation resulted in Rum's favor and that Gaston died due to Rum's self-defense. The word "murderer" did not breathe in Storybrooke but the few that did not like Rum did keep a close eye on him lest he should kill again. Even with his normal hands… Some did fear him.

Belle went back to working in the library between spending time with her best friends and Rum. Although, lately, it's been spending time with the girls more so than Rum.

Belle knew he was hard at work in getting his home back to its former condition. Now with a pair of functionally working hands… Rum could do what he always wanted but never could.

As pleased and happy as she was for him, Belle also missed him.

She hadn't been able to see him since he started his project. Not due to lack of effort on her part. It was that Rum didn't want her to come inside until he was done. Even when she offered to help, Rum was appreciative to the suggestion but kept insisting this was something he had to do on his own. She had to surmise that almost a lifetime without hands would make him antsy to do something independent and she respected his wishes, but she occasionally wished he would come down from the mountain more often. Usually he did when he needed supplies or food but then Rum would be back on his mission without so much as a hello or a friendly wave.

Belle had to reason she shouldn't be upset. Rum didn't need her and he was entitled to live his life. But it would make her sad she wasn't able to see her friend. She missed talking to him, reading, and even walking the castle grounds together.

It was silly, really. Belle always thought that with his hands he would want—She closed her eyes and shook her head. There was no indication that Rum was interested in her other than the innocent caresses. Yes they were good friends, but Belle believed that her feelings were completely one-sided.

After all, she had told him she loved him and he did not say the words back. In the heat of the moment, she figured he was stunned or speechless but since he didn't let her go… she took it as a sign that he loved her too. Over time, Belle began to question his feelings since Rum never said or done anything to indicate he wanted to be something intimate other than friends. Even after his operation, when he touched her hand in the park, Belle thought he would say the words, but to her disappointment, he didn't.

"You have to get your head out of the clouds," she told herself. "Clearly Rum doesn't feel the same about you."

Perhaps there was a time when he did, but Belle started to believe that the ship had sailed after Gaston's death. Maybe Rum was too polite to say it but Belle felt she was to blame. If it weren't for her persistence to have Rum part of her life, then Gaston wouldn't have cause to confront him and it wouldn't have put Rum in that compromising position.

Either way, Belle feared her friendship with Rum was coming to an end.

Until one day he had showed up at the library with an ear-splitting smile. It nearly took her breath
away to see how handsome he was with those dazzling brown eyes and unruly curls. Even with his hands, Rum could not tame his wild mane but Belle was relieved to see he hadn't.

"I want to show you."

That was all he said as he held his hand to her and Belle didn't think twice about slipping her hand in his. She was overjoyed at seeing him again and she couldn't get enough of her fill at seeing how the weeks apart had done.

Rum put on some muscle and she could feel the strength radiating from him as he pulled her along the trail to the mountain. Not that he had to motivate her. Belle was quite willing to follow. And she did have a good view of his backside, which had grown delectable.

Eventually, they arrived at the gate and Belle could not help the gasp that slipped at the transformation.

The castle… it didn't look the same but at the same time it did.

Gone were the boarded up windows. Sturdy glass stood in their places as if the castle's eyes were now awake and taking in the sunlight after its long winter slumber. The coloring was lighter, friendlier and no longer contained the previous gloomy feel; even the bricks were given a polish to appear brighter.

It was difficult to believe this was the same castle that people claimed to be haunted.

Rum tugged on her hand, breaking the trance she was in.

"Come inside."

She did and the surprises continued to follow.

No more chilly air but a warmth wrapped her up as soon as she entered the door. The open space was inviting, lively. The furniture was no longer covered in blankets or crusted with dust and cobwebs. The floors were gleaming and the inventions were like new with its silvery glint.

The heat she had felt came from a giant fireplace that was burning brilliantly and intense. Above the mantle was a portrait of an elderly gentleman with a handsomeness about him that hinted in his younger days he was a heartthrob that had the girls swooning with that mischievous smirk and penetrating eyes. His clothes, though, were mismatched with solid and prints and on top of his head was a top hat. Belle had to admit the look fit this man well.

"That's my Papa," Rum said quietly but his tone held pride.

Belle nodded as she studied the painting. It was pretty immense and she had to wonder how Rum was able to lift such a heavy object, but none of that mattered. There was no denying the love Rum had for his father and if it was possible… she detected some gloating pride in the portrait towards his son for turning the castle back to its former glory.

"Oh Rum…" Belle murmured. "This… You did a fantastic job!"

That was the first time Rum shared his feelings for Belle. He did not know how to tell her how she had brought the light into his dark life, so he decided that actions would be better. Everything he had done in his castle was to show her what her presence and influence gave to him.

On that day, Belle was impressed and excited over the work he had done. She grabbed his hand and
squeezed it with such affinity that Rum figured any moment she would realize how symbolic this was. Instead, she thanked him and told him how touched she was that he would show her first.

That implied that others would see his home too. Rum hadn't counted or expected anyone else to see, but Belle's features lightened up as she asked him if he had replanted the maze and if he would consider letting the children run through it as autumn came.

The thought didn't occur to him but he knew how much she loved the children of Storybrooke and so he agreed. She threw her arms around him, hugging him close. He could have said it right then and there. He could have told her that he loved her. Instead, he remained silent.

*Next time. Next time I will tell her how I feel.*

**xxXxx**

The second time he tried to express his love for Belle was to surprise her with an impromptu picnic with her favorite foods.

It took quite a few trial-and-errors before he was successful in making the perfect cheeseburger and a sweet ice tea (but not overly sweet) with her favorite dessert—honey and fig biscuits. It was something she grew up eating all the time (thanks to Maurice telling him) and he thought the taste of home would let her know how he cared. Of course, he hadn't realized biscuits were really cookies, but they turned out pretty darn good.

The only thing he didn't make was the French fries. He tried. Honestly, he did but the oil kept burning him. And the decent batch he made didn't quite taste the same as Granny's.

Before going to the library, Rum stopped at the diner to pick up two orders of fries to go. Ruby was there and she kept eyeing him while he stood waiting for his food with the basket clutched awkwardly in his hands. Finally, she brought the fries to him but before handing them off, she asked:

"Do you like Belle?"

Like Maurice, the bluntness was unsettling for him as he was quickly discovering he didn't like being put on the spot.

"I can tell you do. And I can smell a cheeseburger in that basket of yours and I know how much Belle loves them." After a brief pause, she continued, "If you want some advice: don't be so shy. You and I have only known each other for a short time and I believe I heard you speak like a half dozen times. You need to grab the bull by the horns and let her know that she's the one."

Rum was at a loss over Ruby's "grab the bull by the horns" statement, but he nodded politely to let her know he understood. Well… partially.

"C'mon! Let's hear it."

"I will," he replied softly.

Ruby snorted under her breath. "Shakespeare you're not."

"'Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind, And therefore is winged Cupid painted blind,'" recited Rum without skipping a beat.

She blinked at him, stupefied and a little bit turned on. "*Twelfth Night?*"
"A Midsummer Night's Dream," he answered.

"Ah. Okay. Start there and she will be putty in no time."

Once more Ruby's colloquialism escaped him but Rum smiled anyways and thanked her again for the advice.

As he walked out of the diner, Ruby whistled softly to herself.

"Belle better get some or I might have to jump him myself."

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Rum found Belle deep within the shelves of the Fantasy and Adventure sections. She was leaning on the top rung of the ladder, her nose buried deeply in one of the books as she used her free hand to shelf the pile of books beside her. Unfortunately, she hadn't noticed him right away and Rum wasn't sure how to announce himself. Setting the basket down, he took a step closer and with Ruby's advice echoing in his head, he began:

"Love looks not with the eyes, but with the mind—"

Belle instantly started. The book she was reading snapped shut as the pile of books toppled off the ladder. Her arms were flailing trying to recover her balance but it was too late… She was falling.

The moment he realized she was about to fall, Rum was already waiting with his open arms to catch her; however, he hadn't taken into account the sudden gravitational force the second Belle landed in his embrace. His breath was quite literally knocked out as he stumbled backwards and fell on top of the basket and their lunch.

Yet all of his thoughts and concerns were on Belle as he started to sputter all at once: "Are you all right? Are you hurt? Do you need a doctor?" between "I'm so sorry! I didn't mean to frighten you! I'm sorry!"

Belle's head was still spinning as she tried to absorb the last ten seconds. She was reading her favorite adventure story Her Handsome Hero before being startled and falling from the ladder. It took her a moment for her to realize she had not fallen to the hard surface, but was nestled comfortably in Rum's lap, his arms wrapped tightly around her trembling form as he gazed upon her with such frantic worry.

She didn't know what came over her, but seeing Rum and knowing she could have been hurt if he wasn't there, Belle grabbed his face and crushed her lips against his.

Rum froze. His mind went blank. All he could feel was Belle's lips, her hands, and the soft strands of her hair beneath his nose. But it registered she was kissing him. KISSING him! Then a foreign feeling unlike any other began to take hold and before Rum knew what was happening… he was kissing her back with the same ounce of frenzy force. All he knew was that Belle was in his arms, in his lap, squirming and burning him with her touch, her taste, her scent. He didn't want to stop. He couldn't let it stop. This was too good.

Then Belle suddenly released him—horror filling her features as she scrambled to get off him.

"Rum! I am so sorry! I didn't—I don't know what came over me—I…" She couldn't find the right words to explain how sorry she was for assaulting him. Rum had been nothing but sweet and kind and here she was ruining their friendship because she couldn't seem to get over her feelings for him.
Her bottom lip quivered as tears welled up in her eyes. She didn't know what to say or do and fleeing to keep whatever shred of dignity she had left seemed like the better option.

So she turned on her heels and ran.

Rum watched her leave in confusion and bafflement. He thought she liked Shakespeare… Standing up, he looked down at the smashed basket and food. Maybe she didn't want the cheeseburger after all. Whatever the reason that caused Belle to leave Rum knew he couldn't leave the floor a mess.

Belle fled to the one place she knew would help her sort out her problems and for a really good girl talk.

Ruby looked up as Belle entered the diner, her brow furrowing as to why her best friend was here and not having lunch with that Shakespeare quoting Rum. Then she plopped down on one of her stools with the tears trailing down and Ruby instantly knew something went wrong.

"Okay. What did he do?" Ruby demanded.

"Uh?" Belle sniffed. "Oh Ruby… I messed up. I really screwed things up and now Rum probably doesn't want to see me anymore."

"Hold on. Back up." Ruby threw the cloth she was using to wipe the counter over her shoulder and squared herself. "You need to rewind for me. What happened with Rum?"

"I was reading while I was shelving books, which yes I know I shouldn't do when I'm on the ladder, but I was on my favorite part where Gideon rescues the princess and I lost my balance and I fell on top of Rum and then I kissed him! He was in such shock that I couldn't believe what I was doing and I got out of there as quickly as I could because I need to crawl into a corner and die from my mortification."

Ruby gaped at her as if she grew a second head. "Are you kidding me right now? Belle… I love you but you can be dense sometimes."

"What?"

"You didn't ruin anything with Rum. He was enjoying himself until you left and the poor guy is scratching his head over what did go wrong. You need to go back to him."

Belle shook her head. "No. I told you. I need to die in a corner."

Ruby sighed. "Belle, I'm going to tell you this with love: you're an idiot. Rum is head over heels for you. He came here to order fries to go with the cheeseburger he made for you. And he quoted Shakespeare. Shakespeare! This is from a guy who can barely speak two words together and who used to have sharp blades for fingers. But he adores you. Every time he looks at you… even before his hand surgery… he was smitten. And if you don't go back to that library right now and screw his brains out, then I will personally slap you silly. Got it?"

"Wait… Are you telling me that Rum has feelings for me?"

"Yes Belle. Now, will you go to him?"

Belle couldn't believe what her friend was telling her. Rum… he loved her? All this time? And she had thought…
"Thank you Ruby. I have to fix this right now."

"Yes you do!" she cheered as Belle flew out the door.

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"Rum! I'm back! I am sorry for running out the way…" Belle stopped to see he wasn't in the library anymore. "...I did," she finished quietly.

To her astonishment, he had picked up the books she had dropped and finished shelving them. As for the basket Ruby had said he made, Belle couldn't find it but she did smell the lingering scent in the air.

Rum… He did that for her and she ruined it. She could beat herself up over the fact she had missed the opportunity to hear him tell her how he felt.

"I have to find him," she said to herself. "I have to find him and tell him it's not late."

But where?

Stepping outside, Belle looked around for a clue until she settled her gaze on the castle in the mountain.

She grinned.

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Rum carried the remains of his lunch for Belle to the kitchen counter to see if anything could be salvaged. The burgers and fries were pulverized but the thermos of the iced tea was good. The cookies… there were a couple intact but the rest were nothing but crumbs.

He exhaled deeply. He thought for sure this would have worked. And saying a line from one of Belle's favorite plays was a sure way to turn her into putty as Ruby said. He had a feeling that it didn't happen.

He set the iced tea down and he threw out the food. There was no point in saving a meal that would not be enjoyed. Once he had it cleaned up, Rum retired to the attic.

The one thing he didn't repair was the roof. He had been in the corner when he met Belle for the first time. She didn't look at him with revulsion or fear when he stepped into the light and it was when his life changed for the better. Despite everything that had happened, Rum wouldn't change a thing. Not even Gaston's death.

Feeling the sun's heat at the back of his neck, Rum stood there with his eyes closed as he transported himself to that fond memory. Even now… he could almost get a whiff of her rose perfume.

"Hey."

He spun around and found Belle standing before him. He had to blink a couple times to make sure she wasn't an illusion.

"Hey," he said softly.

"I wanted to apologize again. I had no idea…" Belle trailed off but she seemed determine to get it out. "I'm throwing caution into the wind but I have to say this: Rum, I love you. I loved you for so long and I am so stupid for not seeing it before. Or even recognizing what you have been trying to
tell me this whole time."

"You... you love me?" he whispered.

Nodding, Belle took a step closer. "Very much. And... do you? Do you love me?"

Rum couldn't believe this was happening! He must be dreaming! There was no other explanation.

But to make sure, Rum reached out to cup her cheek, his thumb grazing her lip. She felt real. So very real and so very warm.

"I love you Belle. You made me the man I wanted to be."

Then with love soaring in his veins and guiding him, Rum lowered his face to hers as he gently captured her mouth with his. He wanted to savor every drop and sweetness that was his lovely Belle. Slowly, he nipped and suckled, as his fingertips glided with featherlike strokes down her neck and across her collarbone. He felt her shiver and wondered if she was cold. Rum pulled back to ask her if she was, but Belle pulled him back to her, murmuring, "No. Don't go."

There was no way in Hell Belle wanted to stop; however, she could sense his hesitance and the innocence in the knowledge of where this was leading. She didn't want to rush Rum or push him into something he wasn't ready to do.

"Rum," she whispered. "I want you to make love to me. Do you understand what I mean?"

Heart-racing, Rum nodded wordlessly. This was what Maurice told him could happen when two people love each other. And the books he read also mentioned how this could be like for a couple. Yet, he knew he needed guidance and he didn't want to disappoint her.

"Would..." He swallowed thickly. "Would you show me?"

A smile bloomed on her petal lips. "Yes."

She took his mouth and delicately traced his lips with her tongue, giving him the chance to get used to the sensation and show him what he could do. It was his turn to shudder and for a low moan to escape. Inwardly, Belle was pleased as she continued to coax him to follow her lead when she begged for entrance. Rum was all too eager to oblige as he understood the message she was sending.

Gently, very gently, Belle slid in and out, the tip of her tongue licking his in a sensual dance. It didn't take long for Rum to get the hint as he followed her, repeating the same slow, circular movements. Feeling a little confident, Rum tilted his face and opened a little wider to further explore the sweetness he was quickly discovering. Belle grinned as she did the same, sucking his lower lip as she softly bit and tugged, inviting him to other pleasurable acts.

Rum was indeed an eager student. Astute and quick, he learned what Belle seemed to like by mirroring her actions. The light scraping of her nails in his hair showed him what pleased her and he found himself enjoying the sensation.

All too soon, Belle withdrew but remained close as she breathed softly against his lips. Her cheeks were flushed and pink, her lips slightly swollen although thoroughly kissed. When her lashes fluttered, her blue eyes sparkled as she dragged her hands across his shoulders and down his arms until they settled in his.

He didn't need any convincing as he followed her to his room. He had eyes only on her as Belle guided his hand to the back of her dress, his finger catching the cool zipper as she motioned him to
pinch and pull. He obeyed her silent command as the fabric parted to reveal the even creaminess of her back. Never had he seen something so beautiful, so flawless that his hand drew back instinctively lest he should mar such beauty. It was easy to do... forgetting he no longer had his nightmarish knives, but even as he compared his normal hand to Belle's milky complexion, Rum saw the stark contrast of his own reptilian hue.

Feeling he had stopped undressing her, Belle turned around with a frown on her face. She was going to ask him why he stopped, but the words stuck in her throat as she saw the warring emotions on his façade as he gazed intently at his hands.

"I... I'm hideous," he lamented. "Even with my hands... What right do I to behold or even touch you?"

"Don't say that," she said sincerely. "I love you Rum. I love every part of you. Every lovely part."

To prove to him, Belle held up his arm as the sunlight filtered through the window, catching the golden tint. "See? See the way the light touches your skin and warms it? See how it glitters? You might expect some roughness but you are smooth and soft. And when you touch me... it's bliss. Even when you had scissors for hands, I never shied away. Because I know you would never intentionally hurt me. There are many who can be cruel and bring pain, but not you. You don't take anything for granted. You are perfect in every way."

She planted a light kiss in the center of both palms and laid one hand over her heart. Holding it tight, Belle continued, "Feel that? My heart skips a beat whenever you are near. You make me feel things I never felt before. You believed in me and you helped me with the library when I needed it most. You have been so wonderful that it is I who doesn't deserve you. So don't say that you are hideous. You're not. You are beautiful and I count myself as the lucky one to touch you."

Kicking her heels off, Belle shrugged the dress off her shoulders and allowed it to pool at her ankles. She stood only in her bra and panties as she stepped forward and began to unbutton his shirt. With each action that revealed skin, Belle pressed her lips to that spot. By the time she reached his navel Rum was already shaking from what she hoped was pleasure.

"This is what I have dreamed about. This is what I want," she said, bringing herself up as she pushed his shirt off him completely. Continuing her gentle exploration, she traced his muscles on his chest and dropping kisses down his throat and lapping at his Adam's apple.

Rum could barely contain himself as he whimpered and keened. Whatever Belle was doing... he didn't want her to stop. This intense feeling was starting to build in his belly and before he knew what was happening... his pants felt tighter and uncomfortable. He needed relief but he was quickly forgetting from his reading what that entailed. And right now, the only word that was coming from his mouth was Belle's name over and over again.

Belle felt how wound up Rum was becoming and she didn't want it to end too soon. She was feeling pretty wound up herself, but Belle wanted to do this for him first.

She led him to the bed, and together, they removed his shoes and pants. To her shock, Rum wore nothing else underneath. But that hardly mattered. Rum was truly magnificent, a fine specimen. And knowing that his greenish-gold complexion covered throughout... Belle could not tear her eyes away or stop the hungry desire from spreading over her features.

"Rum."

Keeping her hands over his, she aided him as he helped her undo the rest of her clothing. His eyes
widened as the rest of her was bare before his reverent gaze. Then, carefully, Belle guided him until he was finally surrounded in her warmth.

Eventually, Rum had no problem in voicing his feelings anymore.

Chapter End Notes

I hope you enjoyed this! Don't forget to send me prompts if you like more! Next… Indecent Proposal, anyone?
6 Indecent Proposal Rated T

Chapter Summary

Twyla Mercedes and Grace5231973 prompted: Months before Gold’s indecent proposal, he cannot fathom why he seems to treat Belle French—owner of The Book Escape—with kindness. He soon discovers the real reason behind his behavior when he ends up defending her. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

Happy Memorial Day! To everyone who is currently serving, who is retired, and who has lost someone in the armed forces. Thank you for your service. And, there were a couple requests for the same idea and so this is dedicated for my two ever loyal readers. Hope you like!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Indecent Proposal

Mr. T. Gold had a reputation to uphold.

He was a shark in the business world and being a landlord and owning practically half of the town of Storybrooke… he had to be. Being kind and making exceptions was not part of the playing field and he made it very clear from the start that Mr. Gold did not fall for any pretenses. If a client or tenant could not complete his or her side of the bargain or live up to a contract, then they must forfeit as necessary. For many years it was the way Mr. Gold conducted his business transactions and it was the way he was going to remain.

Until he met Belle French.

How a mere slip of a woman was able to get under his skin and worm her way in to make him obliging, he could not figure out. And the worse part of it all was the fact that she had done so unintentionally.

It was a couple of years ago that The Book Escape opened under the ownership of Belle French and her partner Grayson Knight. Storybrooke was missing a bookstore, which is somewhat ironic since the name of the town alluded to a storybook. Regardless, the store—once its doors were opened—did remarkably well.

As it should.

The owners were young and were able to draw in a clientele of all ages. They marketed the store as a chance to escape the humdrum of life, and it succeeded. What had initially irked Gold was on Rent Day, besides his money, Belle French also had a book for him. It had been Rob Roy by Sir Walter Scott, which she thought he might enjoy. He refused to accept it, assuming it was some sort of bribe or a distraction that she was under the amount of rent. She wouldn't take "no" for an answer and
claimed it was the least she could since he took a risk in allowing the store to be opened.

Begrudgingly, Gold took the book home. The money she had given was the precise amount and it was a childhood favorite of his. He didn't want to tell her that piece of information, but the following Rent Day had him blurting out the intimate detail. He had no idea what possessed him to tell her that, especially when she wouldn't care, yet Ms. French told him she also liked the book too. Then, somehow, they began to talk about the novel and the political and social issues surrounding it.

She was very knowledgeable, and Gold rather enjoyed the discussion feeling quite astonished that thirty minutes flew by. Then she handed him a new book turning it into a monthly ritual. Every Rent Day, Ms. French had a book ready for him (including his money) and they would proceed to debate/talk about the previous month's book. It was something that he found himself looking forward to.

How in the world that happened was something Gold puzzled over relentlessly.

He concluded it was because she must be part witch. Ms. French had a pair of the most bewitching and beguiling eyes—a radiant cerulean color—and a smile that took over her heart-shaped face. Whenever he felt her eyes on him or that smile in his direction, Gold felt like a part of him was drawn into her magical web, and he found it very difficult to resist.

Even when the news in town spread how she and her partner, Mr. Knight, were together officially, Gold could not tear himself away from her or The Book Escape. His fascination and obsession over Ms. French had continued to grow and Gold could not explain why he felt this way, but he knew it would be dangerous for him if he went to the store more than the once a month.

So he decided to go incognito.

The funny part was how no one seemed to know it was him! All it took was changing his voice, his clothes, and a wig and he was no longer the domineering Mr. Gold. Instead he was John Doe, no one of importance, and he could watch Ms. French from afar.

It became a daring venture for him to approach her with a question. He hoped she wouldn't recognize him (the embarrassment of being caught was something he didn't want), but part of him wanted her to. However, Ms. French never seemed to notice this loyal customer was also her landlord. Even the other residents did not notice. Not even Mayor Mills.

And still he could not reason why this strange behavior of his.

True… he was alone and walking past Bae's bedroom only made the feeling more acute; however, Gold had to wonder if he was truly starved for an intellectual conversation and Ms. French was the only person in this godforsaken town to provide. It made sense to him despite it didn't take into account his unhealthy fixation.

Until the day Gold had his epiphany.

It was the anniversary of Bae's death and Gold was already in a grouchy mood… more so than ever. It was the one day of the year he loathed and he wanted nothing more to drown himself in whiskey and scotch. Yet the anniversary fell on Rent Day that year and so he had to fulfill his duties.

As always, Ms. French had the money ready for him along with the next book she thought he would like. That moment he didn't feel like engaging in their usual discourse and had snapped at her.

As soon as it happened, Gold was instantly filled with regret and remorse. It was not Ms. French's fault that his son's death and Rent Day happened to coincide with one another, but the pain was
inflicted and he could not take it back. Snatching the envelope of cash, he left the book behind as he scurried out of the store as quickly as he could. He never bothered to look back or apologize and kept going until he rounded up all the rent from his tenants.

The money was safely deposited and Gold headed to The Rabbit Hole for his yearly consumption.

He had not expected to see her there of all places. It was sleazy, tawdry and an all-around eyesore to the decent folks. Even he hated giving this place his patronage, but this was the only bar that sold the cheapest and quick to get pissed alcohol. To find Ms. French there… She did not belong. She should be far away from this rat-hole regardless that her boyfriend was there. Then again, Grayson Knight looked like he fit right at home.

Gold was sitting in the corner, his eyes on the couple at the bar. They seemed happy and listening to her laugh… He closed his eyes to block the joyful sound, but it only seemed to heighten his sense of hearing. Clutching his glass tighter, Gold wanted nothing more for them to be out of the bar. There was no way he could wallow in his anguish without having them as a distraction. Of course, he meant her.

At the time, he had not realized there was another person who had eyes on her.

Eventually, she placed a hand on her boyfriend's shoulder, whispering into his ear. There was some sport's game on, and Mr. Knight, never once breaking his stare on the television simply nodded, as Ms. French slid off the barstool to head to the ladies' room.

Gold almost left the bar. He knew he couldn't get drunk properly, not without Ms. French being a reminder of how rude he had been to her. He was trying to flag his waiter for the bill when he noticed a man go up to the bar—to the drink Ms. French still had sitting on the counter. What had him stay and watch… it was only fate. And it was a good thing too since the boyfriend wasn't paying any attention.

The man soon walked away without anyone being none the wiser (except Gold), and to Gold's surmounting horror, both men watched as Ms. French returned to her seat and drink. It took several minutes but Ms. French started to feel the effects of the spiked beverage. It was minor and by all appearances it looked like she was having a headache. She spoke to the lummox who waved his understanding as she gathered her purse and jacket to leave the bar.

As soon as Ms. French was out the door, the lecherous swine was out on the chase. Gold knew he had to follow. He couldn't let that bastard get away.

Gold found them not far from the bar. Ms. French had turned into an alley, her arms outstretched as she swayed and stumbled, trying to feel her way back home. The wanker was merely watching, waiting to strike, when Gold raised his cane and swiftly cuffed him in the side. It certainly captured the potential rapist's attention but Gold was a lot faster to react. Slamming his cane now against the windpipe of the rake, Gold pinned him against the brick wall.

"Go near her and I will rip your limbs apart," Gold snarled his eyes cold and murderous. "Better yet…" With his good leg, Gold smashed his knee into the man's groin, releasing his cane as the pecker collapsed, gasping for air. "If you ever think about drugging a girl again, then I will do more harm on your person. You can bet I will find you. Now go."

The pervert didn't have to be told twice as he half-crawled, half-ran away from Gold.

A soft moan got his attention as Gold turned to find Ms. French lying on the ground. He went to her as quickly as he could to check on her. She was breathing, her heart rate a little fast, but she was
passed out. Unfortunately, he could not lift her, but she needed help.

He had little choice to leave her, yet Gold was confident the man would not come back again to get his victim. So he removed his coat and tossed it over her. Then he went back into the bar and told the closest person to grab Mr. Knight. As much as Gold knew he should have been the one to tell her boyfriend, he was still fuming over how this happened in the first place and he believed he would punch Mr. Knight rather than alert him how Ms. French was in trouble.

Gold kept his distance but he made sure that Mr. Knight did the right thing and took his girlfriend to the hospital. Thankfully, the ox did and Ms. French recovered.

As for Gold's coat… That should have been a clue to Mr. Knight on who was the one to have found her since Gold was the only person in Storybrooke to afford such a garment. Yet nothing was said and Gold found his coat in the alley discarded in a heap. It shouldn't have bothered him, but it did. After all, it was Mr. Knight's fault that the asshole drugged her drink and if it weren't for Gold catching the man in the act… he shuddered to think what might have befallen Ms. French.

Sadly, she had no idea who her savior was that night. And it was difficult for Gold to see her on the following Rent Day and not tell her what he did for her. In addition, he couldn't stomach seeing her with that blasted diamond on her finger.

That's right. She was engaged to that dreadful Mr. Knight.

Gold believed if she had known the truth… she would not be so willing to join that buffoon in holy matrimony. But what place or right did he have to tell her what her fiancé was really? Would she believe him?

Gold knew he was deluding himself in thinking Ms. French would believe him. After all, he was the landlord, not a friend.

But it pained him to see her so happy with that idiot especially as he came to terms that he was in love with her.

Mr. Gold was in love with Belle French.

He could scarcely believe it was possible, and yet, it made all the sense in the world. Gold could no longer deny the truth after witnessing Ms. French's almost violation. His anger and the inevitable violence against that midden arse (Gold did track him down because he didn't think the man would keep to his word) led to the discovery that he had feelings for the young brunette.

Now all he wanted to do was show she was better than that Knight. She deserved someone worthy, someone who was willing to protect her. Grayson Knight did not have any of those traits that would make him honorable. He was a cad, a fake.

Allowing her to marry Grayson would be a mistake.

He had to stop it.

So Mr. Gold did what Mr. Gold does best.

He needed to get her to agree to a deal. But to do so, he had to create the proper incentive that would make it a reality.

And it was fitting too since Gold had an eye on securing another deal with someone else—a businessman who preferred business dealings with a family man.
All he needed to do was lay out his cards on the table and watch as things fell into place.

Chapter End Notes

I am actually planning on wrapping up Seasons of Rumbelle. I will finish the requests previously made as well as some that I was inspired to write, but then it will be the end. Right now… I have 16 prompts done and will probably do a few more to wrap up/finish the prompt verses I started. To give you an idea what I have so far are:

3 more Indecent Proposals
Ravenous
The Best Man
Otherworld
Best Friends
Ghost Whisperer Inspired
Top Gun
Rebecca
2 Dead Again
Fantasy/Role-Play
3 The Lost World
Chapter Summary

Likes_My_Red_Cape prompted: Captain Belle French, recently promoted, is transferred to Fort Spencer where the small regiment has been picked off one by one by the cannibalistic Colonel Gold. Now, she is the sole survivor and has no choice but to face the man nicknamed the Dark One… (Rated M for violence, gore, sexual overtones, and eating human flesh).

Chapter Notes

I found this prompt from a while back and it just so happened I had re-watched Ravenous when I was home from work sick. Naturally, the Muse was being beckoned! I did take some liberties from the movie as well as history so I hope you all enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Ravenous

She couldn't believe it now came to this. It almost felt like a different lifetime but everywhere she looked… blood. Blood stained the bits of grass and snow and dirt all over Fort Spencer. Not to mention the slews of body parts and bare bones from whence the flesh was picked clean. How did it come to this?

And… will she be able to survive from the Dark One?

xxxxxx

Belle French had been accused of not many things, but a dreamer mostly. Her whole life was surrounded with books of heroes doing heroic acts and lands so exotic and foreign that it unlocked a hidden yearning to leave home and see the world.

Most importantly, she wanted to be a hero.

Sadly, there wasn't much "hero-ing" to speak of in her hometown and many would laugh and tell her she was too little, too young, too weak, too… feminine. The world and the adventures… they weren't designed to entice women but men. Strong men. Over and over she was told to leave anything that required strength to the men and stick to what women did best: domestics.

She hated that word. Her father, God blessed him, did the best he could to shelter and protect her, but ultimately, he had to be the one to dash her hopes and dreams and tell her that her place was in the home and not out there doing manly chores. It was high time she woke up to reality, yet he did tell her that she wanted to be a hero then she could always write books with heroes.

Not the same. So, Belle prayed each and every night for a change. At last her prayers were answered.
in the form of the Spanish-American War. The government was desperate for volunteers to protect their territories out West and they needed *anyone, anyone* who can carry and fire a rifle.

Therefore, Belle packed a bag and went to the first recruitment office she could find. Initially, she was laughed at, but not going to be deterred, Belle resolutely told them that the posters said *anyone* was needed as long as they can carry and fire a rifle. It did not specify gender or age and as far as she was concerned she fit all the qualifications they were looking for in the army. The officers ceased their laughing and snickering as their faces became withdrawn with sobriety. She made a very good point, and thusly, proved her capabilities of holding and firing the weapon. They had little choice but to accept Belle into the army.

(It did come to light that there were several other women who also showed up with the same straight-laced logic as Belle and they were also accepted as a technicality. The posters were quickly torn down and reprinted with the *male* requirements.)

Regardless of the army's position, Belle was in and she was determined to prove everyone wrong that she—a woman—could do the impossible and save the day by winning this war for America. She worked harder unlike any of her male counterparts and with the great reluctance of her superiors… Belle worked her way in becoming a lieutenant. She was finally achieving her dreams and she knew it wouldn't be long before she would finally be the hero she always longed to be…

Then the bloodiest battle took place.

She had seen war. She had seen what a battle consisted of and she had seen men die around her. But this battle was different. This was more.

It all became out-of-hand so quickly, unraveling at lightning speed, that Belle was powerless to do anything but watch as every one of the soldiers in her regiment were being shot down, blown apart, stabbed, hacked, ran through, stomped, oh the humanity, as she stood there with her pistol in hand with the mingled look of horror and disbelief, a disconnection from what was going on. Helplessness creeped along her spine, rooting her feet into the ground, and amidst all the screams and explosions, she could hear her Captain shouting for her as well as similar calls for help from those dying around her. Everywhere she looked were bodies upon bodies that Belle knew not where to start or what to do. Her mind had gone completely blank as she slowly sank to her knees and then her belly as she stretched herself out, closing her eyes, wishing for all of this to end. *Please God let this all come to an end!*

She stayed playing dead even when the enemies victoriously hoot and hollered as they ruffled through the dead's belongings, searching for what prizes they could find. Belle had been groped and searched for coins, food, ammunition, and once the vultures finished their tasks, she was dragged by the arms into their territory. Belle fought to keep her composure, making sure her breaths weren't loud or noticeable, even though it had been tempted to look with one eye to see what was going on, yet her brain told everyone to *shut up and be dead.*

It was agonizing, the wait. Hours passed before Belle felt it was safe for her to open her eyes, but only then, the nightmare still wasn't over.

She had been tossed with the other bodies of her comrades on a wagon that was waiting to be taken out to bury the decease. Fortunately, the enemy wanted to get rip-roaring drunk first so Belle had the time to make her escape. It was easier said than done for she had to wade through the piles of corpses, body parts, and organs as the blood from her men cascaded down as a river, never ceasing its ever-ending stream. The nauseating scent of copper and death, smoky and charred, sharp with its metallic flavor covered Belle's every inch, and as hard as she tried, she couldn't avoid the blood from making its way through her closed mouth, trickling all the way down her throat. She coughed,
hacked, sputtered, and gagged, but she would be greeted with another mouthful of blood that would wind itself on the course through her intestines.

What followed next could only be described as dumb luck.

Belle freed herself from the corpses, located a weapon, and single-handedly captured the fort with ease. All of this accomplished due to a sudden surge of energy and strength unlike she ever felt (which she wondered if it was due to the adrenalin and emotional toll she experienced). Even her superiors couldn't quite figure out how she managed to complete such an arduous task without anyone else to support her or help her. Of course, they weren't complaining. It was another victory the U.S. government could proudly proclaim; however, the details were called into question and suspicion went rampant through the officers' minds. Everything suggested that Belle's actions were deemed as cowardly and culpable and she should be punished for abandoning her men when they were dying.

But that fort… She took the fort and such action could not be ignored either.

Hence, Belle French was given a promotion: Captain, and with it, all the decorous trimmings that came with such honors. A war hero, they called her. At least those who were not privy to the truth called her. Those who knew better continued to gaze down at her with condescension, disgust, and disdain. Belle would have to agree with them. She wasn't a hero. She was unworthy of the title because she had done nothing to deserve the praise. She pretended to be dead to save her own hide when she should have fought with her last breath and died as a hero on the battlefield as the rest of her men did.

And yet… Belle could not forget her actions. Something happened, something she couldn't explain, but even then, she knew something was wrong. Something was just not right in the way she seized that fort. Indeed, Belle had little understanding to those events. It would be much later when she finally understood why.

xXx

As part of her promotion, Belle was also given new orders. She was to report to Fort Spencer in California, near the Nevadas, to Colonel H. Mills. It was an outpost served to provide aid and shelter for travelers moving West through the mountains. As it was reaching into the winter season, the chances of travelers reaching Fort Spencer were pretty much nonexistent.

Colonel Mills was a fatherly figure, a bit portly, but somewhat of an optimistic man despite the truth that Captain Belle French was sent to an unwanted post. He welcomed her warmly; sincerely proud of the honor it was to have someone like her gracing the barracks. He also introduced (well, more like a friendly warning) to her the rest of the men in Fort Spencer:

Private Hopper—Fort Spencer's very own self-proclaimed emissary, very shy and reserved, but determined to bring God's message to the men.

Major "Grumpy" Leroy—he loved any bottle that graced his fingertips; formerly a hospital janitor prior to enlistment and now the fort's doctor since he is the only person with some medical knowledge.

Private Arthur—the soldier in the bunch; he was constantly, almost unhealthily, pushing the boundaries of the human body under any extreme pressures.

The locals, Granny and Ruby Lucas—a grandmother and granddaughter pair that were inherited after the Americans took Fort Spencer from Spain.
Private Jefferson—he was the overmedicated member of Fort Spencer and also the cook.

All of this was now Belle's new happy, little family for the foreseeable future. Indeed, they were a ragtag team of misfits, and for some, a danger to society, but Belle was not in a place to be picky or demand a new outfit. This was where she was assigned, and this was where she would stay until the army could decide on another suitable punishment.

Fort Spencer promised tedium and boredom, a place of reflection, and that was Belle's goal: to reflect on her cowardliness. The last thing that any of Col. Mills's men expected was for the fort to become a bloody massacre.

And it was all thanks to an unlikely man who wandered into the fort, lost and frozen, practically delirious.

At once, the men of Fort Spencer responded judiciously to the poor soul. Even Major Leroy managed to be sobered if only for five minutes. The stranger was stripped, bathed in hot water, rubbed and covered in furs and blankets, anything that they could find to throw over the shivering man's body.

He had been thin, frail, a quivering mass who spoke in incoherent ramblings and utter nonsense. Even Private Jefferson, with his penchant for the ridiculous and an unusual knack of understanding inane languages, did struggle in deciphering what the stranger raved but he did pick out "monster" and "death."

Those two words alone did little to assuage the troop. Yet there was nothing they could do to morning and hopefully the man would survive the night so they could get the full story from him.

Col. Mills charged Belle to stay with the stranger after Major Leroy wandered off and passed out on his bunk. It wasn't like she had any medical knowledge that would prove useful to the man, but Col. Mills handed her one of the Major's books and she took comfort in that. Private Hopper stayed for a while to pray over the stranger, but eventually, he too, turned in for the night.

Belle, alone, gazed upon the brow of the man as he continued to tremble beside the crackling fire. He was pale, ghostly white, and his hair was long and scraggly also brittle to the touch as Belle discovered when she brushed it behind his ear. He slept fitfully but she could not stop her scrutiny. His jaw and chin were bearded and stiff from the bitter cold. The picture of him naked appeared in her mind, and she had to look away lest her burning cheeks would be noticed if he were to wake. Not that he would... out like a light he was but Belle's modesty was something she cursed from showing. After being in the army as long as she had been, she had seen many a naked male body and while it came as a shock, she soon became accustomed and desensitized to the fact. However, there was something about this man that she could not prevent her from blushing. While he was terribly thin, he still sported somewhat of a muscular chest, lean stomach, and sturdy legs. Even his presence was bigger and larger compared to her male comrades. Belle could not have that image burned in her mind, especially when the man was at death's door, but as she was alone and the others could not witness, she brought that vision forefront and she could not suppress the soft sigh or the flood of wetness that pooled between her legs.

Maybe being in the army and surrounded by oversexed men did leave an impression on her after all.

She dared not relieve herself of the discomfort for he could wake and the last thing she wanted was Col. Mills to hear how she was pleasuring herself instead of following her duty to nurse the invalid. Biting her lip, Belle kept her legs squeezed together as she rocked on her knees, but that was useless. Eventually, she decided to ignore the throbbing and focus on the sick man.
"Please wake up," she told him.

A couple hours later, he did.

Belle had dozed off for a moment so she didn't see the man's roving eye or the little flare of his nostrils as a crooked grin graced his lips, exposing his sharp teeth. It wasn't until she heard coughing that roused her from her sleep. She checked the man to make sure he wasn't suffering anymore injuries or the frostbite didn't take effect. Satisfied, Belle told the man she would be right back and for him to stay put. He only mumbled a reply, but she didn't catch what he said.

A few minutes later, Col. Mills and everyone was gathered around the man and the fire.


"Aye," came the reply. He tried to sit up, but still struggled from the fatigue that Belle immediately went to him, providing some support so he could sit straight. "Thank you, dearie," he said cheekily, sending her a wink meant for her alone. Belle wanted to say something in kind for the audacity but then again… she remembered how aroused she was at the sight of him and kept her lips pressed tight.

"What were you doing out there?" questioned Private Arthur.

"Walking. Looking for food." And with that, the man launched into his sorrowful tale of woe.

His name was R. Spinner. He was part of a traveling party through the Nevadas for a better life. There were five others with him, including their guide, a Colonel Gold. At the name, Spinner sneered as if he had tasted something sour. Unfortunately, no one among them knew who Colonel Gold was, and Spinner told them they were very lucky not to know the detestable man.

"He was disliked by all in our party, but we had no choice in guides and we believed him when he said he knew a shortcut through the mountains…"

They ended up being stranded in the snow and had to seek shelter in a cave. Food soon became scarce and they were forced to eat the animals and the leather of their belts and straps. But still they hunger for something substantial, something that would take away the gnawing feeling.

"A couple of us left to forage what we could. In the mountains… there is not much in way of food. We took what we found, mainly sticks and branches for the fire, and when we returned… One of our parties, Mr. Glass, had succumbed to death the previous night and the others were cooking his legs. I know what you're thinking," he told the speechless group. "I, too, was unprepared and if I was there, would I have stopped it? I don't know. But I do know that it was meat cooking and I thanked the Gods for this deliverance." Spinner broke down weeping as if the memory suddenly reminded him that eating another human being was immorally wrong. "Forgive me. I could not help myself. I was hungry. So hungry. Just like the others. We thought in time God would forgive us our sins but there were some who were too greedy, too selfish. They took and ate too much, and before the week was out, we were back to having nothing at all."

Belle's hand went to her mouth. Sympathy filled her eyes as Spinner sobbed against her. She couldn't begin to imagine, let alone think what she would do in that situation. And while he pleaded for forgiveness from them and God, the least she could do was take his hand and hold it gently. The simple act had him looking at her with something shining in his eyes, but she swore she saw gratitude within the tears.

"Col. Gold wanted more. I begged we try to leave the cave and go down the mountains. Surely there
was a new trail, new travelers, anything that could lead us to salvation and away from this unholy horror that we created. But Col. Gold didn't want to leave. He was fine where he was at, and in front of us, he killed Misters Whale and Jones, leaving myself and Mrs. Jones. I wish I could say I was heroic but I was not. I'm a coward and I l-l-left." Spinner lowered his head, covering his face in shame. "I wouldn't be able to fight him off. I wouldn't be able to protect anyone! I escaped and I got lost in the woods and I don't know how long I've been wandering… then I saw the smoke coming from your fort and I knew I was safe. I knew I was safe."

"You are safe," Belle assured him. "But Mrs. Jones..." Something about his story didn't make sense to her, but if there was someone in danger or needed help…

"Ah, yes, Mrs. Jones, we should go and help her," Col. Mills said. "Are you certain this Col. Gold is still in that cave?"

Spinner nodded. "I have no doubt the monster is there."

"Right." Col. Mills gave an abrupt nod. "We will need to gather a rescue party. Hopper, Arthur, and Jefferson—you will be coming with me. The others will stay on the off chance Mrs. Jones might have escaped herself."

"What about me?" Spinner asked. "I could take you to him."

"I don't know," Col. Mills said. "You're not in the best condition."

"You must let me. I have to atone for what I did, abandoning her like that. Besides, there is a reason they call him 'the Dark One.'"

"The what?" This captured all the soldiers' attention.

"He mentioned it to us. Briefly. I think we all thought he was joking, but he really wasn't. The Dark One is a nickname he earned for the way he would toy and kill his enemies. He would have this hideous cackle that I'm sure even Satan himself would tremble in fear. He is a madman."

"Mr. Spinner, we are all mad here," Priv. Jefferson declared with a boyish grin and laugh.

"You know an often lot about this Col. Gold," Priv. Arthur said. "I have never heard of such a man in the army."

Belle wanted to add "same here" but she kept an eye as Spinner cleared his throat. "He does exist. I wouldn't be making this up."

"I didn't say you were."


"Gentlemen," Col. Mills placated. "Right now, our major concern is that poor, helpless woman trapped in that cave. We can debate on the matter of Col. Gold's existence later. I have given you my orders. Men, let's go to the armory."

Belle watched as the men Col. Mills selected follow the good Colonel outside, and part of her felt the sting that she was excluded. She was Captain after all and technically she was the third in control. If anything, she could be useful on this rescue mission. However, she kept her mouth closed as she and Mr. Spinner were soon on their lonesome. The Lucas women had followed the Colonel and she could hear what sounded like an argument underway as young Ruby translated what her grandmother was telling their commander.
She got up and walked to the door where she hoped to catch what snippets she could.

"I wouldn't do that. *Dearie.*"

Belle looked in her company's attention. "Do what?"

He pointed to the door. "Eavesdropping. Not always good."

"I'll be the judge of that Mr. Spinner," she responded. "You stay there and get warm. You're fortunate the frostbite didn't get to you."

He flashed a broad smile, teeth and all. "I don't recall the army allowing women to join."

"You wouldn't. Only a few were granted permission," she retorted.

"Ah. So you were one of the lucky few."

"Yes."

He hummed as he continued to stare at her quite blatantly. Belle tapped her foot impatiently as she did manage to catch the word "wendigo" before the Colonel and the Lucases were gone, but she was waiting for Spinner to stop his gawking like he never seen a woman in uniform before. Of course, his surprise of her in the army indicated that he probably hadn't, yet he was being explicitly rude and Belle didn't tolerate such disrespect.

"All right, Mr. Spinner, that is enough—"

The last thing she remembered was being smacked across the face and nothing.

---

By the time Belle came to, her head was a little sore from the impact of hitting the floor. Groaning, she cradled her head as she sat up. When she was able to see clearly, Belle looked around, her eyes widening in astonishment as Spinner was gone.

*He* hit her!

Her hand immediately went to her right hip for her pistol, but she felt emptiness and muttered an oath. Spinner took her gun and he was Gods know where. But she couldn't help asking herself *why* when he was the victim from his story.

Unless…

Belle didn't want to entertain it but the possibility that Spinner was not who he said he was, was growing stronger. After all, why in the world would he knock her out and take her gun? For a second, Belle was sorry she was even lusting after the man in the first place!

Getting to her feet, Belle opened the door and stepped into the cold wind. The fort was oddly quiet, not even the sound of the horses could be heard.

Did the others leave?

Looking down at the snow, there was some fresh powder but Belle could make out the footsteps and hooves going towards the fort's gate. If they made it out… then maybe she could catch them and warn them about Spinner.
Running, Belle got to the stable and flung open the door—only to freeze in her tracks.

Blood.

All across the stalls and floor was blood. The few horses left behind were lying in the piles of straw and hay, coating it with their crimson fluids.

Belle's gasp was lost to the howling outside as a force rushed her from behind, shutting and locking the door, securing them with the horses. Belle lost her balance and began to slip in the pool of blood and nearly fell until a hand reached out and steadied her.

Ruby!

"Wha—?" she started but the young girl shushed her, putting her finger over her lips.

"He will hear you."

"Spinner?" Belle demanded.

Ruby nodded. "But he's not Spinner. He's a wendigo."

That word. "Ruby, what is going on? What's happening?"

Sighing, the girl motioned Belle to follow as they stepped over the carcasses so they could settle in the back. "We tried to tell him. Granny was positive he was not who he said he was, but Col. Mills wouldn't listen. He blew her off and her warning as some childish story. He told her we were being fools. Monsters don't exist. Pst. Look at where it led."

"Ruby," Belle said, avoiding the urge to roll her eyes. "You're not making sense. What is a wendigo?"

"It's a myth but something our people believes in," Ruby began. "The wendigo is formerly a man who has the taste of human flesh. It is said the wendigo will eat his enemies to help make him stronger, faster, invincible. Spinner has eaten the flesh of his fellow men and craves more. He is the devil in sheep's clothing walking among us now."

So… basically what Belle thought before was confirmed. Spinner was probably this Colonel Gold. If he really was a Colonel…

"So then what?" Belle inquired.

"The Colonel and his men gathered their guns and horses for one last check before searching for that woman. Out of nowhere, a gunshot rang out and poor Priv. Hopper was shot in the gut! As the others scattered looking for the shooter… I saw Spinner come around and he went right up to the Colonel and stabbed him—here!" Ruby demonstrated with thrusting her fist up into her abdomen and towards her heart. "He started laughing this horrible sound… he was like a demon… and he started chasing the others around the fort. No one could get a shot in. He was too quick! Granny and I fled to our rooms to get our crossbows, and by the time, we returned—they were dead. All of them."

Belle felt her chest tighten. All?

"We assumed you were dead too," Ruby told her. Tilting her face, she peered at Belle through squinted eyes. "Why are you not dead? You were in that room alone. Together."
That was a good question and one Belle wasn't sure how to answer. "He knocked me out. I woke up and my gun was missing. Then I found you."

"Huh." Ruby licked her chapped lips. "I guess he was saving you for dessert."

Whether or not Belle appreciated the crack, she decided to ignore it. "Where is your grandmother?"

Ruby blinked and Belle noticed the girl was holding back tears. "He got her. That's all you need to know."

"Oh. We need to fight back. Do you have any other weapons on you?"

Ruby looked at her sharply. "I have nothing. I lost my crossbow."

"Wonderful." Trapped in the stable with no weapon and a murderous cannibal on the prowl… Fort Spencer was losing its tedium. "We have to fight back. What is a wendigo's weakness?"

"If he doesn't eat, then he loses his power."

That should be simple, but they were looking at five men, one woman, and eight horses dead. Speaking of which…

"Where are the bodies?" Belle mused aloud as she dared to look out the window. The winds were picking up and snow was falling, but other than that, Belle didn't see any signs of the violence that Ruby described.

"He cleans fast," Ruby muttered.

"Wait." Belle's brows furrowed but she saw him—Spinner. He appeared to be dragging something behind to the chopping block for firewood. Her eyes widened when she saw it was Hopper. She could barely make it out but it looked like Hopper was alive and he was waving his arm futilely as Spinner picked up the ax. She didn't have the heart to watch what happened next as Spinner swung the ax overhead.

Ducking, Belle closed her eyes and covered her mouth to keep herself from vomiting. Ruby watched her impassively and crossed her arms over.

"So, Captain, what do we do?"

Belle was at a loss but she knew one thing: "We can't hide here. We have to get help."

"Where?"

"There has to be another base nearby. Or a town."

"There's a village about two days' journey from here," Ruby supplied. "It won't be enough time."

"No. But it should be plenty for us."

"We need to kill him," Ruby insisted.

"In time. First, we have to survive," Belle explained.

"I'm not going to keep hiding," Ruby accused.
"I didn't say that!" Now, Belle was getting annoyed. "We have to keep our wits. We won't survive
two hours if we blindly run out of here."

"What do you suggest?"

"We need guns."

"The armory could have guns left. It didn't look like they took that much anyways."

"Okay. The armory. Once the coast is clear, we will make a run for it."

That meant they would have to watch him butcher their friends.

Getting her bearings, Belle lifted her head once more. Thankfully, it looked like the mutilation of
Priv. Hopper was over as the man called Spinner or Gold whistled a tune as he used a cloth to drag
the pieces behind him. He disappeared into the kitchen.

This was it.

"Go," Belle whispered.

She and Ruby made a dash from the stables and began running to the armory as fast as they could
despite the stinging slap of Mother Nature trying to slow them down. The doors were already
whipping and banging together by the time the women arrived, and as Belle hoped what wouldn't
happen did happen.

Empty.

All the rifles, pistols, ammunition… gone. Vanished. Poof!

"Bastard," Ruby growled next to her.

"New plan. We need to come up with a new plan," Belle said.

"I'm all ears."

But Belle's mind was blank. She was banking on this working all the way through. "We will have to
run for the forest."

"What?"

"Yes," Belle said, nodding. "We can make it. If we stick to the path and maybe climb the trees to
rest… he won't find us."

"We're better off staying here and hiding then risking it out there," Ruby cried.

"You don't know…"

"I do! You know, Captain, you do what you want. Me? I'm going to kill a beast."

Spinning on her heels, Ruby started to head towards the kitchen. "I know there are knives. Good
luck Captain."

Belle protested but the girl refused to look back as she continued with her purpose. So Belle could
watch as Ruby peeked through the windows before going within. She had to assume Ruby had it
under controlled.
As for Captain French…

Belle looked out to the gate and wondered if it was possible to make it out in the woods with nothing but what she had on her person. She wasn't familiar with the terrain and she doubted her skills would help her find the village Ruby spoke of.

"Well, well."

Belle whirled, her heart racing, as Spinner showed up beside her. In one hand he held a knife dangling between his fingers. Gazing at her, he gave her a slow onceover, his tongue pressed lewdly against his teeth.

"I believe I caught a damsel in distress."

"I'm not in distress!" Belle exclaimed, realizing how silly she sounded when she had nothing-in fact-on her to fight back. "You're…"

"Colonel Gold? Why, yes. Yes, I am." He continued to walk closer as Belle backed away. "Now, now my good Captain. You have nothing to fear."

"You killed my men!" she shouted. "And the Colonel!"

He winced. "I did, didn't I? The Colonel was a nice enough fellow but did he really think that Mrs. Jones would be alive if I—'Mr. Spinner'—left her to the villainous Col. Gold? Think about it. I did say he killed two men in front of us." Then he threw his head and chuckled.

He hadn't been kidding. That laugh… It would definitely cause the Devil to tremble before him. Belle wondered if she would be able to run to the kitchen, to Ruby, or if she should stay and try to disarm him. He was much thinner than she and Belle had to surmise her weight could pin him if necessary.

"Although, I am terribly sorry about killing him. He and I could have been friends. Then again, maybe not. I was never good at keeping them." Again, he trilled that high-pitch laugh as he continued his forward assault, moving closer and closer. "But you… You knew or suspected I might add." Staring at her intently, his boldness never wavered. "I have never met anyone like you. You're different from the others. I know you are. You've tasted it."

Whatever she expected him to say, that was the last thing. "I've what?"

The knife danced in his grasp. "The blood of man. I can smell it on you but it's getting fainter. You know exactly what kind of power it wields."

"I haven't a clue what you're going on about," Belle said. She knew she had to make a decision and quick. If this man had the abilities that Ruby said he had… he might be able to outrun her. She couldn't let him get the upper-hand, no matter what. So without warning, Belle dove towards him, catching him around the middle, as they fell to the ground.

The knife flew from his hand and fell a distance shortly behind. Belle couldn't help but smile at the triumph.

"Mmm… I knew you were hot for me."

Before she knew what was happening, Gold wrapped his arms around her waist and rolled them over so she was pinned below. He forced her legs to spread as he settled between them, his hardness hardening as he rubbed against her. Smirking lasciviously, Gold couldn't help the sweep of his lashes
as he took her all in. "I bet you're tight," he purred in her ear, his voice deepening to a guttural tone. "I never had the chance to tell you how delicious you smelled last night. Gods… thinking how you were getting off in front of me and I had to pretend to be sick from the cold… Unfair, my dear. Really unfair of you."

Belle squeezed her eyes as Gold bent and licked the side of her neck to her cheek. "You can't help it even now. Already you're getting so… wet." To prove his point, he rotated his hips as his bulge happened to graze her in the right spot.

Belle bit her lip to keep from moaning but he did it a second time… only he added a little thrust. Her jaw fell as a harsh pant escaped from her and he took it as a sign, diving down and catching those lush lips with his.

The kiss was wholly unexpected, and as her eyes flew opened at the contact, Belle couldn't resist kissing him back as he plundered her with his tongue. Her body was on fire from Gold's touch and the power he had as he devoured her in the kiss… For a brief second, she could almost forget he murdered the men of Fort Spencer…

Cognizance returned and Belle caught and bit his lip. Hard.

Gold pulled back, startled, but there was amusement glittering in those dark eyes of his as he wiped his mouth to show blood on his finger. "You like to play rough, I see."

"Oh yes." And Belle clenched her fist and punched him as hard as she could. That caught him unawares as he landed in the snow, holding his jaw.

Belle scrambled to her feet and ran for the knife, picking it up, and turning to use it on him, but Gold was gone. He had fled.

Looking around, Belle couldn't tell where he went. But she knew she had to warn Ruby. And fast.

xxxxxx

The winds had stopped and the snow ceased its falling as Belle managed to get a better view of the fort.

Just a few hours ago, she and the whole troop were listening to the stranger's story and a group of them were to embark on a rescue mission. Now… it was only a massacre.

After her run-in with Colonel Gold, Belle went searching for Ruby to no avail. The girl had disappeared for the better lack of the word. As much as Belle wanted to make sure she was alive so they outnumbered Gold, she couldn't stick around forever for her.

It disturbed her how Gold was able to butcher and string up her fellow officers like they were nothing but cows as she moved around in the kitchen. Even poor Granny Lucas met a horrible end with a cleaver nestled comfortably in her scalp. Belle did her best not to retch at the slaughter or acknowledge the large stewpot already in the fire and bubbling with whatever it was.

She couldn't think about those things right now. Not when she had to find a way to stop this monster, this beast.

Keeping her knife in front, Belle slowly moved through the corridors, hissing Ruby's name. It didn't help that she could hear Gold outside with his disturbing laughter and garbled voice as he sang her name. And she was certainly not thinking about earlier when he had her beneath him.
But it was a punctuated scream that grabbed her attention. Ruby!

Belle ran outside, and sure enough, Gold had poor Ruby by the throat. A knife was protruding from his thigh from where she stabbed him. Belle called him but he was too busy with his new toy. With his other hand, he yanked the knife from his thigh and plunged it into Ruby's belly.

"NOO!" Belle screamed as Ruby choked up blood. Gold dropped the girl as she twitched and tried to pull the knife out. He gazed at her dispassionately as the life faded away from her. Not even Belle's screams pierced him as he spun on one heel and limped away.

His back was to her and she had to strike now.

Belle slammed into him again, taking him to the ground, and with the unsteady grip in her hand, she started to plunge the knife downwards. She managed to get a couple strokes in his shoulder before he knocked her off him. Rolling to her belly, Belle half-crawled, half-scrambled to get the knife but Gold came back on top of her, knocking the wind from her chest.

Seizing her by the head, Gold slammed her face into the snow. It took a few hits but Belle was out.

"Well?"

Her head lolled to the side as Belle cringed at the dull throb in her skull. It took her a moment to realize she wasn't outside. No… She was inside the main living space of Fort Spencer's quarters. And she was tied to a chair. The knots were well-done as Belle twisted and squirmed but the rope wouldn't give.

Giving up, she leaned back as she looked to find Col. Gold sitting across her from the small table. He was dressed accordingly to his status but the clothes were obviously too big on him. It was a mockery to see him in Col. Mills's uniform but she was too tired to comment or even fight back. If he was going to kill her… let it be quick.

"Do it," she begged. "Kill me."

"Now, why would I want to do something like that?" he asked somewhat offended and possibly hurt.

"You killed the others. Why spare me?"

"I told you. You're different."

He stood up and went to the fireplace where a bowl was keeping warm. He picked it up and placed it in front of her. At first glance—a harmless looking stew, but harmless it was not as it was not only loaded with potatoes and carrots and onions but the protein were her former colleagues. Her stomach lurched in both hunger and revulsion.

"If you think I'm going to eat—"

"I do," Gold interrupted. "Makes you stronger, powerful. I told you Belle. You and I… we're kindred. We're not like those fools."

"I'm not a monster," she said. Despite the proclamation, her stomach continued to gurgle like the traitor it was. Even her eyes betrayed her—looking down at the steaming bowl of stew. The voice inside her head, whispering, One bite. That's all you need. Remember how good it felt.

"I understand the reluctance. I struggled too but you see—it's all for a purpose. A good purpose."
Once more, Belle tried to look away, to take the higher ground in all this madness. Still the sweet, seductive purr of "eat, eat" continued to gnaw at her. If she did this, then it would give her the ability she lacked before. She could help the men on the battlefield, save countless lives. So what if she had to kill and eat someone every so often? Surely the sacrifice might justify the means? But then what about the morality of it? Her soul? Was that worth it?

Gods… She was so hungry.

Gold came around the table where she sat. He was about to undo one tied wrist… A slow smirk overtook his lips as he instead dipped his finger into the bowl, squeezing the bit of meat, lifting the fingers coated with the red nectar and began to smear it across her mouth. He did this slowly, his touch electrifying, sending a shock through her veins to her core. Clenching her legs together, Belle wiggled to get away but Gold would not let up as he continued to bait her with each plop of his finger into the bowl and caressing her with the blood gravy.

By the fourth time, Belle opened her mouth as he inserted the digit inside. She was not in control as her tongue tentatively licked the tip. The taste was pure honey as she groaned. Never had something been so divine!

Her hands were straining against the ropes. Gold snapped the cord effortlessly.

Immediately, her freed hand went for the spoon and dug in. It ignited a wildfire as Belle put spoonful after spoonful into her mouth. The meat practically dissolved on her tongue. She chewed and swallowed over and over until the bowl was completely empty.

The craving in her belly was satisfied and the pangs were gone. Only a new feeling remained as she turned her gaze on Gold who had watched the engorging feast with a cat who ate the canary glint in his whisky brown eyes. Flicking his tongue against his lower teeth, he couldn't resist asking:

"How do you feel now?"

Breathing harder, Belle dropped her gaze to his mouth. Her bound wrist broke free from its constraints as she seized his lapels and crushed him to her as she bit and sucked his bottom lip.

Drawing back, she couldn't help the lopsided grin.

"Ravenous. Now… eat me."

Chapter End Notes

A little departure but I had so much fun writing this. I don't know what that says about me, but I hope you all liked it!
Oncer4Life69Dearie prompted: Alistair Gold fell in love with his best mate's girl. Before he knew it, he was the best man and had his opportunity to declare his true love. Now a year later, Alistair is faced with a terrible dilemma when Belle comes to him with upsetting news about her husband. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

The idea for this request was more The Best Man and the inspiration came after I watched the movie The Truth About Love starring Jennifer Love Hewitt and Dougray Scott. It's pretty corny but it matches where this verse was going and I thought why not?

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Best Man?

Just to recap.

Alistair kept his expression neutral as the organ began to play and Belle was suddenly walking down the aisle. He knew if he looked into her eyes he would break. He would literally collapse and his emotions will come flooding out and he would demand her to marry him and not Jefferson because he didn't deserve her.

His hands clenched as he visibly shook but his betraying eyes looked up and his breath caught at the vision the bride presented.

She was so beautiful. Even in white, she was a sight to behold in all that silk and lace.

It wasn't fair.

It should have been him. And now…

"If any of you has reasons why these two should not be married, speak now or forever hold your peace."

Alistair took a deep breath…

Now.

Sometimes life can throw you a curveball and this one was a doozy.

Alistair Gold had a problem that probably NO ONE had in the universe. He was in love with his best friend's girl—no, wife.

That's right.
While he had been the best man for his mate Jefferson Hatter, Alistair could not get over the fact that the fates played a cruel trick. He had been the one to have seen Belle French in the bar that night, but he had been too much of a twat and coward to even approach her. Instead, the world's biggest ladies' man (and yes his friend) was the one to snag her in holy matrimony.

Why Jefferson decided to settle down and with Belle… Alistair had never known. It was so unlike him to be monogamous that when the two announced their engagement, Alistair nearly spat his drink at the restaurant. Of course, he kept his surprise to himself as he congratulated the happy couple and bought a bottle of expensive champagne to toast the upcoming nuptials.

Inwardly, he was flagging himself for missing on the opportunity in having Belle become his wife.

He did everything right as the best man. He helped Jefferson with some of the wedding planning that Belle wanted him to do. He even helped Jefferson with his wedding vows.

It really irritated him that Jefferson didn't know what to say to the most beautiful woman in the world. There was so much about Belle to say… her intelligence, her wit, her charming laugh, her love of books… Not to mention her quirky sense of humor and her penchant for drinking tea in this old chipped cup. And how she loved to watch sappy romantic comedies on rainy days.

But Jefferson was completely clueless. The only things he could think about were how good in bed she was and how she was a fantastic kisser and how she lets out this adorable whimper when she…

Well.

Alistair knew quite well what sound she makes. He did live with them for a while and he would sometimes close his eyes and pretend it was him that made her make those lovely sounds.

Such things were not meant for a wedding vow.

Yet somehow… Jefferson was able to get it together for the wedding. He said the right things while pledging his love for Belle as she gazed at him with those adoring, shining blue eyes. Meanwhile, Alistair had to keep the agonizing pain in his heart to himself. He masked his despair with smiles and even though he wanted to announce that the bride and groom should not be wed… He couldn't break Jefferson's heart. As much as he wanted to deny it, Jefferson did love Belle. After all, Jefferson gave up his man-whoring ways to be with this incredible person. He made her happy, and frankly, Alistair had to acknowledge that maybe Jefferson and Belle were meant for each other.

If only he could convince his heart. And he stopped thinking that he and Belle were the real soul mates.

Then… he could accept the possibility that Jefferson and Belle's love was a fairy tale ending.

Happily ever after and all that jazz.

It soon became apparent Alistair couldn't get over Belle, even when he would kiddingly call her "Mrs. Hatter" (it was the only way to make it a reality), and she would flash that dazzling smile and laugh, lightly punching him in the arm, saying, "C'mon Alistair. I'm Belle and that's what I prefer you to call me."

How could he resist her wishes?

He couldn't and that was the sad and painful truth.

So Alistair tried to keep his distance from the happy couple. Of course, he was Jefferson's best friend
so "distance" wasn't quite the ideal description. But he would avoid Belle's company when he could, insisting he had a cold, flu, or whatever new virus that was on the news if Belle was going to be present at a party or the pub or the movies. However, his best laid plans fell flat because Belle would show up at his flat with a bowl of homemade chicken soup and freshly brew hot tea with a hint of lemon and honey (just the way he liked it) and she stubbornly refused to leave until she knew he was on the mend.

Unfortunately, his ruse was doomed to fail. Belle was smart—cleverly so—and the last time he pulled the "sick" card to back out from Belle's birthday dinner, she showed up at his door, demanding to know why he always somehow came to be ill whenever she was going to be around.

Alistair tried denying it but Belle was quick to the punch.

"Don't play me as a fool Alistair Gold! I know that when you and Jefferson have plans and I suggest if I can come along… Jefferson will tell me after he rang you that you have a migraine or the cold. At first, I thought to myself—what are the odds that you keep catching all these things, and then it dawned on me: I'm the common denominator. You can't stand to be around me. I honestly don't know what I ever did to upset you Alistair. I really don't. I thought you and I got along quite well. Great, even. I thought we were friends—you and I. I guess you were faking it for Jefferson's sake. Really… you had me there. But I hate to tell you this: I'm not going anywhere. I'm Jefferson's wife and there are times when you and I will have to spend company with each other. I'm not going to insist that my husband doesn't see his friend. That's not me. But I will insist you at least behave civil towards me for his sake and his alone. And to do you another kindness… I won't tell Jefferson you hate me."

Alistair couldn't believe what he was hearing. Belle thought he despised her?! How far from the truth she was and how depressing it was not to tell her that he actually loved her with every fiber and every breath. Yet, he waited for her to finish her scathing tongue-lashing (and trying his best not to fantasize her scolding him for being such a naughty boy), and then told her earnestly:

"I don't hate you Belle. I never have. You're a wonderful, sweet, and loving woman. I can't think of a single reason for anyone not to like you. I'm sorry if you thought I didn't like you but that's not it at all."

"Then what is? Why are you backing out on my birthday?" Belle stood there, impatiently, crossing her arms over as she cocked a thin eyebrow in his direction.

He gulped. The unbidden image of her standing before him in black leather and high heel boots with a crop twisting in her hands flashed before his eyes. Alistair squashed his interest lest she became aware that his feelings weren't as amicable as they should be when she was his friend's wife. Then he began to wonder… What if she knew the truth after all? Belle loved Jefferson and learning that her husband's best friend had feelings for her might help in putting the kibosh on his feelings. She would definitely turn him down, and maybe, just maybe, she would find the situation so uncomfortable and awkward she would understand his reasons for canceling all the time. Maybe she would help with the excuses too! After all, why would she want to spend time with him knowing he was in love with her? It was the perfect plan! Now, he had to tell her. Taking a deep breath, Alistair said:

"It's difficult because you and Jefferson love each other so much. I'm happy for the both of you… I am. But I find sometimes feeling like the third wheel and it's no one's fault but my own. You see Belle… What I'm trying to tell you… You're bloody perfect and beautiful and I'm… What I mean…" He was struggling, floundering so pathetically that he couldn't spit it out. The words kept getting stuck in his throat and he began choking and sweating and Belle was standing there with her features unreadable until something broke in them and a smile blossomed.
Maybe she understood! She must have! So why was she smiling? Could it mean she felt the same way too?

"Oh, Alistair," she said, his name sounding like heaven on her lips. "I should have seen it! Oh my God… Here I was acting so selfish and rude and it never occurred to me that you felt that way. It makes perfect sense now!"

She got it but why was she so happy about it? Shouldn't she be appalled? Disgusted? Embarrassed?

"You want what Jefferson and I have. You could have said something silly. I know a lot of terrific girls who would be perfect for you."

Then in a snap, his hopes were dashed. Belle didn't feel the same way… She saw him as the lonely friend and matchmaking was already glowing in her eyes.

Before he realized what was happening, Belle was pairing him up with her friends. He went along with it because… well, he was a man and he was lonely, but seeing Belle become excited when she would tell him about so-and-so and how they would get along… He agreed to the dates. And they weren't half bad as he thought it could be but the problem was: none of the other women were Belle.

First, he was setup with Ruby. She had a loud personality and she was certainly a wolf in disguise but Alistair felt Ruby was too much to handle. Thankfully, she felt the same way and they parted on friendly terms.

The second was Snow. He couldn't get over how strange her name was and she was nice, but Alistair couldn't stand being with her when all she kept doing was pining over this David guy. That's all she talked about and he learned that David was also married too (he was unhappy with the missus but Snow insisted that it was an accident they fell in love) and she wanted to do the right thing in break things off. Of course, she hadn't expected it to hurt so much and Belle wanted to help her. Alistair admitted Snow was a kindred spirit (not that he would tell her that he was in love with her best friend), but he told her that he loved someone who was unavailable. They did try to give it a go with their heartbreak as the only thing they had in common, but it was quickly apparent they weren't going to be a good fit. They separated also on friendly terms.

The third was Emma. She was blonde and drop-dead gorgeous. And she was a bails-bondwoman which she loved role-playing since she did a lot of that in her line of work in catching the perps. Alistair had to admit she was fun to be with and he thought he could fall in love with her. She wasn't like Belle by any means and that was fine with him, but as lovely as Emma was and how she challenged him on so many levels… Alistair still couldn't get Belle off his mind. It was for the best just like the others. However, he and Emma did have a nasty breakup when he caught her cheating on him with one of the guys she was supposed to catch—a Neal Cassidy, if that was even his real name.

Sadly, every time a relationship didn't work, Belle would feel bereft that she hadn't found the ONE for him. Alistair kept insisting it wasn't her fault and even Jefferson told her not to be so hard on herself.

"I wanted you to be happy like us," Belle told him.

"I know," Alistair said. "Maybe this is a sign for me."

"For what?" Jefferson asked.

Alistair shrugged. "Maybe the right woman for me doesn't need to be found. Maybe I need to wait."
"Whatever man," Jefferson replied, snorting into his beer.

Belle shushed him and elbowed her husband. "Don't give up Alistair. She could be closer than you think."

Holding her gaze, Alistair said, "I won't ever give up."

xxx

He didn't know if Time or the Fates would be merciful to him, but he had hoped Belle's words were prophetic at the moment. As much as he loved Jefferson, he didn't want his friend to be hurt if that was the only way to be with Belle. But over time Alistair became used to the idea that he could be with Belle as a close friend. At least she could confide in him in things she couldn't tell her husband. Not that he would promote secrecy in a marriage, but he did get a little thrill when she asked him not to tell Jefferson when he had noticed once she bought a new pair of earrings that were expensive.

Little did she know that he would never betray her confidence.

On some level, perhaps, Belle did too.

Because on one particular fateful evening, Belle ran to his shop completely drenched with rivets of water streaming down her hair and clothes, but it was her tearful face that had his breath catching.

She was crying.

Belle was crying.

She didn't stop running until she collapsed into his arms, pressing herself against him tight as she sobbed into his tie and shirt. He didn't give two winks about his Armani as he wrapped his arms around her and held her until she was ready to let go.

When she did, he mourned the loss but he instantly scolded himself over his selfish feelings when Belle was clearly in distress.

"Come with me," he said, offering his hand as he nodded to his backroom. Belle sniffed as she shakily walked behind the curtain. Quickly, Alistair ran to the door and flipped the "closed" sign and made sure the door was locked before he joined her.

Belle was sitting in one of the chairs, but she barely acknowledged him as he went about in making a cup of tea. It was pouring like crazy and he figured a hot drink would help warm her up, especially since she couldn't stop shaking like a leaf. She finally looked up at him when he finished the tea and held her cup to her.

She muttered a faint "thank you" and took the cup into her cold hands. He watched as she took a tiny sip, which seemed to put a little bit of color into her pale lips.

Gently, he asked what was wrong.

He could see there was a fresh group of tears ready to fall, but Belle held them back as she dipped her head back to finish off her tea. Alistair was about to tell her to be careful as it was still very hot, but if the drink burned her… Belle didn't let it be known. She set the cup on his work table and finally spoke.

"How long did you know?"
He was confused with the question. "How long did I know… what?"

"Don't patronize me Alistair. You're his best friend."

Alistair was lost. "I swear I have no idea what you're talking about Belle."

She lifted her head as she studied him carefully. It took her a couple of minutes but she must have seen that his confusion was genuine.

"You don't know do you?"

"Belle, I honestly don't know what you're talking about."

Her face started to crumble and she began weeping into her hands. At once, Alistair went to her with a handkerchief in hand. She accepted it by blowing her nose and wiping the few stray tears. Her shoulders were not shaking as much as they had when she entered the shop, and Belle appeared to be calming down. At last she had regained some composure so she could tell the anxious Alistair what happened.

"I'm sorry. I thought you knew and I was so angry that you didn't tell me because I thought we were friends and… I'm rambling, aren't I? Okay. From the beginning. That's the best place to start, right? The beginning."

"Belle." Alistair brought the other chair closer, and then touched her hand that was clutching the handkerchief. "It's all right. I'm here to listen when you're ready—"

"I'm pregnant," she blurted out causing him to freeze. A million thoughts flew through his mind and he was doing his best to stay upright in his seat without blacking out. "I mean… I was. Pregnant. Not anymore."

"Oh." He didn't know what to say. The news threw him for a loop and now… he wasn't sure what to think.

"There was a miscarriage," she explained. "Jefferson and I… we didn't think to tell anyone because it was so early and then I started having pain and it was over. I barely had the chance to absorb the idea of becoming a Mum when I wasn't going to be a Mum anymore. As for Jefferson… Everything went back to normal so fast that it almost felt like a bizarre dream. He acted as if the baby never existed and I guess in a way that could be true but that could have been our daughter or son. I didn't want to bring it up to Jefferson because I was afraid he was hurting and this was his way of coping with the loss. So I kept quiet and—and for several weeks he was behaving strangely. He would come home late and sometimes he would reek of alcohol and we would argue and then it wasn't until last month that Jefferson was his old self again. I thought that he was at peace or something until… until this."

Belle reached into her pocket and pulled out her cell phone as she opened her photo gallery to show Alistair what she captured. He took the phone as he enlarged the picture to reveal it was a text conversation from Jefferson's phone. It was difficult to make out what was said, but from what he could read… it appeared Jefferson was flirting.

"You're going to think I've lost my head but I had this picture for a while. I thought maybe I was overreacting or jumping to conclusions and I should have confronted Jefferson but I was too frightened to know if it was true. So I told Emma and she helped me." Reaching into her other pocket, Belle pulled out another cell phone, which was a

With another woman.

Alistair lifted his surprised brow at Belle as she hiccupped. "You're going to think I've lost my head but I had this picture for a while. I thought maybe I was overreacting or jumping to conclusions and I should have confronted Jefferson but I was too frightened to know if it was true. So I told Emma and she helped me." Reaching into her other pocket, Belle pulled out another cell phone, which was a
pre-paid one. "Open it," she told him.

He did and scrolled through the text messages. He couldn't believe what he was seeing. This couldn't be Jefferson, his best mate. Not the Jefferson who swore off all women to love only this one incredible woman for the rest of his life.

"I pretended to be someone else," Belle whispered. "I knew Jefferson had a wild history and he told me this while we were dating, but it seemed like he gave all that up to be with me. So I thought if I pretended to be one of the women he had dated, then I could prove to myself I was being the insane jealous wife. But it backfired. He went along and you see how explicit those text messages are. He's cheating on me and I can't help but feel it's my fault. If I hadn't lost the baby…"

"No!" Alistair interrupted sharply. "You can't blame yourself Belle. It was a terrible tragedy but nothing to warrant this. Jefferson… He's the bastard. He shouldn't be mucking around when he has a wife!"

He knew his friend could be a cad but at least Jefferson had always been a cad with morals. He wouldn't play around or mess with a woman's heart. Once he had his fun then he would let the girl know it was over before he moved onto the next one. But this was a whole new low… One that Alistair never believed Jefferson was capable of doing.

"Thank you but I don't know what to do. I love Jefferson. But I can't be with someone who doesn't want me. And I keep thinking—what if this is a one-time fling? What if Jefferson didn't know how to talk to me and he thought this was the only way he could grieve? Am I being too premature? Do I leave him or should I stay for better or for worse? Help me Alistair. What do you think I should do?"

Belle looked at him pleadingly and Alistair knew he was in a precarious situation. This could be his chance to make his dreams come true and be with Belle, but at what cost? Jefferson was his best friend… As his friend and hers, shouldn't he help them try to make it work?

*God give me the strength.*

"Belle…"

Chapter End Notes

What do you guys think? Should he tell Belle his feelings or help her and Jefferson? Or could this be a misunderstanding? You know the drill! Prompt me what you like!
Chapter Summary

Tinuviel Undomiel prompted: Were!Gold is on the search for half-demon!Belle; the origins of Belle's powers are discovered. (Rated M for smut, violence, minor torture, and character death)

Chapter Notes

This is another older request and I was just thinking about this verse and I thought—I need to revisit this. So this seemed like a perfect return and it wound up sending me on this lengthy trip. I hope you all like!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Otherworld

The ground was soft, damp. The air was heavy with dew and pine and maple trees. In the far distance there were hooting owls, scurrying squirrels, and snapping branches as deer hurried for shelter.

And for good reason too.

A predator was on the hunt.

With paws sinking into the wet earth, the wolf raced through the forest in search of the elusive prey. Any second he would catch it… So close.

Then, the prey darted out in front and he leapt into the air, colliding with the animal as they rolled through the leaves and dirt. The wolf reared its head back and sank its teeth into the tender meat, blood spraying onto his coat. The deer died instantly, which was almost regretful since the wolf would have liked to play a little longer with his meal. However, those feelings fled as he continued savoring each bite and morsel.

Once the hunger was sated, the wolf licked and cleaned his fur until he was satisfied the blood was gone. Lifting his head into the air, he took another whiff of Mother Nature's providence. If he could smile… the wolf would have had a huge grin as a familiar scent reached him.

New prey.

And this one was very sumptuous and ripe for the plucking.

xxxxxxx

"Oh God!"

Belle placed her hand over her heart, feeling the organ pumped wildly, as she fought to regain her
breath. Never had she experienced that kind of intensity before! A gruff chuckle beside her alerted her to the smug satisfaction that was pouring off him. If only she had the strength to stretch her arm those couple inches and slap his arrogant ass. Then again, he would take it as another round of foreplay and Belle doubted she could go again in fear she might actually combust.

"I… hate… you…" she panted with each word.

His laughter in her ear only made it worse as she curled her fist and lifted it weakly to punch his side.

"Well, you should have known better than to cavort around the forest in those skimpy pair of shorts. There are monsters lurking out there."

"For… the… record..." Belle went on. "I… wasn't cavorting."

He snorted softly.

"And it's summer and it's hot. Did you expect me to wear something heavy?"

Rolling to her side, Belle felt the leaves sticking to her back and legs. She let out a disgusted groan. "Ugh! This is why sex outside isn't my thing."

"Nor mine," Robert Gold teased but laughed again as she glared at him. All Belle could think was yeah right. He clearly felt right at home lying in the woods as if he was the Greek God Pan. Why shouldn't he? He was in his element being a werewolf and everything. The forest was a second home.

"You knew I would be running this morning. You planned this, didn't you?"

Robert flashed his trademark smirk as he tucked his arms beneath his head. "Maybe I did, maybe I didn't. You know, Belle, sometimes the wolf wants what the wolf wants."

Now it was her turn to snort as she rolled her eyes. "Uh-huh. The wolf was really in control."

"He could be," Robert defended. "I'm only the messenger."

That was utter bullshit as they both knew since Robert was really good about making sure he Changed as often as needed to avoid any nasty complications. The last thing he wanted was for himself to Change in the middle of Storybrooke and send the people panicking. Of course, the chaos might be worthwhile if Belle was present.

"Good morning to me then," Belle commented. Not that she was really complaining. It was a nice way to start the day with a run and a vigorous workout from your werewolf boyfriend. Belle had hoped they would cross paths, but she was thinking how much fun it would be if they were running side-by-side. Yet Robert had other things on his mind as he playfully tackled her.

She wasn't frightened or anything. Belle sensed him the second he was on her tail and his recent chaotic waves from a fresh kill still clung to him. She only went along with the chase because she knew how much the wolf in him loved a good run. Plus he knew how to be gentle in his form with her. It would be difficult to explain any scratches or bruises as if it wasn't an animal attack.

He pinned her and gave her a kiss on the chin as a form of apology if he had hurt her. Belle was tough despite her petite stature and she ran her fingers through his thick fur to let him know there was no foul. She loved doing that and took as much advantage as she could when Robert was a wolf. He wasn't entirely comfortable with the idea of being close to her in his wolf state. Playing was one thing but any sort of intimacy he shied away. Bestiality wasn't his thing. Actually, most werewolves
were not into it. Only those who wish to live in their wolf forms would engage in such activities. Robert said fucking was better as a human. She didn't harbor any fantasies herself but she did admire his strength and agility when he Changed.

Still… he had to make sure she wasn't injured. Then and only then did Robert Changed back into human form.

This was actually a very intimate and private moment. Belle learned from the others in the Pack that no one watches when the other Changes. Not that anyone would want to watch as it can be painful since their bodies are shifting to another being altogether. Yet, a werewolf's life provides little privacy and this is the only one that is respected. As far as Belle knew, Neal and Emma never watched each other go from human to wolf or back again. Then again, when Emma became a werewolf she was bitten by Neal and felt betrayed by him and refused to have anything to do with him. Now, they were back together but even as a couple they would not share this detail.

Robert, on the other hand, didn't mind.

In the beginning, Belle respected the Change and would avert her gaze so she wouldn't gawk or make him uncomfortable. Of course, hearing Robert groan and moan didn't help the painful images from coming to her mind. Eventually, he convinced her to watch and… simply put… it was pretty amazing.

The human body is capable of many things, but a werewolf? They could give a contortionist a run for their money. However, Belle still would wince when she heard his bones pop and see them rippling across his flesh as his human form became the wolf. Regardless of the years Changing, Robert told her that the shift does hurt but it feels more like a cramp that won't go away.

Belle was honored that he would share this with her, and so when he Changed, she made sure her eyes didn't leave his body.

As an added bonus… he was naked.

His clothes were somewhere in the forest but he was naked, beautiful, hard, and ready.

And she was overdressed.

Belle quickly shed her clothes so when Robert closed the distance between them… there were no barriers.

Skin met skin as their mouths collided hungrily, their arms wrapping one another in a viselike embrace. They fell to the forest floor—both leading the other—as they rolled and tousled until Belle slammed his wrists above his head. Lifting her head, she looked down into his dark eyes brimming with lust and desire as she lowered herself, taking him and setting a brisk and almost punishingly pace. With each upward thrust, Belle tossed her head back, eyes closed, her chestnut curls swaying in time. Then, without warning, he flipped them, taking control as her leg rode higher and higher over his hip as he pounded into her.

"Robert!" she gasped, her body going into shockwaves as he delivered one of her other desires… Sweet, delicious chaos…

Splash!

Belle started, breathing heavily, as the cold water sent little pricks and needles through her skin. It took her a moment for her to realize she wasn't in the forest with Robert. No… But what she would give to go back to that moment in time.
Awareness became a throbbing sensation in her limbs, the stiffness in her joints from standing on her feet and her wrists shackled from the ceiling for days. There was no way of telling how much time has passed. All she knew from the daylight was the tiny shrivels that passed through the boarded windows and the one good fluorescent light. The rest of her time was spent in darkness, which she should be accustomed to being a half-demon and all, but Belle never knew darkness like this.

Another douse of water sent her coughing and sputtering as she shook her head. She didn't want to wake up. She wanted to sleep.

But he wouldn't have it.

"Wakey, wakey luv."

The crooning Irish accent had her stomach coiling in disgust as Belle glared at him defiantly. He only smirked, dropping the bucket on the concrete floor.

"That's much better."

Stepping forward, he rested his hook upon her cheek in a mocking attempt at a caress.

"Now," Killian murmured. "Let's see if you are going to be helpful today."

xxx

"Any news on Belle?"

It had been seventy-two hours since Robert last saw her and twelve hours since he received the message that would forever haunt him for the rest of his life.

His Pack, his family—Neal, Emma, David, Peter, and Midas—all wore the same dejected, worried expressions as they looked upon their anxious Alpha. Those looks didn't bode well and Robert was almost afraid to hear what they had to say, but Neal… his boy… cleared his throat.

"Nothing. We've been checking the area, scouring for any signs from Killian but so far he doesn't seem to be in Storybrooke."

"We're extending our search out of town," Emma added, stepping in. "Any abandoned warehouses, buildings, houses, you name it."

Robert nodded, not saying a word. Emma was one of the best trackers this Pack has ever had. If anyone could sniff out that worthless Mutt it was her. After all, she found him last time when Neal had been taken…

"Belle will be found," Midas said, interrupting Robert's dark thoughts. "Have faith old friend."

"She's strong," Peter continued. "You know she'll fight back."

Indeed she will. His Belle was a feisty one.

But he couldn't help it was his fault.

The last time he saw her they had gotten into an argument. Not unusual. Though he couldn't remember why they were fighting in the first place. Only that it had been bad and Belle stormed out of Dark Haven while cursing him to Kingdom come. He more than likely did something to upset her and the only reason he didn't suspect something was up because she had been silent.
Again, not unusual.

Belle wouldn't speak to him for a day or two until he or she (depending on who started it) would seek the other to apologize and they would make-up in some tantalizing way. When day two arrived, Robert decided to go to her apartment to tell her he was being an arse and insensitive or whatever she wanted to hear. But his entreaties and knocks were ignored and silence was his only response. He even tried finding her at the library, but it was still locked.

He wouldn't have suspected anything, except Ruby and Mary Margaret were peeking through the windows. Then he learned the unthinkable:

Belle hadn't been seen or heard from in two days.

Two days.

A lot can happen in that short time.

Instead of alarming her friends, Robert told them that Belle mentioned to him about visiting her mother. It wasn't a total lie. Belle had brought it up once or twice with an underlying message that she would like him to meet her. Not that her friends would know about their relationship, yet it was no surprise in this small-town that he and Belle were friends. Naturally, the speculation was bedfellows but he didn't give a damn about what the residents thought. And Belle wanted to avoid the questions that would come about from her friends if they knew that she and the local recluse were "more" than friends.

They bought it, at least, reluctantly because apparently Belle had also mentioned about seeing her mother in Australia. They had hoped she would have told them beforehand.

As soon as the two women disappeared, Robert hurried his way back to Dark Haven to inform the rest of his Pack about Belle. Emma tried reassuring him that Belle probably wanted some time and space to herself and that was why she was gone.

"Remember how many times I left Dark Haven without a word?" she joked. But there was no joking tone in her voice nor was there any humor.

The truth was that their species always flirted with danger. Anyone a part of the Otherworld had their dance cards filled up with that possibility. Furthermore, Robert had his fair share of enemies and he feared someone wishing to challenge the American Alpha might target Belle to get to him.

Then the message.

It was an unassuming brown package—small, really—but as a werewolf living as long as he had, Robert knew it was anything but unassuming. Inside was a snippet of Belle's hair. It was no trick or lie. There was no denying her scent and the other scent that also clung to the soft tresses or the dried substance that was left encrusted.

Killian Jones.

The rotten, cowardly bastard took her. He fucking took her!

Robert went mad with howling rage, practically Changing in the foyer, until Neal and Midas were able to calm him down. There was no use in losing control. He had to stay in control for Belle's sake.

Her life depended on it.
Now, they were looking for the Mutt who almost tried to destroy their lives a year ago.

"We won't give up until we find her and when we find him—" David trailed off.

"—We will rip him apart," Emma finished with a sneer.

"We do need to focus on what we know already," Midas explained. "The package he sent had no postage. Chances are he bribed someone to deliver that on your doorstep. So it means he is somewhere local. And let's face it, Killian lacks creativity. He will want to stay close to watch you Robert. Anything involving you is personal to him."

"I know," Robert growled.

"Belle is useful to him alive. He's taunting you so you can't lose your guard, Papa," Neal told him. "He's counting on that."

"I won't lose a goddamn thing until I have my hands around Killian's throat." Robert sharply looked at his Pack. "That is an order. When Killian dies… it will be under my hand. No one else's."

No one disagreed with him.

xxxxx

"You can't expect me to believe you and the Crocodile don't know each other," Killian jeered. "A tasty little treat like yourself?"

Belle figured her best option was to play dumb with him. From what she learned from the others, Killian wasn't the smartest of the bunch. His ego took up too much room for brains. And it was fortunate for her that the Pack's last encounter with him didn't involve her. She had been purposely left behind, which at the time did piss her off, but now she was looking at it like a blessing in disguise.

"I already told you!" Belle gritted. "I don't know who 'the Crocodile' is!" In fairness, she couldn't fathom why the Mutt kept calling Robert a Crocodile. He was a werewolf like Killian so the connection wasn't exactly clear.

Getting frustrated, Killian yelled: "Robert bloody Gold! He's the fucking Crocodile!"

Blinking innocently, Belle asked, "My landlord? What am I supposed to know? I only met the man a few times."

"You're lying," Killian accused. "You don't think I don't smell him on you?"

Belle forcefully closed her eyes as he came towards her, his face pressed into the side of her neck. He inhaled deeply and then to her disgust… she felt the tip of his tongue on her skin. She flung her head back but Killian was already laughing as he walked back.

"Hmm… Well, I guess the water stripped him off you, but I am right." Bringing his hook under her chin, he brought her gaze to his level. "You are certainly tasty."

Belle spat at him, catching him in the eye.

"Certainly spirited too. I like that." Killian wiped his eye with his good hand as he regarded her. "There's something else too about you. I can't quite pin what it is but your scent is different."

It was the demon in her he smelled, but apparently he didn't know that. And it certainly didn't help
that he was thinking back on all those "tasty" and "spirited" women he liked as well.

There were sudden bursts in her mind. Flashes of pictures flooding her vision of women—all helpless and frightened—beneath him as they cried out in pain, their throats being ripped and torn into, tied up, beaten, forced to submit in all sorts of painful ways. Their fear, their knowledge of death soon to come only to be prolonged because they wished it… All of it was too much to bear as Belle bit her bottom lip hard, blood trailing down her chin as her body convulsed from the chaotic waves.

Normally, the chaos would arouse her, but not this time. Not with all the misery, anguish, despair, and suffering she was witnessing. She couldn't exalt in the mayhem. She could only weep for the poor victims.

"Cheer up luv," he cooed. "I promise it won't be very long and I will make it equally pleasurable for you."

"Y-you're a m-monster," Belle stammered, the cold settling around her.

Killian couldn't stop his cackling. "You have no idea, luv."

Hang on Belle. I'm coming.

It was now approaching Day Five and Robert had been unable to find her. Wherever Killian had her hidden… he stepped up his game. The usual places that a Mutt would hide were found to be empty and Robert feared they were losing time.

Whatever he wanted from Belle… if he became bored or lost his patience… Killian wouldn't hesitate to kill her. She was only a pawn, nothing more.

Everyone, save David, split up and went in different directions from Storybrooke to spread their search. David was left in town in case Killian tried contacting Gold or if he was able to catch a whiff from Belle in case she really was close by. He kept in constant touch with the rest of the Pack, but so far all the updates had been the same:

Nothing.

Robert couldn't give up. Belle was good as dead if he did.

Running as fast as he could push himself, Robert searched and prayed for a clue, something, that would tell him if he was going in the right direction.

Then he caught it.

It was faint but he was positive…

Sulfur and brimstone.

Belle.

He didn't bother to Change and phone the others. Killian was his.

"I hate to say it, but I am getting a little bored with our chats."
Belle groaned as Killian unshackled one cuff from her wrist, which unceremoniously dropped to her side. Her arm had been held up for so long… she lost all feeling but feeling the return of blood flow… she welcomed it. The other cuff also gave way and before Belle could help herself—she was falling.

Her back collided with the hard floor, her head getting whiplashed, but she had little to no strength as she helplessly lay sprawled out. She was weak… so incredibly weak. She hadn't had any food or water for days, nor did she have any relief from being forced to stand with the cuffs and chains as her only support.

Opening her eyes proved to be Herculean task, but she had to so she could see what Killian was going to do.

She didn't have to wait for long.

He stood over her, his eyes roving up and down her body. Then, he got down on his haunches, his hook catching the collar of her blouse.

"Let's see if I can make you comfortable," he said.

The ripping of her blouse was a sound she won't ever forget. Every fiber in her wanted to fight, to push him off her, but he made sure she was weak so she couldn't fight back. She could only lay back and watch from her half-hooded gaze and prayed a quick prayer that it was quick.

"What was that poppet?" Killian asked.

Belle hadn't realized she spoke out-loud but as he lowered his ear closer to her moving lips, she said: "Help Father."

There was a splitting crack and Belle felt the pressure from Killian's body suddenly lifted from her. Then, she slipped into oblivion.

xxXXxx

The scent was getting stronger. Robert knew he was close. *Hang on Belle! I'm coming!*

In fact, the scent was *too* strong. Belle's scent was never that pungent.

As he burst from the bushes, his paws skidded to a stop as he realized he was near the sea.

And the docks.

He hadn't realized he was this close to the water. Belle's scent overwhelmed everything!

It was daylight out but thankfully there were no humans around. Yet there was one thing that captured his eye that was anchored at the dock.

An 18th century ship.

He narrowed his eyes. The sneaky son of a bitch hid out near the water where his scent would be masked by the salt. No wonder they couldn't find him! He raised his muzzle, nostrils flaring.

The smell was coming from there.

xxXXxx
Robert was able to sneak on board, his head ducking low as he sniffed the floor. Killian's scent was there but he let out a sneeze as the sulfur penetrated the wood. He glanced around to see if he could find something to wear but seeing none… he would have to find a way below deck as a wolf.

He bared his teeth and found the hatch. Shuffling down the ladder, Robert took the last couple prongs in a leap and turned around.

No one in sight.

The smell was certainly rancid and it was still further below. Robert proceeded onwards.

xxx

When Belle came to, the first thing she was made aware was this horrendous stench that instantly had her gagging. As soon as she started, the smell went away. She tried lifting her head to see what was going on, but her head felt so heavy and she was so very weak.

Footsteps.

Belle instantly tensed as a hand was placed on her forehead. A low murmur in a language she had never heard filled her ears and then a warm feeling began to spread all over her body from her forehead all the way to her toes. It was like all the fatigue, pain, and everything was lifted!

She pushed herself up and turned to find an older man bending over her. He had a kind face, blue eyes, and gray hair and she felt a strange sense of calmness radiating from him… a sense of familiarity…

Her eyes widened. "Who—?"

"Belle," he answered. "I came as soon as you called. When I saw… I feared I might be too late."

She frowned. "What?"

"Ah…"

Belle looked over the man's shoulder to find Killian lying in a heap, but he was attempting to get up. Her expression told the man what was happening, and without looking behind him, he raised his arm and Belle watched as Killian collapsed again with a loud yelp.

At that point, something started ramming at the door and after the second try, it busted open and there stood Robert. Well, Wolf Robert but it was Robert nevertheless.

"Robert!" Belle exclaimed in relief and happiness.

He let out a whimper to know he was glad to see she was all right, but one look at the fallen Killian and the stranger still bending over her… Robert's ears lay down as he began to growl a warning.

The man raised his other arm to show he was no threat. "I am not going to hurt her. It's the last thing I would ever want."

Robert didn't look convinced but Belle somehow knew the man was telling the truth.

"It's okay Robert. He's… a friend."

The man looked back at her with a smile. "Yes." He offered Belle his hand and she accepted as she stood up on her legs.
"Wow… I don't feel—Anything."

"I healed you. Now, I believe your werewolf friend has some unfinished business with this foul thing. I would sooner dispense him myself but I think he would rather do it."

Belle nodded. Looking back at Robert, she said, "I will see you on deck."

Robert didn't want to let her out of his sight ever again, but Belle seemed to trust this man and she didn't appear to be injured so perhaps he wasn't a threat to her. He chuffed in agreement and waited for the two to leave.

Soon it was just him and Killian.

Part of him regretted he wasn't going to be able to chase the blighter down, but Belle was safe and sound and to him that was the only important thing that mattered. If only Killian would be conscious!

"My head…"

He was awake! This was indeed Robert's lucky day as he pounced, his fangs going for the Mutt's jugular.

xxXXxx

Several minutes passed before Robert lumbered up from below. He was in human form and wearing Killian's leather coat, but Belle didn't care if he came up as wolf or even in his birthday suit. He was there.

Robert caught her in his embrace, hugging her tight, and his lips pressing kisses on top of her head.

"Thank God!" he breathed.

"God had nothing to do with it."

The couple broke apart as the man crossed his arms. "But I will say I am sorry I have not kept better watch over you. I just… I never thought you were a possibility."

"I'm sorry but who the Hell are you?" Robert demanded.

"Can't you tell? I'm Belle's father." The man smirked.

Belle inhaled sharply. "My father?"

"You called for me. I came right before that—that flea infested creature… Well, he's dead now."

Robert stiffly nodded. "He is."

"Good. He'll rot in Hell."

"Excuse me but who exactly are you?" Robert went on. "I know Belle's a half-demon and most demon fathers don't exactly come a-calling unless it suits them."

"Indeed. I am not like most demons but Belle can tell you that."

Robert looked down at her but she shrugged. "I know I am a chaos half-demon."

"Expisco," the man interrupted. "To be exact."
"Oh." Belle never knew the correct terminology but hearing it from his own lips… It felt right. "And your name is…"

"Lucifer."

"Lucifer," Robert repeated. "As in the Devil Lucifer?"

Lucifer sighed. "If it makes you comfortable, then you can call me the name I gave Belle's mother. Moe."

"It doesn't but thanks."

"Robert," Belle scolded. "I'm confused. You're really him?"

"I know the kind of reputation I have in this world but let me assure you… you have nothing to fear from me. Ever. You're my child."

"But… I thought…" Belle couldn't believe what she was hearing. Never in her wildest imaginings… Well, she did. It made perfect sense but part of her couldn't believe it. Not really. It was so biblical.

"She's not some anti-Christ, is she?" Robert questioned.

At that, Lucifer—Moe—whatever threw his head back and laughed. "No! She's half-human and she inherited my demonic and angelic blood. The chaos was created when I fell and while my power is strong… Belle can only sense and have visions of chaos. She is harmless."

"That's good to know." Belle didn't want to think she could be responsible for the apocalypse. "I don't understand still. How… How is this possible?"

"I feel the same. I never thought I would ever have a child. I have tried for centuries but whenever I get a woman pregnant she would miscarry. I grew to accept that I would never have the chance to create, only destroy. I had given up all hope until I heard about you. I didn't think you were real but here you are."

"Why?" Then realizing the risk and danger he could have put her mother through, Belle marched up to him and slapped him across the face. "You could have hurt my mother!"

"Belle!" Robert grabbed her and pulled her back. "I don't think that was a good idea seeing how he is…"

"I don't give two fucks who he is!" she shouted. "He could have hurt my mother! And for what? His own selfish needs!"

Slowly, Lucifer/Moe raised his hand to his cheek. "I do deserve that," he said quietly. "I have no reason or excuses. I was lonely and sometimes seeking company with a human is the only time I feel something." Gazing at Belle, he bid, "Can you forgive me?"

"Forgive you?" she echoed.

"Belle, you're a rarity in this world. And not just among demons. I am your sire but you should know that your life will always be in danger. And yes it was selfish of me. All I wanted was a child… and I condemned you because of who I am and what I mean to people."

"Are you telling us that there are people out there looking for someone like Belle?" Robert shook his head. "This cannot be true."
"I'm afraid it is. So far she has kept a low profile which has worked in her favor. But she has been exposed to others like herself and they know she exists. That alone will make her a target. I have already fended off some threats who think they can get into my good graces through her. However, there might be a couple stupid ones who think they could slip through if it means certain rewards. I felt it was only fair I warn you about them."

"But you are Lucifer," Robert protested. "Can't you stop them yourself? For good?"

"It's not that simple. My powers, sadly, are diminished when I'm in human form. I'm no good use to Belle as protection in this body. In my true form, however, yes I can. But not every threat is demonic."

"I supposed not," Belle said. "But if it wasn't for the fact that I was in trouble or these threats… would you ever have shown yourself to me?"

"Would you be happy to know that I was your father?"

"Touché." Belle admitted he had a point. "It was necessary then."

Lucifer/Moe nodded. "I wish I could bear good news, but alas, that is never within my grasp. I am glad that I am finally able to meet you, my girl. You grew up beautifully. I am proud of that."

"Thank you."

"And you do have a fine protector on your side. I'm not usually a fan of werewolves, but I know you genuinely care for her. That means more than you could possibly know. Thank you for that."

"My pleasure," Robert said, wrapping his arm around Belle's waist.

"Do take care. And one last thing."

"What?" Belle asked him.

"A second generation Expisco only inherits the visions. There is no further cause for alarm."

"Oh. Wait, what?!"

But he was gone. Leaving Robert and Belle to look down at her stomach.

Chapter End Notes

Hee hee. Couldn't resist throwing all that in. Like I said, the story got away from me and I couldn't stop the Muse from doing what she did. This will conclude the Otherworld verse. You guys know what to do next and leave a review!
Chapter Summary

C.R. Carlyle prompted: Top Gun!Rumbelle. Lieutenant Robert Gold aka Spinner plays the piano. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

Disclaimer: I do not own the lyrics to Jerry Lee Lewis's "Great Balls of Fire."

A/N: I was going through my desk drawer and I found a notebook with my notes for this prompt. It's another old one; something someone asked me to write about a few years ago when I started this project. So I took it as a sign for me to finish it. I know it's overdue but I hope you all still enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Top Gun

It had been a long grueling day at the airbase, but when the Mad Hatter himself suggested blowing off some steam at the local piano bar, who was Spinner to resist?

Bonus—he was even able to get their instructor Belle French to join in as well.

What started as a strenuous day ended with its reward with the lovely Belle sitting beside him and his friends as they drank. They talked and laughed and swapped stories until Hatter decided to take a turn at the piano.

His wife, Alice, snorted into her beer as her husband started strumming the tune to "Great Balls of Fire!" To make matters worse, Hatter decided to start singing. Very badly and off-key.

"Spinner, can you get my husband?" Alice asked her friend, shaking her head, but smiling widely. "Doesn't he ever embarrass you? Lord knows I can't take him anywhere without him creating a scene."

Spinner shrugged. "Hell no. Well, there was this one time…"

Alice stole a wink at Belle. "The Admiral's daughter. He told me all about the time you went ballistic with Zelena Green."

Belle couldn't help laughing as Spinner actually pouted. "Did he? That's great."

"Oh yeah. He tells me everything that you two get into."

"Is that so?" Spinner finished his beer and motioned the waiter for another. "I hate to break it to you dearie. But Hatter cannot have told you everything."
"Uh-huh?"

He nodded emphatically. With his new beer in hand, he twisted to look at Belle. "The thing is… Hatter and I have been doing this flying gig now for a long time. A long time. We have done so much stupid shit that I honestly can say I don't remember half the time."

"That sounds encouraging," Belle said drolly as Alice chortled.

"It's true."

"That's not what I heard," Alice commented.

"Why am I not surprised?" Spinner said more to himself.

"Oh yes. I hear it all the time how my little angel, Hatter, goes home early for church, and you, you always go home with the hot women."

Spinner spit his drink back into his mug and the two women started howling with laughter. Glaring at them, Spinner sniffled as he rose from his seat.

"I know when I'm not welcomed. Thank you Alice. I think I might go and embarrass myself with your husband for a while."

"Have fun!" Belle shouted as he waved his hand. She watched his backside with appreciation as Spinner clapped his hand on Hatter's shoulder. The two men talked back and forth until Hatter slid over so Spinner could have a seat next to him. Spinner stretched his arms, cracking his knuckles, before settling them on the keys. He glanced behind him to make sure Belle was paying attention and lewdly winked at her with his tongue curling against his lips. Then in a crystal clear voice, he started singing:

You shake my nerves and you rattle my brain

Too much love drives a man insane

You broke my will, but what a thrill

Goodness, gracious, great balls of fire!

He was as bad as Hatter! Maybe even worse!

Belle couldn't stop laughing as she took another sip of her beer. This man was something else, she decided.

"So…" Alice slyly dragged out. "I would love to warn you off about Spinner. But I have to tell ya a secret: I love that man to death. I've known him for years—almost as long as I have known my husband. I'm telling you… You should know… There are hearts breaking wide open all over the world tonight."

"That so?" Belle said, arching her brow.

Alice nodded. "Honey, unless you're blind and a fool, that boy has clearly decided to take himself off the market. He's hands down, one hundred percent, primetime in love with you."

Belle blushed hotly as she, too, was feeling the same way about him. She wasn't sure if her feelings were reciprocated or not. Sure the sex between them was good. Really good. Actually, he was the best she ever had. Not that she would admit that to Spinner. He already had an ego the size of Texas.
"You're one lucky girl. Keep that man safe." Then Alice shifted her attention as she began calling out to her husband. "Hey Hatter! You big stud! Come over here!"

Hatter hopped off the bench and jogged back to the table. Laying his hands flat, he leaned across the table as he gave his wife a slow onceover.

"You called, my dear?"

Alice slapped him across the chest. "Take me to bed or lose me forever."

Hatter threw his head back in laughter. "Well, then, that seems like a mighty order. Show me the way home babe."

Holding out his hand, Alice slipped hers into his as he pulled her out of her seat and brought her back over to the piano.

Belle swallowed the rest of her drink as she also went over to join the small group. Together, they all finished singing the song as badly out of tune as they could before Hatter pulled Alice closer to kiss her soundly.

Belle gazed at Spinner and opened her arms.

"Spinner, you big stud. Take me to bed or lose me forever."

Chapter End Notes

Some of the lines are lifted from the movie Top Gun. They worked so well and had to keep them in. Hope you enjoyed!
1 Fantasies Rated M

Chapter Summary

dizzy78 prompted: Belle is fed up with the village's cranky and rude GP. She can't stand how brusque he can be and is determined to put him in his place. (Rated M for smut)

Chapter Notes

This is an older prompt so please forgive me for the wait! Inspiration for this will be explained at the end.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Fantasies

Doc Rum was probably one of the most infuriating people she had ever met!

Honest to the fault, sometimes rudely so, and socially inept in the basic functions of humankind, blasé and indifferent and cold… the list could go on to about his lack of feeling to the villagers. He had no bedside manner, nothing that would promote warmth or comfort.

And yet…

He was a brilliant doctor who could instantly diagnose a problem with his patients almost immediately.

Indeed, Storybrooke was very lucky and fortunate to have someone like Doctor Stiltskin as the General Practitioner.

If only he behaved like a human being.

Belle was part of the committee in hiring him after their last GP unexpectedly passed away. Her first impression was that he was a rude gawker since he would not stop staring at her on the plane to Storybrooke. He didn't say a word. Only stared.

It was unnerving and uncomfortable and she told him to his face that there was something wrong with him. Of course, she hadn't known he was the doctor she was assisting in interviewing and she made it clear at the end how she felt about his lack of interpersonal skills.

To her astonishment (and mortification), he asked her if her right eye was blurry and if she had any pain. She told him "sometimes," which he responded in his off-handed way: "Acute glaucoma." He suggested she see a specialist right away, which she was going to dismiss, but later thought better against it and did.

Diagnosis? Acute glaucoma.

Since then, Belle was forced to admit that perhaps he was the best choice. As Storybrooke was a tiny
village, it didn't take long for word to spread about the Doc and his gruff manners. He didn't take any nonsense from his patients, adamant about making appointments and not asking questions about symptoms on the street, and absolutely refused to write any prescriptions without an examination first.

All the villagers were not used to this way of doctor-patient relationship. The previous GP did not stand on formalities while this one practiced it to the T. And, yes, there was a lot of gossip and complaints about Doc Rum and his behavior.

Belle understood where they were coming from, but at the same time, she couldn't deny his competence or his refusal to deal with fools and focus on those who were suffering from actual health issues. The people forget that a doctor's surgery wasn't the local hangout.

However, Belle could not abide his unfair treatment or his disparaging comments to everyone he meets. She felt it was her duty to tell him about his behavior, as she was the only person on the committee who didn't vote for him, and if he didn't start being agreeable then perhaps she should recommend they look elsewhere.

She walked right into the surgery, ignoring the chime from the bells, and frowned when she noticed there was no one inside. No patients were sitting in the chairs and the receptionist was nowhere to be seen.

*Odd, Belle thought. The surgery's not closed. Where is everyone?*

Shrugging, Belle took it as a blessing and proceeded to head back into the doctor's consulting room. She didn't bother to knock, just waltzed right in, and closed the door behind her.

She wasn't surprised to find the doctor was at his desk, but he looked up with his usual frown and scowl, although there was a faint detection of shock in his eyes.

"Rum," Belle started.

"Do you have an appointment?" he interrupted abruptly.

Gritting her teeth, Belle shook her head. "No. I came here because I wanted to talk to you."

"I'm busy at the moment. You can make an appointment—"

"Bugger the appointment! I need to talk to you now about your behavior."

"My… behavior?"

Belle marched to the empty chair in front of his desk and plopped down. "Rum, you have been in this village now for a couple of months, and this cannot come as a surprise, but the villagers do not like it when their GP is calling them 'idiots' and 'imbeciles' all the time."

"Well, they are."

"That's not the point," she said in frustration. "Even if they are, you don't tell them to their faces."

"Why not?"

"Because you don't!"

"Hm. I fail to see the point in this conversation." Then to prove this was decidedly over, the doctor went back to scribbling his notes.
Belle didn't know what possessed her, but she couldn't stand by this rudeness any longer. She was going to get him to listen to her or so help her!

Jumping to her feet, Belle reached across the desk and slapped his pen and paper pad away. She didn't bother to look as they fell to the ground. She finally got his attention.

He slowly stood up, he was certainly taller than her, and set his hands firmly on the desk as he leaned towards her.

They were engaged in a staring contest—neither one willing to budge or admit they were in the wrong.

Then someone snapped.

Rum reached for her and half dragged her across the desk as he sought her lips in a fiery, passionate kiss. Belle was too stunned and rigid to realize what was happening, but she was pretty certain the doctor was kissing her.

And she was kissing him back.

Her hand tugged his tie closer to her, her breasts squeezing against his chest, as she plunged her other hand into his hair. *So soft,* she thought absently as she twisted and stroked the strands in her grasp. He groaned into her mouth allowing her to take advantage as her tongue snaked inside. Dipping, teasing, Belle took full control of the kiss as the doctor melted into her ministrations as she encouraged him to do the same.

Soon, too soon the need to breathe came as they drew back, gasping and panting.

The pause did allow clarity to return to Belle as she realized she was snogging the Doc. And he was quite a kisser.

Even Rum appeared to be in a daze as he couldn't stop staring at her.

"We, um, shouldn't do that," Belle said, her heart pounding thunderously in her ears. She hoped to the Gods he couldn't hear it, but with his keen observations she wouldn't put it passed him. He would no doubt have some medical terminology to use to describe her palpitations and shortness of breath as potential symptoms for arrhythmia.

"Right. We shouldn't," he echoed.

"Right."

He continued staring at her, which was quickly becoming annoying, but before she could protest, the doctor was rounding the desk and pulling her into his embrace once more.

Belle's objections were immediately silenced as she raked her nails down his back, groping him through the suit jacket. In the back of her mind the little voice was telling her this was a mistake and he was a right bastard for getting off in the first place. But she couldn't stop and before she knew what was going on… they were moving towards the examination chair.

She didn't think twice about hopping on top as her arms and legs reached for him, intertwining and locking him against her. Not that he needed much encouragement. The Doc was eager to please and follow whatever this lady wanted. Of course, he was too overdressed and Belle wanted nothing more than to get him out of the stuffy suit.
Deftly, the tie was loosened and she yanked it off him. The suit jacket was next to follow. He was in the same mind as he undid the button to her cardigan, pushing it off her shoulders. She helped him remove the cardigan as she threw it to the side and started undoing the buttons to his shirt. Meanwhile, he was flipping her skirt upwards as his fingers began the ascent to her center. Belle bit back a moan as he started to stroke and rub her with her panties.

She might have been embarrassed how wet she was quickly becoming, but reason was already out the door the moment she entered the room. Now all she could keep thinking about was how she could drive him crazy as he was clearly doing to her.

With his buttons liberated, Belle started to explore the smooth, pale chest. She was liking how lean and muscular he was underneath the stiff clothes. She couldn't help grinning at his sudden intake of breath as he shivered with her gentle caresses. Apparently, the Doc was sensitive there and she was going to exploit that if she could. Her touch became bolder: scraping her nails across his nipples and then down his abdomen where it left no question about his interest in where this was leading.

Feeling confident, Belle nipped and lapped at his chest as she continued rubbing him through his pants. His own attention to her person was lapsing as he continued to tremble from her actions. However, he was able to regain somewhat of his composure as he continued his exploration as he slipped one finger into her.

Belle threw her head back and moaned in approval as Rum curled and teased her mercilessly. It was too much!

"Please," she whimpered.

Obeying her unspoken desires, Rum freed her from her barrier as he removed his pants and boxers, stepping closer as he joined them together.

She sighed in delight as he started pumping in and out; first, using slow and deliberate thrusts, then quickening his pace as she laced her legs around his bum, tightening her grip as she vocalized her need for more.

Too happy to oblige, the Doc continued his pleasurable assault until her inner wall started to clench as she reached her peak. The fluttering around him was all it took to push him over the edge as he fell ungracefully on top of her, his nose inhaling her scent, his limbs sprawled over her petite form but mindful not to crush her.

"Wow…” He swallowed thickly as soon as he found his voice.

"Yeah," she hummed in contentment.

"I'm assuming I played the part well."

Belle giggled as her husband lifted his face to her. "Very well. That marathon of *Doc Martin* was worth it! You really got his dour look."

"I bloody hope so. It wasn't easy to keep it when you were looking very delicious in that schoolteacher getup."

"Doctor!" she admonished in mock-horror. "What would the villagers say about your scandalous tongue?"

"I dunno but maybe I need a good seeing to from the headmistress."

"Hmm… That could be arranged," Belle teased as her hands moved lower to cup his buttocks. "I'm not a firm believer in corporal punishment, but I could make an exception…"

Meanwhile, in the shop…

"Oh my God! They don't let up, do they?" Emma said as she looked at Neal. He, on the other hand, was staring up at the ceiling as a blush stole across his cheeks.

"I told you coming here was at your own risk." He closed his eyes and cringed as he heard his parents in the backroom laughing and then a loud slap echoed in the shop.

Grabbing Emma's hand, Neal dragged her out of there before he could hear anything else.

He didn't want to know about the slap.

Chapter End Notes

So… the actual prompt was for a married Rumbelle role-playing to spice things up in the bedroom. I didn't want to do another Enchanted Forest role-play so over the Christmas break I was watching this fantastic show on Netflix Doc Martin and absolutely fell in love with it! I could totally picture Rumple as the Doc and Belle as Louisa and thought… why not use this as role-play thing? I hope you all liked it and the little humor at the end. Poor Neal! Hee hee.
Chapter Summary

Tinuviel Undomiel prompted: Ryan knows the truth about Belle's pregnancy and he decides the time for secrets is over. (Rated K)

Chapter Notes

I couldn't make up my mind on what I wanted to post next, and I didn't have to think for long since one of my lovely readers requested more One Night Stand. In a loud Maui voice: "YOU'RE WELCOME!" This will be the final prompt for this verse. I am resolving it pretty quickly but I know many of you will be happy with this resolution. Don't forget to review!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

One Night Stand

Ryan managed to keep his demeanor calm as the doctor finished Belle up and she was given a glowing review of her progress. He remained silent as he helped her into his car and as he drove her home.

His! The baby was his and she never said…

Belle thought his silence was unusual and she tried speaking to him until he slammed on the brakes and pulled the car aside.

"It's mine," he said without question. His chest was rising and falling at a steady rate and his voice was eerily calm despite the rapid beating of his heart. He continued to stare ahead as his fingers drummed against the steering wheel.

Belle sucked in her breath and she knew objecting or denying it was pointless. The doctor told him how old the baby was and Ryan was smart enough to do the math… Then yes. There was no use in lying anymore. The time for hiding was done.

"Yes," she whispered.

Ryan sighed and closed his eyes. "Why?" he asked her brokenly.

"I was scared. I never thought I would see you again—and then you showed up and—I don't know—I panicked. I'm sorry Ryan."

She really meant it as ridiculous and understated as the apology sounded. But that was all she had.

Ryan nodded, started the car, and began driving.

Nothing else was said.
Belle quietly cried to herself knowing she had royally and epically screwed up. Here was a man who turned out to be a loving and wonderful father and was also incredibly sweet and kind and understanding and compassionate. How could she have ruined their friendship? Ryan never pressured her for anything and he had been so helpful when he didn't have to… She messed up and hurt Ryan and there was nothing she could do to take it back.

What had she been thinking?

Eventually, they arrived at her place and Ryan parked the car. Neither of them made a move as they sat there. Then Ryan cleared his throat.

"I care for you Belle. That hasn't changed. And… I want to be with you. I wanted to be with you since we met at the bar. When I saw you again at the library and you were pregnant… I thought I lost my chance. But now I have hope. I don't want to lose you. I don't want to lose this child. Already I love this baby and I want to be whatever you want me to be even if you don't feel the same."

At last, he turned and fully faced her.

It was up to her to decide what capacity she wanted him to be in her life.

Belle didn't have to think twice.

xxxxxx

Gideon William Gold was born nine pounds, four ounces.

He was beautiful with a head full of hair and Bae was super excited to be a big brother.

Yes… Belle and Ryan started dating after they did a lot of talking and worked out the issues between them. Then they told Bae and he couldn't have been happier. Or over the moon. Either way, things were going well.

As Belle held her son, Ryan couldn't look away over how perfect this was that his family was together.

Well, not officially.

When Belle looked up at him, her smile beaming, she saw him with the ring and she knew this was what she wanted. She couldn't believe how a one night stand could have turned into the future she wanted to have. And she knew exactly what her answer was for him:

"Yes."

Chapter End Notes

Again… I know this seems rushed but as I said before… I do want to wrap this up. As for the next post, I will leave it up to my readers:

Dead Again
The Lost World
Rebecca
Best Friends
Ghost Whisperer Inspired
The Best Man?
Indecent Proposal
Chapter Summary

Grace5231973 prompted: Ghost!Gold continues his research while he reminisces, and Belle discovers his unfinished business. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

For this next update, I'm going for a double- Ghost Whisperer and Indecent Proposal. You guys know the drill after reading! Thank you to everyone for reading and sticking with me.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

**Ghost Whisperer Inspired**

Belle was determined to help Mr. Gold whether he wanted it or not. Since her encounter with him she couldn't stop thinking what he was doing in the library of all places. She knew why she would want to spend eternity there, but why did Gold? From her inquiries, Mr. Gold wasn't a bibliophile.

So why the library?

She went to Mrs. Lucas to see if she knew why Gold was lurking about. The librarian told her "Damn if I know. Probably waiting for the rent."

In fact, everyone she spoke to had said the same thing or something close. Mr. Gold was a miser and he had own the town. He was disliked; no, loathed was the appropriate word. If people didn't pay, then they got the boot. Or worse... if you made a deal and then didn't keep your end of the bargain. There was a reason he was called the Dark One.

Surprisingly, Gold's death wasn't a murder. All of Storybrooke had a motive to kill him if they wished. Instead, Gold died of a heart attack.

His cause of death wouldn't lend itself to a mystery or unfinished business. Something else was anchoring him.

But what?

**xxxXxx**

"Hi Papa! Look what I can do!"

Andy Gold couldn't hold back the laugh as he waved to his son as he rode past him on his bike. Bae put up his hands in the air while he maintained his balance. It was impressive and Gold applauded the accomplishment.

His reward: a huge grin, all teeth.
Some people might wonder if ghosts can cry. Gold knew the answer to that.

Yes they can.

Thinking of Bae. His precious, sweet boy. It always brought tears.

He rubbed his eyes and went back to his work. This was for Bae. This was for the truth. No matter how painful it would be.

"Papa! There's an ice cream truck. Can I get one?"

"Sure Bae."

"Thank you Papa! I love you!"

Last words.

Who would have thought something so simple, something so habitual would be the last thing your loved one would say?

Gold rubbed his eyes on the back of his sleeve. His vision was blurring and he had to get back on track.

For Bae.

He had been scrolling the headlines and articles for months now. He suspected he would continue to do so for many years to come. Already he had them memorized but still he kept on reading. Every time he hoped something new would appear. Every time there wasn't.

Then he thought about that medium.

She wasn't the first nor would she be the last. But there was something different. Sure, like the others, she believed getting him to crossover, to enter the light would give him a happily ever after. He had to scoff at that thought. Him? In front of the pearly gates?

What a crock.

But she wasn't like the others. When he knocked her to the ground she didn't run away. Instead she stood up to him, her eyes glowing with fire. She was going to be a challenge. He knew when she did finally leave that she would return. Call it a hunch but that spark he saw spoke volumes.

Oddly, Gold wanted her to come back.

Maybe she could…

No! This was for him. He didn't need help. No one can help him. This was all he had.

Even if he spent all eternity… it was better than what was waiting for him. Gold wasn't a nice person and he did terrible things but this Hell is what he picked.
He had been gone too long. Ice cream should have taken Bae a couple minutes.

Gold went outside and saw an empty, vacant street. No ice cream truck. No children.

No Bae.

No one can understand the terror that can seize a parent's heart when their child is nowhere in sight.

He ran out, screaming his name. Only silence greeted him. It was the worst sound in the world. And it continued as hours blended to days. Then weeks. Then months.

Then years.

The police couldn't find him. Couldn't find any evidence. Bae had vanished into thin air. No one knew what happened. But he wasn't the only child to have disappeared.

There were more.

Boys. All boys.

Years went by and Gold grew older. Far older than he would like. His temper changed. He wasn't the kindly landlord. He became short and mean and heartless.

He lost his heart when Bae was taken.

No amount of money or PIs he hired could give him the answers he wanted.

The torment of not knowing was utter agony. He only wanted to see his little boy again.

Fourteen.

He would have been fourteen. Or is.

He didn't know.

Then he got the letter.

The goddamn letter.

He first received a letter the day after Bae was gone.

The sweetest song played and the children came one by one, lining up two by two. Holding hands they sing and dance as the Pied Piper whisked them away to a place of wonderment and fun.

All the parents whose sons were taken received the same note.

And then he got another one eight years later. It was the same sing-songy taunt but new lines were added to add salt to the wound.
Years passed and the games go on. Young forever and ever.

The last line implied something definite. Something no parent wants their child to experience before them.

Gold didn't want to believe it. He couldn't. He had hoped Bae would walk through the door.

He never did.

And he got the same letter every year on the anniversary—that last line always a slap to the face.

*Young forever and ever.*

xxxxxxx

Belle was back in the library. She was in the reference section when she noticed one of the computers was on.

Curious, she went over and saw a newspaper headline dated over twenty years ago.

*Pied Piper Kidnaps Local Child; Police Baffled*

Further down there was a picture of a boy no older than six with wavy brown hair, a little long past his ears, and the biggest smile. He was adorable and beautiful.

Bailey Gold.

"Oh no…” Belle whispered.

"What the Hell are you doing?!"

Chapter End Notes

I am willing to take on requests for this verse to finish it. Thank you!
7 Indecent Proposal Rated K+

Chapter Summary

Grace5231973 prompted: Belle and Gold have dinner with his potential business partner. Just as things are going well, an unexpected wrench gets thrown into the mix. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

The moment you have been waiting for in the Indecent Proposal world! The dinner with this mystery businessman! But he's not so much a mystery man when you see who because it would make sense, lol. I am going to reference moments that have already happened between Belle and Gold, however, they are not written. I hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Indecent Proposal

The evening finally arrived for Belle to help Gold in the start of charming this future business partner. The weeks leading up to it were full of preparations that the faux wedded couple endured. As much as Belle had to remind herself this was all part of her bargain to Gold to keep her bookstore afloat, her feelings were caught in a maelstrom of turmoil.

Somewhere—down the line—her emotions were changing towards her "husband."

It all began with a few minor things: first, there was the first kiss in Gold's shop. He claimed it was to ensure the authenticity's sake of their marriage. She recalled how their first kiss as a married couple was quick and completely devoid of passion. The whole point of this sham was to make it appear that Belle left her fiancé for Gold because she fell in love with him. She couldn't help that on the wedding she wasn't exactly feeling the giddy bride she should have felt. Begrudgingly, Belle had to admit Gold made a point and so she allowed him to kiss her as a proper husband should.

The result?

She was shocked at how she had responded to him! Gentle and tender were words Belle wouldn't have associated with Gold, but gentle and tender he was in the way he held her in his arms and in the way his lips danced across hers. He wasn't demanding, pushy, or greedy. He gauged her comfort and when she wasn't screaming for the hills... he applied pressure and then she was lost in bliss. Belle lost track of time as they stood there in silence, only the sounds of their lips clinging to each other, before he pulled back and she was feeling bereft from the loss of contact.

Second, the child's bedroom she found that Gold kept in pristine condition. She had been familiarizing herself with her new home when she came upon a locked door on the second floor. Since he never told her that any place was off-limits, Belle took that as implicit permission to check it out. What she found was heart-wrenching. Everything—clothes, toys—were kept in order all preserved in the tragic memory of a beloved son. She never knew about Gold having a son; in fact,
she believed no one in Storybrooke knew. Mr. Gold was known as the forever bachelor in every sense of the word, including no children. The fact he maintained the bedroom and kept it cleaned spoke volumes about his character and how he was still hurting after all these years.

Belle departed the room with deep respect and reverence, making sure she didn't intrude again. She had wanted to ask Gold about the young boy, but wasn't sure how to approach the subject. She clearly felt it wasn't her business, but at the same time, they were supposed to be a married couple and she should know this about him, right?

Of course, she hadn't worked the nerve at the time. Instead, the third event in her life concerning Gold led to her defending the man to the residents. She was growing weary of the people in Storybrooke ostracizing her. When Leroy made a nasty comment about the "real" reason why she married Gold, she snapped.

What did Leroy know about him? And anyone for that matter? No one knew that Mr. Gold had another side to him—a side he never let anyone see—but Belle saw it nevertheless. He was a kind man, compassionate, caring. He could have been the ruthless jerk everyone believed when he married her… but he wasn't. He never pressured her or forced her to do anything against her will. He never demanded anything from her. All he wanted from her was to pretend to be the dutiful wife (which meant she would have to lie to her friends and ignore her fiancé to make it legit) for a business dealing. The other things, like cooking and cleaning, Belle did that on her own regard. He never expected her to keep house; in truth, he was rather speechless when he returned from work to a home-cook dinner.

Despite how she felt towards Gold in the beginning and about this contract, Belle intended to honor the deal. She hated how alone it made her feel, but in a strange sort of twist, she was able to get to know him on a scale she would never have been exposed to. And she was able to see the man behind the beast.

It was scary how quick it was to defend him. Yet she meant every word and she didn't regret a single one. In addition, she was able to gain a friend back: Ruby. It felt good again to have someone on her side and while Belle couldn't share it was charade… Ruby stood by her friend. As long as Belle was happy, then so was she.

And to Belle's consternation, she was happy.

How? Why? She could not fathom or explain. She just knew she was contented in a way she never felt with Grayson. Of course it went without saying she did miss other aspects of her previous life. She did miss The Book Escape, even though the library did offer a nice alternative. She had her books but she missed the independency of owning a business. She missed being Belle, and not "Mrs. Gold." However, Belle was able to live with the changes and make the most of them.

The frightening part was how Belle didn't miss Grayson as much as she ought.

She had to remind herself she was doing this for his sake too. Grayson insisted she go along with Gold's deal to keep the store alive. Gold was willing to offer large amounts of money in exchange for Belle as his wife, and Grayson talked her into signing the contract so they could keep their dream and have the wedding they always wanted.

She was positive that Grayson had to be hurting. After all, not being able to see or speak to him… it was a killer. Belle had her imagination and she often had to take comfort in that it wasn't her that was feeling the strains. Grayson had to be regretting the deal, and she wished he would see Gold and demand the contract be null—damn the consequences. It was part of Belle's fantasy for the first couple of weeks of her "marriage." She kept expecting that her Prince in Shining Armor would show
up and they could forget this nightmare and return to their normal lives. She was certain they could find the money elsewhere to keep the store going…

But Grayson never came.

He never rescued her.

So Belle was left on her own.

She knew she could blame the whole thing on Gold. She did and she had. The arguments they had… Now, Belle can only look back with remorse. Gold wasn't to blame for Grayson's actions. Grayson chose this ordeal and he chose to sit back and do nothing while his fiancée was the gossip in town. Belle practically hated him for abandoning her, but a part of her had to believe Grayson was feeling something akin to the sacrifice being made.

Otherwise… what was the point?

Needless to say, Belle's feelings were spiraling out of control. To say she was conflicted was the understatement of the year. Regardless how forgotten she felt with her actual fiancé… Belle was experiencing something new and a bit alarming towards Mr. Gold.

She was starting to see him as a friend. It was the only explanation for those past circumstances and her defense in him.

But then something changed.

Belle couldn't shut out or ignore the past week. Gold confided the truth about his son, Bae, to her, the heartbreaking tale that never had the closure he wanted so desperately. Bae had been six when he complained of a really bad headache. At first, Gold brushed it off as an ordinary headache and treated it as such. However, Bae continued to have headaches and then he began to tire out easily. Eventually Bae was diagnosed with leukemia. It had been so sudden and the doctors tried a rigorous treatment but it was too late. Bae died before his seventh birthday.

What followed next was a spontaneous kiss that had Belle withdrew and refusing to look at him as she ran to her room. It would have been one thing if the kiss had been a quick peck, but this kiss had been world-shattering. Belle swore the floor moved underneath her, and it honestly wasn't far from the truth because when she closed her eyes… she could feel the weight and warmth of Gold's body on top of hers.

When she saw the opportunity to flee, she took it. Too mortified, too stunned, Belle hid until she was certain he had left for work the next day. She couldn't bear to look at him when he returned home but she knew she had to face him eventually. So she swallowed her pride, and soldiered on as if nothing happened.

Obviously, the plan backfired on her.

Her desire to ignore and forget did not sit well with him. There were words—heated words—exchanged and Belle wound up pinned against the wall with Gold holding her lips hostage.

But it was a poor hostage situation when the recipient was being torn apart with a consuming lust that came out of nowhere.

Then as quickly as it combusted… the faster it was doused.

Gold broke away and wanted to focus on their story for the exceptional Mr. David Nolan that was
scheduled to fly in that week.

AKA… the family-oriented businessman.

It was the distraction Belle needed and she dove into the details that would become her truth to persuade this man to sign a deal with Mr. Gold. The research proved to be diverting and she was grateful for that respite.

Now it was show time.

"Wait."

Mr. Gold glanced over his shoulder as Belle paused at the foot of the stairs. She was absolutely breath-taking in a navy blue dress that hit below the knees, lace overlay all over with a belted waist, and lace sleeves to her elbows. Red heels were the only splash of color as the rest of her attire was simple but elegant. Her curls were in relaxed waves and she was light on her makeup. She was not the showy or the overdoing spouse to impress look, but natural.

"Mr. Gold… in all this time… I don't know your name."

How could Belle overlook something so blatant?

Fearing it was something else or cold feet, Mr. Gold sighed in relief when Belle said she didn't know his name.

"Thomas," he answered. "My name is Thomas."

"Thomas," she tested, nodding her head as if committing to memory. "All right Thomas. I'm ready."

Dinner was going smoothly.

They had arrived a couple minutes earlier but Mr. Nolan was running late, which was fine since Belle needed those extra minutes to compose herself. By the time he showed up and introductions were made, the nervousness that filled her belly slowly dissipated as she began to see what an agreeable and amiable man this Mr. Nolan was… a real Prince Charming.

He was handsome if one was interested in men with boyish looks. His flaxen hair was short but wavy on top, eyes a bright blue and full of kindness, and he smiled too much. He didn't strike Belle as a business type of person at least not the type who would partner with Gold.

But it soon became apparent how much family meant a lot to him. He had been late because he was reading to his daughter, Emma, a bedtime story via Skype. He knew she would be asleep by the time the dinner concluded. Since he sometimes had to travel for work, Mr. Nolan—David, he insisted, Mr. Nolan was his father after all—he wanted to keep in touch and continue his nightly ritual of bedtime reading.

Indeed, he loved to talk about little Emma. She was a spry, energetic four-year-old with a big heart and even bigger imagination. Her current fascination (and favorite books) was about police officers.

"Anything and everything about the police she has to have to be read to," he said, chuckling affectionately. "She is determined to be a cop when she grows up. Already she polices the children at the playground! Some parents feel she's being bossy, but she has an eye for safety measures."
He adored his child as much as he did with his wife. They have been married for six years but it was six very happy and wonderful years.

"We met in unusual circumstances. I was engaged and Mary Margaret was a teacher where my fiancée worked. I was visiting and Mary Margaret accidentally ran into me and landed on my lap. It was love at first sight! Good thing too because Abigail fell in love with another man but wasn't sure how to break it off with me. She saw a spark between myself and Mary Margaret, and knew we were meant to be."

"That's sweet," Belle said. She looked over at her husband, expecting him to say something in reply. His expression conveyed little interest but she caught his eye and the slight wiggle of her eyebrow told him he better say something.

"Uh, right. It's good that it all worked out in the end," Gold said.

"How about you?" David asked, looking at them point blank. "What is your story?"

Belle and Gold practiced this to the tee.

"I moved to Storybrooke about five years ago," Belle started. "A friend and I opened a bookstore and… Thomas here was our landlord."

"Belle would give me a book with the rent every month," Gold added.

It was the truth and it was best to stick close to the truth as much as possible. Until…

"We would have these book discussions and then the conversations became a bit more personal and… Well, Thomas has a reputation."

"Ah yes. I heard," David interjected with a grin. "But Mr. Gold… you do have a knack on finding the right objects and antiques for your clients. Not to mention, you know what and where the best investments are."

Gold nodded in thanks as Belle placed her hand on top of his fondly. "Once I got to know him better, my feelings began to change. He wasn't as bad as everyone claimed and we fell in love. To be frank, it's kind of similar to your marriage," Belle went on. "I was engaged with my friend who helped me with the store. We were drifting apart and it wasn't until I discovered I had feelings for Thomas… then I knew."

To really sell it Belle turned a very loving smile in Gold's direction. To her surprise, he returned it in kind. Squeezing her hand, he said, "It snuck up on me as well. I wasn't expecting someone like Belle to come into my life."

Perhaps to both it sounded a bit cheesy, but David Nolan seemed to soak it up.

"I see you're really happy," David commented. "There's nothing like marital bliss."

"Yes," Belle answered.

The meals arrived, and while they ate, David and Gold talked shop. Belle didn't understand the idea beforehand on what this partnership entailed, although listening to them she was able to get the gist.

David owned several very successful sheep farms that dispensed their wool for various uses. He wanted to open a shop in Storybrooke that would sell the wool in different products like blankets and sweaters. Gold had the equipment that David wanted so they could be made in-house.
Furthering Belle's astonishment, Gold assured David he could aid in the training in the proper treatment of wool. As Gold launched into the process and explained the additional services he would be able to provide to David, Belle was impressed with his knowledge. She had no idea that he could do something like that. It led to the thought that this was information she should know about her husband…

However, there was something else that caught Belle's attention.

Out of the corner of her eye she saw Grayson enter the restaurant and she frowned noticing his swaying movements. Turning fully, her eyes widened as she took in his haggard appearance: the loss of weight, the dark bags beneath his eyes, disheveled hair and facial growth on his chin and jaw. He looked awful! Belle couldn't recall a time where Grayson ever let anything go, including shaving.

The first emotion that crawled into her heart was pity. Then she saw the blood-shot eyes and instantly she sensed trouble.

Then again, it didn't help that Belle hadn't turned around to avoid him seeing her.

Immediately, Grayson saw her and he began heading in her direction.

"Oh no…" Belle exclaimed as she faced the table and the two men at it. "Excuse me. I need to use the little girl's room."

Gold looked at her in confusion, but Belle didn't have time to explain or even signal what the problem was. She got up, trying not to bring attention to the urgency, and strode towards Grayson, meeting him halfway. Grabbing his arm, Belle attempted to drag him away so he wouldn't make a scene, but Grayson wasn't having it. He not-so-gently pushed her aside as he continued his path to the table where Gold and David were.

Belle's heart was beating wildly as she followed him, and heard Grayson saying, slurring his words, "I changed my mind. I want out of this deal."

Gold, now realizing what was happening, gazed at Grayson with as a stoic demeanor as he could. Yet Belle knew him well enough to see the anger teeming in his eyes.

"Mr. Knight," Gold began slowly. "This is not the best time to be having this conversation. I suggest you go home and sleep it off."

"Nooo." Grayson pointed his finger at Gold. "I, I think this is the best time Mr. Gold."

"What's going on?" David asked, looking somewhat alarmed at the intruder.

Belle got there and once more laid a hand on Grayson's arm. "Grayson, you need to go. You're making a scene."

Her soft chiding words did not have the affect she had hoped as her fiancé spun, his balance off-kilter, as he finally recognized Belle was right there.

"Belle? Thank God! I thought he would have you locked up somewhere," Grayson rambled. "Honey, I am so sorry! I never should have pushed you—"

"Stop." She lowered her voice as she looked at Gold and David who was now confused. Some of the wait staff was also standing close by, not sure if they should intervene, yet Belle feared the damage was already done as a couple were looking at Gold with disgust plainly written across their features. "Grayson, you're drunk. You're not thinking clearly. Go home and sleep it off."
He batted her hands away, shaking his head like a petulant child. "I can't go on like this. Knowing you're with him. It's wrong. So wrong. Screw the money. I want you and our lives back."

Belle gasped. She couldn't believe this was happening. Now of all times. All she ever wanted since this deal was made was for Grayson to come and tell her he regretted it. Now… he was here and doing exactly that (of course, she hadn't expected him to be drunk off his ass) and she was feeling… annoyed? Not quite the knight rescuing the princess from the tower. It was more of a bumbling fool being an irritating gnat and she wanted him gone.

Now.

"Grayson," she repeated, slowly and with indignation. "You are out of line. I don't know what you're talking about, but you are not only insulting my husband but me too. This is why we are done. Why we have been done for a long time. You need to let things go and go home before you continue to make an ass of yourself."

Her fiancé stood there, unblinking and dumbfounded, as he was at a loss on what to do. Apparently, in his drunken state he thought Belle would leave with him.

"But—" Grayson objected.

"No." Belle shook her head. "Leave Grayson."

Seeing how she wasn't going to go along with him, Grayson looked back at Gold who was in a similar state of shock. "You…" Grayson said a warning in his voice.

"Can you please escort him out?" Belle asked one of the employees, nodding to Grayson. Finally, someone took action and complied with her wishes as Grayson was led out of the restaurant. A manager came forward and asked if they wanted them to call the police.

Gold wanted to say yes, but Belle beat him to the punch insisting there was no need for the police.

The manager, clearly mortified with the incident, was adamant about doing something to make up for the interruption. This was a high-end restaurant with a reputation to maintain and especially with a patron already known to them… Belle raised her brow in Gold's direction as she stated calmly:

"I suppose a bottle of champagne on the house would be all right; that is, David, if you are still willing to invest with my husband?"

David glanced over at Gold and then back to Belle. "I will say I can have my lawyer draw up a contract—say, next Tuesday?"

"Next Tuesday will be fine," Gold said, pleasantly surprised and relieved that Grayson Knight didn't ruin the dinner after all.

David nodded. "Excellent. A bottle of your best champagne, sir!"

The manager bowed and excused himself to retrieve the bottle and new glasses.

Belle was grinning ear-to-ear that it worked out. She squeezed Gold's hand as he lifted his eyes to her in thanks. There was also a ghost of a smile curling on his lips as he could not believe this woman—this incredible woman just saved a very important investment. She didn't have to… Belle could have easily gone along with her fiancé but she chose to stay.

*Stay with him.*
Belle blushed from the intensity of his gaze as she dropped her hand into her lap. She knew they would have a conversation later about this, but for right now, she settled on lifting the filled glass of bubbly in cheers on a successful dinner.

Chapter End Notes

Don't forget to leave a review!
6 Rebecca Rated T

Chapter Summary

Twyla Mercedes prompted: The truth is uncovered about Cora's death. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! I have not forgotten my promise about getting this story wrapped. I have been busy with my new job. I finally have a teaching position where I don't have to work these long hours. I'm still adjusting but I am super excited to have a job that provides decent benefits.

Enough of that. This prompt is venturing away from the original novel but I think it will still be refreshing. Hope you like!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Rebecca

Belle was sitting in the court room as the deposition played out. Testimony after testimony. All about Cora.

Her Anthony was barely hanging by a thread. She knew this was going to be difficult, but that was an understatement. It was torture. Watching her husband sit and relive those moments he wanted desperately to forget. She wished she could take it away and help him bear this burden.

Anthony stole a glance in her direction and Belle smiled. That simple gesture seemed to put him at ease.

She knew he loved her and now he knew that she loved him.

No matter what.

Anthony confessed he pulled the trigger that killed Cora, and then put her on the yacht and set it off to sea so it would sink, erasing all memory of her. He didn't think Belle could love him after what he done, but God help her, her love for him only deepened, and if possible, grew even more.

She was at his side, now and forever.

Then the coroner came.

Anthony tensed as Dr. Whale swore his oath and began his testimony. Only she and Anthony knew the truth. They knew her death was the result of a bullet not the accidental drowning that everyone believed. The hope that all these years with her body underwater would cover up the evidence of a murder.

However, they never expected nor were they prepared for what Dr. Whale revealed.
"Upon examining the body of the late Mrs. Gold, I came across something startling. There was a scar above her right shoulder from a grazing of a bullet. I do not know how long it happened before the yacht sank, but Mrs. Gold was quite determined to take her life."

The people present in the inquest all had gasped collectively in resounding shock. Belle looked to Anthony who was thoroughly astonished.

Dr. Whale continued.

"There were additional scarring found on her wrists. It is in my expert opinion that the late Mrs. Gold wanted to have a dramatic exit and must have regretted the choice of a gun. Since Captain Triton testified the yacht was tampered, the late Mrs. Gold must have caused the damage to have the yacht sink and with the final *au revoir* she took her life. Her death was suicide."

Belle covered her mouth as the rest of the room went into frenzy. Suicide… Cora Gold took her life? She went to Anthony, taking him in her arms, as he hugged her close.

"It's over," he murmured. "She killed herself. We're free Belle." Then as it occurred to him, he lowered his voice. "I didn't kill her… But she had been lifeless in my arms when I carried her…"

"She must have pretended," Belle said.

"Yes but why?" Anthony frowned.

"You said before she liked to play by her own rules. Perhaps even in death it was to be on her terms."

Anthony nodded. "Indeed. That would be something Cora would have done."

"At least we can be together. No more ghosts; no more demons."

"Just you and me. Oh Belle… how I love you."

"I love you too Anthony. Let's go home."

Taking her hand, Anthony and Belle returned to Manderley where they started their lives anew.

Chapter End Notes

Short, I know, but a fitting end. You guys know the drill!
2 Best Friends Rated K

Chapter Summary

Grace5231973 prompted: More of Robby's first day at school.

Twyla Mercedes prompted: During lunch, a bully tries to intimidate Belle and to Robby's surprise, the little girl does something surprising. (Rated K)

Chapter Notes

Hi everyone! Sorry for the delay but with getting accustomed to my new job, and I was working on a new Phantom of the Opera story, I neglected this one. I still intend on wrapping this up. I'm posting 2 chapters—one is for the Best Friends verse and the other is for The Best Man? I hope you all enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Best Friends

So far his first day was surprisingly speeding along. Typically the first days would take forever to end, but Belle was making his experience an adventure.

When Ms. Shirin started the morning's lesson on grammar, Belle informed Robby that the sentences on the board were a group of villagers that had lost their precious valuables to the evil, greedy sheriff and it was up to Sir Pencil to return what was missing back to them. As she copied the work on her blank piece of paper, Robby followed suit and watched with fascination as Belle made little en garde noises as she added the punctuation and capitalized letters.

In fact, Belle had some story in mind for each lesson that they had to accomplish. It was amazing how quick her mind was in developing these ideas that Robby wished he had tiny figment of her imagination.

When she noticed his look of despair, she had asked him what was wrong.

"I wish I could make things up like you. I'm not that good."

Belle frowned. "That's silly. Anyone can make anything up. You have to try!"

He scratched his head. "Okay. I'll try." Since they had moved on to mathematics and the lesson was all about subtraction, Robby tried to think of something good. "There's a dragon and he's… That's stupid. Dragons like to collect things, not get rid of them."

Belle gingerly poked him. "Go on. I like the idea of a dragon. What is he doing?"

He shrugged. "I don't know."

"C'mon Robby. I know you have it in you!"
But he didn't. Sighing, Belle tapped her chin before an idea came to her. "The way I see it: This
dragon is unlike most dragons. Instead of collecting, he likes to give away. He feels good when he
can make people smile. Every time the number goes down, the dragon does a little dance."

To demonstrate, Belle did a problem and in her seat, she did a little dance with shaking her butt and
twirling her pencil in her fingers.

Robby laughed and he solved the next question. Then it was his turn to shimmy too.

The two went back and forth until Ms. Shirin announced it was time for lunch.

"Yay! I'm starving!" Belle exclaimed.

Grabbing his hand, she dragged Robby to her cubby where she had her lunchbox and off they went
to the gym, which was now converted to a cafeteria.

Robby's stomach grumbled and he realized that he forgot to make his lunch. Da never did because he
had other things on his mind, but Robby was so nervous about school that it slipped his mind.
Reaching into his pocket, he managed to find a dime and two quarters. He looked at the menu sign to
see if he could buy anything for that amount and he was able to buy only an apple.

He found Belle waving to him as she patted the empty seat next to him.

"Is that all you're having?" she asked, pointing to his apple.

"Yeah."

Belle shook her head. "That won't fill me up and I know me. Here. You can have some of my carrot
sticks and half of my sandwich. I hope you like peanut butter."

"No jelly?" Robby asked.

She scrunched her face as her tongue rolled out. "Ew! No. I like only peanut butter."

As much as Robby did like jelly on his sandwich, he knew he couldn't be choosy so he took a
grateful bite of the sandwich. It was tasty and he wished he was able to have some milk to wash it
down.

As if reading his mind, Belle pushed her carton of chocolate milk towards him. "We can share," she
said.

He didn't know what to say but thanked her anyways. He was starting to come to the conclusion that
Belle was an angel in disguise. She knew exactly what to do and say to make him feel comfortable.

Robby was so happy that he made a friend that he hardly noticed the shadow looming over them.

"Go away Keith."

Belle's voice had him turning his head to see what was wrong when a boy, a tall boy, probably a
fifth grader from the looks, was standing behind them, his pudgy arms crossed.

"I thought I said this was my spot," the kid, Keith, said flatly.

Belle nonchalantly shrugged. "I didn't see your name on it."

"I always sit here," Keith went on without skipping a beat.
"Well, today my best friend Robby and I beat you," Belle replied as she bit off a carrot stick with a resounding crack.

Even though Keith was bigger than the two of them combined, Robby was in awe that Belle just called him her best friend.

"What are you smiling at you doofus?"

Robby didn't realize Keith now had his sights set on him as he gulped, shrinking in his seat. "N-n-nothing."

"That apple good?" Keith now reached over and snatched the fruit from the table.

Robby's eyes widened as he tried grabbing it back. "That's mine!"

"It's mine now," Keith told him as he opened his mouth to take a huge bite.

What happened next was amazing.

Belle had stood up on her seat so she could be as tall as Keith was, her hands on her hips, as she lowered her voice in a warning. "You better not take a bite out of that apple."

"Or what?" Keith taunted. "You're an odd funny girl. No one even likes you anyways."

For a second, Belle's blue eyes darkened but not in anger, in sadness as her bottom lip quivered. It lasted only a second before she launched herself at Keith, knocking him to the floor, the force causing him to let go of the apple as it bounced and rolled around.

Robby reached down and got it, setting it on the table, as he watched Belle using her fists to punch Keith in the chest. There was a huge commotion as the other kids all began to gather around and watch the fight unfold, but it was quickly broken up as the lunch moms and Ms. Shirin were there to pull the struggling Belle off the crying Keith.

Ms. Shirin set her down and checked Belle for any injuries. When she was satisfied that Belle was not hurt, she helped Keith up on his feet and saw that apart from his dignity being hurt... Keith was not injured either.

"Come with me," she told the two children as she took them hand-in-hand out of the cafeteria.

Robby, worried, got up and ran after them. He didn't want Belle to get into trouble. Not when it was his fault that Keith wanted his apple.

He found them as they entered the office and Robby ducked inside.

Ms. Shirin had them in the principal's office as she spoke calmly about the incident. Belle was strangely silent but Keith was anything but as he protested loudly that Belle attacked him for no reason.

Robby knew he shouldn't interrupt but he couldn't understand why Belle was not defending herself. So he pushed open the door and instantly got the attention from everyone in the room.

The principal, a Miss Blanchard, rose from her chair as her eyebrow quirked. "And who is this young man?"

"I'm Robby Gold," he stammered. "M-m-miss." Looking at Belle, he licked his lips as he found his voice. "Belle's not to blame. She was helping me. He wanted my apple and I forgot to make my
lunch and I didn't have enough money to buy anything but the apple and I was hungry and he was so big and I was scared so I let him take it but Belle stopped him from biting it so I could have it," he said in a rush. "The end."

"My word," Miss Blanchard said, sitting back down as she looked from one child to the next. "Is that true Mr. Nottingham?"

"Na-huh," he answered. "It was my apple that he took from me."

"No!" Robby exclaimed. "It was mine! He said something mean to Belle and he tried taking a bite…"

"Miss French?" the principal questioned the little girl who kept her eyes on the floor. When her name was heard, Belle snapped her face up as she bit her lip.

"Robby said the truth but I did punch Keith. I know it was wrong…" She swallowed thickly as Keith jabbed his finger in her face.

"See?! She admits it!"

"Actually, she admits to punching you," Miss Blanchard clarified. "But I know you Keith. You like to bully the third graders and how many times have I had you in my office this week? And so far nothing has been your fault."

Keith flushed hotly as he stuck his fat hand under his seat.

"Now, we can't go around fighting other students, even if they are being mean or in the wrong," the principal said. "But seeing that no harm was done, let's leave this as a warning. No more fighting. Now, Belle and Robby—is it?—you two may go back to lunch with Ms. Shirin. And…" She reached into her drawer and pulled out a couple single dollars. "Make sure he has a proper lunch," she told the teacher, sending Robby a wink. "As for you Mr. Nottingham… I think we should call your mother about your bullying."

"Oh no! Please no!"

xxXXxx

They finished eating lunch and with Robby having a full stomach… he felt he could tackle anything else left in the day. But Belle was quiet and he couldn't understand why. She wasn't in trouble. Even Ms. Shirin didn't seem that upset as she escorted them back into the gym. So what could be making Belle blue?

"It's nothing," she insisted as she picked up her garbage and threw it out.

"It doesn't seem like it," he said.

She sighed glumly. "No. If I tell you… you won't be my friend anymore."

Robby balked. "No way! Belle, you're the nicest and coolest person in the world! You're the only friend I ever had!"

A flicker of a smile played on her lips, but it faded as soon as it appeared. "No. You'll change your mind. They always do."

"That's not fair!" Robby stood in front of her, placing his hands on her shoulders. "Belle, you
stopped that kid from eating my apple. I… No one has ever done that before. Please Belle. Tell me why you're sad."

Taking a deep breath, she looked him in the eye. "Keith said I was an odd funny girl."

"I remember."

"Well, all the other kids think that too. I like to read and make up stories and I don't really like to run around on the playground," she explained.

Robby shook his head. "Is that why you're afraid I don't want to be your friend?"

Belle nodded. "That's why my friends stopped talking to me."

"I don't care," he declared. "You're my best friend. And—" He stopped talking when he realized he let his accent out. He stared, heart beating fast, as Belle tilted her head as she narrowed her eyes.

"You have an accent," she pointed out.

"No—I don't," he said.

Shaking her head, she said it again. "You have an accent!" Face beaming now, she started talking once more, but this time, she also had an accent. It wasn't Scottish like his, but it was unusual and one he instantly recognized from one of his favorite animal shows.

"You're Australian!" Robby exclaimed.

She giggled. "I am. That was the other reason too. The kids make fun of my voice so I stopped so I would sound like them."

"Same here," Robby and Belle continued to stare at the other with new appreciation and understanding.

"I have an idea," Belle told him. "Let's talk like us. No more hiding, okay?"

Robby liked the sound of it. "Deal. Friend?"

"No," she said, grinning. "Best friends."

Chapter End Notes

I have to say once more I loved this prompt.
Chapter Summary

Popular Request Prompt: We last left Alistair in a predicament involving Belle and a possible cheating husband. Truths will be told, feelings will be known, and of course, a happily ever after. (Rated M)

Chapter Notes

After the responses I received for The Best Man? I was going to have to add one more! This will be the final one for this set too. Thank you so much for reading and reviewing!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Best Man?

Alistair couldn't believe this was real.

The last thing he ever expected was to wind up in bed with the woman of his dreams. Even now his mind was returning to those delicious memories of being entwined with Belle. Heart still racing, he glanced over his shoulder as she slept peacefully and with a smile curving her lips.

His blood was starting to sizzle again and he wanted to wake her up so they could make love once more.

His appetite for her hadn't waned; instead, he hunger for more.

But he didn't have the heart to wake her. Not yet at least.

Of course, winning Belle came with a price.

xxXXxx

"What do you think I should do?"

Looking into her pleading blue eyes, Alistair's throat was very dry. She was coming to him as a friend on what to do about her cheating husband.

Well, allegedly cheating.

For all they knew was that Jefferson responded to the flirtatious text messages. There was no actual physical proof he was sleeping around. But the other part—the part that wanted Belle for himself—wanted to tell her to leave Jefferson and be with him. However, he was a friend to both and he would be a terrible one if he pushed them towards divorce.

"Belle…" In the end it was the friend that won. "You need to talk to Jefferson. Clearly there was a misunderstanding."
"There was no misunderstanding over this." Belle showed him the phone with the messages. His eyebrows hit the top of his head as he swallowed thickly over the explicit content on a particular suggestion of body contortion.

"Well, I—that is—Is that even possible?"

Belle groaned, rolling her eyes, as she closed the phone but the blush could not be mistaken that yes it apparently was possible.

"Right. Okay… no misunderstanding but Jefferson's crazy about you. It was a lapse of insanity and he's probably regretting what he said. Have you seen him yet?"

"…No."

"See? I bet he's at home now mentally kicking himself in the arse for even considering doing those things with another woman."

"Maybe."

"I don't know about that…"

Belle played with her fingers, gaze avoiding him as she pondered the situation. Then hope took hold as she got to her feet. "Thank you Alistair. I don't know what I would do without you."

"I don't know that…"

"I'm going to head home. Thank you again."

Losing the ability to speak, he merely nodded and Belle was gone. The realization he drove her back to her husband's arms had him regretting his advice and the yearning to call her back to confess had him running to the door.

At least in his mind's eye he did. The truth was… Alistair Gold was a coward and he couldn't bear to expose himself to her. Not when his friendship mattered.

And yet… something changed. He didn't know how or what but it was only the beginning.

xxXXxx

The next day he heard about the incident from the horse's mouth. Jefferson stopped over and Alistair was tortured over how the two patched things up.

"I don't know what I was thinking texting that woman like that."

Well, somewhat patched. Belle never told her husband that the texts came from her and why she didn't disclose that tidbit Alistair couldn't say. But Jefferson seemed remorseful enough.

"I haven't told you this but… Belle and I… we miscarried and it was Hell to deal with it."
And Belle didn't tell him that she told this to Alistair. It was unlike Belle to keep secrets, but he wisely kept his mouth shut as his best friend poured his soul out.

"Belle is the best thing to ever come into my life. I know that and I was a fool to have almost lost it. Fuck. I need to cut back the drinking."

Paradise restored.

Appearance-wise it seemed.

Alistair didn't pick up on the discord until a month later. The three of them were having dinner out, and afterwards they went to the pub for a nightcap.

Jefferson noticed her first.

"Hey, Alistair. Check that number out." He motioned with his little finger as Alistair looked at the auburn-haired woman. She was wearing a tight-laced green dress and heels that made her long legs even longer. "You ought to go to her and get her number because she is fine."

Before Alistair could respond a "no thanks," Belle interjected. "Leave him be Jefferson. If Alistair cared, then he would have noticed her already. Besides, she looks more like a high end prostitute."

"So? He can talk to her anyways."

"Why so she could rip his heart out?" Bell snorted. "No offense but that woman is out for one thing only. Alistair can do better."

"What? It's okay for you to try and set him up, but I can't?! My own best friend!?" Jefferson's voice grew louder and started to attract a couple bystanders, but Alistair jumped in to keep the peace.

"She's lovely but not my type."

"Not your type?" Jefferson scoffed. "You have something against hot women?"

"I'm not all that into redheads," Alistair said, knowing brunettes with bright blue eyes was his type. Yet to make amends with his friend, Alistair did spot a brunette in the corner of the bar. Nodding to her, he remarked, "She's cute. I'll talk to her."

Belle took one glance and wrinkled her nose. "No not her either."

"Why not Belle?" Jefferson asked curtly and even Alistair had to admit he wondered too.

"Trust me. Women's intuition."

Jefferson mumbled "bullshit" and Alistair was feeling pretty confused. The way Belle kept discarding the other women… Funny. She didn't seem all that upset with her husband's comments but when Alistair was thrown into the mix it was almost like she was jealous.

Jealous—why?

Of course, Alistair figured he was misinterpreting the situation. Belle was his friend and she had his best interests at heart. But something seemed off and while he assumed she was right in her assessment on the redhead… he couldn't pinpoint what was wrong about that brunette.

There was one way to find out.
Alistair excused himself and he felt Belle's eyes on him as he began moving to that woman. Her hair was short—just going past her chin—with two bright, full red lips. Her eyes were dark and magnetic and in them seemed like a lifetime of sorrow. He couldn't help but notice the appletini she was drinking.

Sophisticated.

"Is this seat taken?" he asked politely and without missing a beat she motioned "go ahead" without speaking a word. Just picked up her drink and sipped.

He had a feeling this was going to take a while and with both Belle and Jefferson watching… Alistair felt he had to make a point. But to whom and why, he couldn't say.

"My name is Alistair and—"

"Let me guess," she replied dryly. "Your friends are making you uncomfortable with setting you up and you want me to pretend I'm interested so they can back off, right?"

"Well… not exactly. I mean you are attractive…"

"Thanks but I'm honestly not in the mood. My boyfriend decided to give it another go with his ex and I would rather wallow in my own misery than help some stranger with relationship troubles."

"I wouldn't say stranger. I did introduce myself."

She smirked. "That you did." Looking past his shoulder, her lips continued to twitch in amusement. "Fine. Buy me another drink and I'll play along. The name is Regina." Her hand was held out and Alistair shook it.

"Nice to meet you Regina."

The next several minutes were spent in conversation and flirtatious laughter as Regina took it upon herself to touch his hand, arm, and even kneecap (not necessarily in that order) as she lowered her eyelids and batted her lashes. Alistair was having fun, enjoying her company, in fact and not faking it, when he felt a hand clap his shoulder.

"Hey Alistair. We're going to take off. Don't do anything I wouldn't do." The last part Jefferson whispered with a wink.

"Are you sure you don't want us to drop you off?" This from Belle and her expression was somewhat queer and her tone wasn't quite happy. It seemed amiss in some way.

Before Alistair could reply, Regina leaned over, ensuring her chest rubbed against his as she purred, "I'll make sure he's home in one piece." Her words held a suggestive overture and he couldn't help the tremble that it elicited.

Oddly, Belle paled at this before she concealed her disapproval and gently squeezed his shoulder. She stared into his eyes as if trying to convey a message but Jefferson was tugging at her arm.

Alistair watched them go and Regina whistled softly.

"She has it bad."

"Excuse me?"

Regina nodded in the direction his friends left. "She really likes you. I would even bet to say she's in
love with you. Shame really since she's married. Do yourself a favor and break ties. It will only end in heartache. Believe me."

Alistair sputtered. "Belle—in love with me? Oh no. We're just good friends."

Regina wasn't buying it. "Look if looks could kill, she would have cut me opened when I touched you."

Could it be? Was it possible? Alistair didn't want to hope it was because as Regina said… it would only end in heartache.

Belle was married to his best friend and he couldn't do that to Jefferson.

But… if his friends weren't happy together…

"Hey, don't say I didn't warn you," Regina told him with that knowing grin.

If what Regina said was true, then what was he going to do about it?

xxXXxx

Alistair thought about testing his theory and he didn't have long to wait as Belle showed up at his shop the next day. Naturally, she came in the guise she was going to buy a gift for so-and-so from work's birthday. Playing along, Alistair was showing her his latest inquisitions when Belle finally blurted:

"How was your night with that Regina woman?"

There was no jealous note he could detect. Just genuine curiosity from a friend.

Perhaps Regina was wrong… but there was avoidance in her expression like Belle was purposefully not looking. Was she afraid of what she might see?

"We talked. And drank. It was nice."

"Oh. So you didn't hook up?"

"Didn't say that. I am a warm blooded male and she was attractive." Truthfully, he and Regina went their separate ways but Belle didn't know that.

"Are you going to see her again?"

"Maybe." Alistair watched her carefully and he noticed the slight twitch of her eye and the intake of breath as she sucked in her bottom lip. "Belle, are you all right?"

"What? Yes! Of course I am." She was quick to reply and she finally looked at him. Her smile was forced despite the cheeriness in her tone. "Why would you ask?"

"From the last time we spoke. All is well with you and Jefferson?"

Belle lowered her gaze. "We're trying. I shouldn't say anything. He's your best friend."

"You're my friend too," Alistair said. "I care about you as well."

"I need to go. Thank you Alistair."
She was gone before he could say anything else.

xxx

Alistair started studying Belle much closely. It was the way she was going out of her way not to be near him or be alone with him. Not that anyone noticed, even Jefferson, but Alistair did.

However, he knew things weren't not as "fine" as Belle said.

For one, Jefferson was constantly calling him to go to the pubs and taverns. There Alistair watched him flirt with any available woman. It was harmless at first but it steadily grew worse until Alistair caught Jefferson in a lip lock with some girl.

Jefferson was remorseful and he begged Alistair not to tell Belle. As much as he was loathed to do, Alistair didn't. It was only a kiss. Not that he had sex with her.

But then Jefferson confided in him:

"I think Belle is in love with someone else."

This taken Alistair aback and he had little time to prepare when Jefferson made another startling confession:

"And I'm not upset. Funny, right? I'm her husband but I'm not mad or jealous or anything. I'm not heartbroken. Just relieved. I was only fooling myself in thinking I could be married."

He went on to tell Alistair that the miscarriage as tragic as it was made him realize he wasn't ready for children. He wasn't ready for that commitment like he thought he was when he proposed to Belle.

"I'm telling Belle tonight," Jefferson told him. "I could use a good stiff drink after."

Alistair said he would wait. It was the least he could do.

xxx

The divorce proceedings didn't take long. It was a mutual affair and very amicable. Belle and Jefferson drifted apart. It happens sometimes.

Yet they were his friends and while he felt bad for what was lost… he was overjoyed.

Belle was free.

And Alistair wanted to tell her but he couldn't. Something was holding him back.

Until Jefferson came over.

"I know you have feelings for her. How could anyone not? Yet I know you did nothing to act on it and I am grateful for you being a true friend. But things have changed. Go to her. Tell her how you feel. Don't let me be the one to ruin things."

Then he left and Alistair's mind was blown away. Jefferson was giving him his blessing and he was torn what to do until he heard a knock and he found Belle behind the door.

"Belle…"

"Alistair." She licked her lips.
He grabbed her or she grabbed him. Either way, they were in each other's embrace and were falling into bed and tugging their clothes off. The rest was bliss.

Sometime later, he held her as she explained to him what changed.

"It was the night I came to you and told you about Jefferson's affair. I kissed you and it felt so right that it startled me. Then I couldn't stop thinking about you and our past conversations and it was then I realized how much time we spent together and how well you really knew me. Then I knew… I had feelings for you and I was mad at myself because I was married and shouldn't feel this way. I tried to ignore it but when I was with my husband… I wished it was you. Jefferson saw through me and it was then we knew we weren't made for each other. He gave me his permission. In fact, he told me that you were the first to see me but apparently you were nervous. Alistair, why didn't you tell me?"

"I don't know. I was a bloody fool but I'm not going to make the same mistake."

And Alistair kept that promise.

Months later came another wedding, but this time, Alistair was the groom and Jefferson was the best man.

Alistair and Belle lived happily ever after.

Chapter End Notes

So ends this set of prompts. You know the drill!
Dead Again

She couldn't get the image out of her head.

Hamish. The scissors. Isabelle's horrified expression.

Even now Belle couldn't stop shaking, her breath stuck in her throat, the phantom feeling of the gold-plated scissors piercing her throat…

Somewhere, in the back of her mind, she recognized Hamish wouldn't do such a thing. He was too kind, sweet, caring. It didn't make sense. But in a flash she was back in that bedroom, a witness to the gruesome murder. She had to get away but where? She had no memory of her identity, no money, no anything to help her escape.

Hamish's heart was beating wildly in his chest. He never felt this way—this pain—from a single terrified look. Belle looked as if she expected him to murder her that very instant, which could have been further from the truth. He would never harm her. Couldn't. He had no idea what he was feeling but he knew he was falling for her. Now, she was a frightened animal. All of their progress—gone. Poof!

"Now Belle—"

"Stay back!" she hissed. "Don't come near me."

Holding his hands out, Hamish did as she told. "Okay, okay. I'm not near you. Can we talk? Belle?"

"You murdered her…" came her soft voice, accusatory.

"You got me. Who did I murder?" he asked.

Shaking her head in disbelief, Belle spat, "Isabelle!"
Hamish paused. "How could I if I wasn't born yet?"

"I don't know!" she exclaimed, confusion all over. "Maybe Rupert!"


"But you look like him!"

"I'm not him Belle! Just like you're not Isabelle."

"Then why do we look like them?!"

"Christ, I don't know!" He ran a hand through his hair. "Look. This is what I know—I like you Belle. A lot. I wouldn't hurt you. Ever. You have to believe me."

"I want to," she admitted. "I really want to Hamish but I don't know if I can trust you."

There. The one blow she could possibly make.

"All right." Hamish's face was emotionless. "Don't trust me. Be scared of me. Think I'm a killer. I know the bloody truth."

He quickly thrown on his clothes and shoes and stormed out of the apartment before she could protest.

 xxxxxx

Hamish was gone for the whole evening. He did call to leave a message he was bunking at his reporter friend's place—Jefferson something—and returned early in the morning. He looked as if he hadn't slept a wink; and frankly, neither did she. Belle felt awful on how things went. Looking back, she knew it wasn't presently her most proudest moment. Her fears got the best of her and poor Hamish had to deal with the consequences.

She made breakfast as a peace offering. From what she could remember she made a decent helping of scrambled eggs and bacon. Even the coffee turned out pretty good.

Hamish had a cup and plate, silently accepting her apology, but all he said was:

"I'll see Diane today."

 xxxxxx

Arriving at the antique shop, Hamish looked up at the store sign and had to resist the urge to roll his eyes. The name was so ridiculous that "antiques" was not the first thing that popped in his mind. However, he had to remind himself he was here for Belle's sake, and perhaps, even a little bit of his own.

She was so adamant that she had seen him murdering Isabelle that Hamish had to wonder if there was some truth to the Rupert Strauss trial. The man didn't even confess let alone put up a defense to claim his innocence. From all accounts, Strauss really loved his wife, but his jealousy and temper must have gotten the better of him. Hamish knew he had a bit of a temper but to go as far as to commit murder?

He didn't know.

Maybe Strauss wasn't the violent type until he snapped. Hamish had seen that happened too often
enough in his line of work.

Yet… he couldn't get rid of the feeling that there was something wrong about the whole thing.

He was hoping Gaston Baker would give him the insight he was looking for. Jefferson told him that the reporter was still kicking and was willing to meet with Hamish the next day.

Taking a deep breath, Hamish pushed the door opened as he and Belle went inside. She insisted on coming and he wasn't in the mood to argue. The whole visit was to prove a point that Hamish Gold was not Rupert Strauss.

Diane greeted the two with open arms (much to his chagrin) and couldn't help the delightful glint in her eyes when Hamish told her he wanted her to put him under to find out if he had a connection after all.

"Of course, Mr. Gold. Of course! Have a seat and we'll get started."

Hamish felt pretty silly sitting in that chair as Diane's hypnotic voice instructed him to stare into the candle as he walked towards the door into the past.

The first thing he noticed was the light.

It was so bright that it took him a moment to realize it was the lightning from outside. The storm was intense and he was feeling rather anxious as he stalked down the hall in a hurried pace.

The path was never-ending, stretching too long for him to reach his destination. All he knew was he had to make this call soon before everything gets too out of hand.

"Who are you?"

He can't tell. There were no mirrors to be found.

Finally, he reached his room and closed the door, pausing to make sure that he wasn't being followed. It was disconcerting not to be able to trust the privacy of one's own home, but he didn't want the nosy busybody to overhear his conversation. Not that it was anyone's business but his.

"Find a mirror. Tell us who you are."

Yes. He had to know. He had to find out who he really was.

There was a mirror. A tall one that stood proudly in the corner of the room. He went to it.

"Tell us your name."

Belle was biting her nail when Hamish's eyes suddenly flew opened, his mouth forming a silent "o" as his cell phone buzzed persistently in his pocket. His hand flew to his pocket, fumbling to grab the device, and when he had a good grip on it, he checked his message.

"We need to go," Hamish said, snapping the phone shut as he rose from his seat, avoiding Belle's inquisitive stare. "Now."

Belle turned to look at Diane who was as equally confused as Belle was, but Hamish was reaching for her hand and was dragging her out of the shop.

She waited until they were outside when Belle yanked her hand from his grasp. "What the Hell was that?" she demanded.
"Jefferson found out who you are."

Belle froze. Her name… Her *real* name was finally uncovered. She didn't know what to think or how to react. At first, all she ever wanted to know was who she was. Now… She wasn't so certain.

"Hamish?"

He was already standing at the driver's side of his car. "Let's go."

"Hamish," she repeated. "What did you see?"

He finally lifted his eyes to her. "Nothing," he said. "Like I told you before. I'm not Rupert."

xxXXxx

"It took some time but some neighbors finally came forward. Turns out you were mugged the night you went missing and wound up at the orphanage," Jefferson explained as he handed over a purse and wallet to Belle.

Tentatively, she took the items and noticed she had keys inside the purse. There were two on the keychain… her car and home presumably. The wallet she unzipped and took out the cards inside.

Her driver's license—Lacey Sharp.

That was her name.

Lacey.

It didn't sound right. She much preferred Belle but as she sorted through the credit cards… they all had the same matching name.

Lacey Sharp.

"Am I…? Do I…?" she started to ask Jefferson.

"Are you attached, you mean?" he clarified. Roguishly winking, he answered, "No. You're single. In fact, you're an artist."

"An artist?" Belle couldn't help the skeptical tone in her voice. She didn't feel like an artist. Actually, she didn't feel like Lacey Sharp.

"Yup," Jefferson said, his lips popping the last letter.

Hamish had his arms crossed during the exchange. The entire time he was refusing to look at her, even talking for that matter. Belle had no clue what had happened back in Diane's shop, but she wished Hamish would say or do something.

Yet he kept his silence.

It wasn't until Jefferson addressed him that he woke up.

"No, no. You can take her. I have some errands to run."

Belle's brows skyrocketed to her hairline. "Errands? Hamish…"

"Sorry Belle—I mean, Lacey—but I have somewhere I need to be. Good luck now that you have
"Thanks… I guess." Belle didn't know why he was acting like this, but she didn't want things between them to end like this. But Hamish was gone. He left without saying another word or goodbye.

"Ready to go home?" Jefferson asked.

She exhaled. "Yes. Home sounds great."

xxx

He couldn't do it.

He couldn't send Belle—Lacey—back to her old life. That wasn't her. It didn't seem like her.

But Hamish had other pressing things to contend with.

For one, he couldn't stop replaying the memory of being in front of that mirror.

He knew who he was… who he really was.

Standing in that mirror, in that reflection was none other than Isabelle Strauss.

Chapter End Notes

There will be one more prompt for this one and that will wrap it up.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Hamish meets with Gaston Baker to find out what he knows about the Strauss murder and trial; the real killer is revealed; and a fast forward to the future. (Rated T for violence and character death)

Chapter Notes

This is going to be a quick one with a lot happening, but I wanted to wrap this one up. Hope you enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Dead Again

He had spent the better part of that evening buried deeply in his cups.

And a couple good bottles of scotch.

No matter what… Hamish couldn't forget what he had seen. In fact, he was avoiding any mirror or anything that could reflect back his image. He was afraid he would see Isabelle Strauss standing there and not Hamish Gold.

Even worse.

Seeing Isabelle Strauss with scissors lodged in her throat.

Unconsciously, his hand rubbed against the tender flesh as he tried to imagine what it was like for her (for him) when she realized she was dead. And if he was the murdered wife… then Belle was Rupert, the alleged murderer.

Lacey! His head screamed, reminding him that she was no longer Belle.

But even now, he could not wrap his mind around Belle being a killer. Not even a half-crazed jealous husband. It didn't make any sense.

Swallowing another mouthful until the bottle was empty, Hamish tossed it over his shoulder. It wasn't long before he put his head down on the couch that he was lost to the world.

xxXXxx

The next morning he woke up with a rampaging hangover, but Hamish managed to put himself together to get ready for his appointment with Gaston Baker, former reporter and alleged adulterer with Isabelle Strauss.

Just the idea alone had him running to the nearest wastebasket.
But Hamish had to remember who *he* was and that Isabelle Strauss was not going to be present in this interview.

*Well, in a way she is, he thought wryly. But not in that way.*

Slipping on a pair of sunglasses, Hamish got into his car and drove out of Storybrooke towards Boston where Mr. Baker was residing in one of those assisted care living facilities. It was pretty fancy looking and awfully bright white when he pulled into the drive. Obviously, Mr. Baker did very well in the journalism gig even though he had stopped writing after the court decided Rupert Strauss was guilty and sent to the electric chair.

However, in his mind's eye he saw Belle being led to the chair and the bile began to rise.

Thankfully, Hamish swallowed it back as he approached the reception desk.

It took a couple of minutes but a nurse arrived to escort Hamish to Mr. Baker's room. As they walked, the nurse who Hamish decided to christen as Nurse Buzzkill explained the rules of the house.

"No getting the patient excited, no opening the window unless a nurse is called to be present, no loud noises, no alcohol, and certainly no smoking."

"How about sex? Is that against the rules too?" Hamish asked, jokingly. Nurse Buzzkill glared at him, not finding his humor at all humorous, and Hamish had to look away lest she should burn a hole between his eyes.

"Here's Mr. Baker," she announced finally. She gave Hamish one more garish look before she left him on his own.

Feeling suddenly nervous, Hamish rubbed his hands against his pants before mustering the courage to knock on the door. He heard a raspy voice replying to come in and Hamish took another deep breath before pushing inside.

He was instantly smacked with the strong scent of disinfectant and bleach and something underlying that it was trying to mask...

Old age and misery.

For a swanky joint it was depressing to be in one of the rooms.

Gaston Baker was sitting in a wheelchair that was facing a window, which had a view of a manmade lake.

*This place may be expensive but it has all the cheap fixings,* Hamish thought. "Uh, Mr. Baker? We had an appointment."

The snow white head turned and Hamish's eyebrows rose over how much Baker had aged. Of course the man was pushing his eighties but he looked a lot older than he appeared. He also looked as if he hadn't had a decent night's rest these last fifty years or so.

"I know we do. I might be old but I'm not senile," Gaston snapped. "Sit down Mr. Gold."

Hamish did. "Thank you again," he said. "Did my colleague tell you the reason for my request?"

Gaston nodded warily. "Isabelle and Rupert Strauss. That's all anyone wants to know."
"Well, there is some new information that has been brought up regarding the murder and trial. I do know that Rupert Strauss wanted to see you before he was executed. Why was that?"

Gaston shrugged as he looked away. "Beats the hell out of me. I went because I wanted to know that Isabelle would be at peace with her murderer gone. What is this new information anyways?"

"There is some fact-checking that needs to be done and it is mostly alleged information, but I wanted to hear from your perspective. Did Isabelle and Rupert have a happy marriage?"

"In all appearances… yes." Then a strange expression passed over Gaston's face before he corrected himself. "Actually, they were happy. Very much in love."

"But the papers… They said Rupert had a temper on him."

Gaston nodded. "Indeed he did but not with Isabelle. To be honest, you should never trust what the papers say. A lot of that crap was to stir up the pot. Make the story interesting."

"So what happened?"

"I am older and I know I won't have that many years left so I'm going to tell it to you straight. Everyone speculated that Isabelle and I were having an affair, which sparked Rupert's jealousy and led to her murder. The truth is… the feelings were one-sided. Mainly me. Isabelle never had any romantic inclination towards me. To her I was a friend. Not a very good one, I'm afraid. I tried to talk her out of marrying Rupert, and when that didn't work, I tried to talk her into getting a divorce. I even told her the truth about where Rupert's fortune came from."

"His first wife…" Hamish murmured, a distant memory coming forward.

"Milah Gold died while crossing those mountains despite her heart condition," Gaston went on. "I wanted Isabelle to think that Rupert could have killed Milah and hoped those doubts would lead her into leaving him. It didn't. So when I couldn't persuade her… I thought the only way would be Rupert himself."

From there, Gaston revealed how he would insert himself into situations where he was always at Isabelle's side. During one party (the night where he and Strauss did end up fighting), Gaston had pulled Isabelle off to the side to plead with her about leaving her husband. He even got to his knee, taking her hand to beseech her. Then Gaston saw the anklet and ran his fingertips over the jewels.

Rupert had seen what looked to be an intimate gesture and immediately confronted Baker about it. This led to accusation after accusation and both men were throwing punches at each other. Isabelle tried to break them apart, begging them to stop, but neither man would be satisfied until the other was beaten to a bloody pulp.

Eventually, some of the other guests broke them up and Isabelle and Rupert left. That was the last time Gaston saw Isabelle alive.

"I spoke to her on the phone that night," Gaston continued. "The night of her murder. It had been storming and she called me to tell me she no longer wanted our friendship to go on. I tried to reason with her but she hung up and that was the last of it. I didn't know until the next morning that she was dead."

"Do you believe Rupert was capable of it?"

"Yes, no. Who knows? He never confessed to it nor did he speak on his defense. That morning of his execution I went hoping to get a confession out of him. Instead he leaned over and kissed my
cheek. Afterwards, I stopped writing altogether."

Hamish was shocked to say the least. "He—he kissed you?!!"

Gaston sighed. "Strange, I know. But he seemed content, happy. As if he was going to see her again. I know it's not the type of ending you were looking for, but that's all I can say."

"I recall that Rupert Strauss said his house was broken into and the thief must have killed Isabelle."

"Oh yes… the breaking and entering story. Rupert told that to the police soon after he discovered Isabelle's body. The only thing missing was her anklet—the one encrusted with diamonds and rubies. It was never found but people assumed Strauss hid it somewhere to cover up his tracks. Of course he never mentioned the anklet again or brought up the breaking and entering. It was why people assumed he had to have killed her."

"What do you believe?"

"I thought the bastard was guilty. I wanted him to be guilty. But… Isabelle was the kind of woman that didn't back down from anyone. She would never allow a man or anyone to control her. She was independent and bold and stubborn. If Rupert was the extreme jealous sort and was abusing her, then Isabelle would have kicked him to the curb. In fact, *she* would have been in the news for murdering him."

"I have to agree with you on that one," Hamish told him with a knowing smirk.

"But people can snap. Those we don't believe are capable of violence could potentially become lethal. Then again, Rupert was devoted to his wife. I suppose if anyone knew—I mean *really* knew—about the nature of their marriage it would be the housekeeper."

"That's right… What's her name?" Hamish frowned.

"Zelena Hart. That one… what a pistol. Fiercely loyal to Rupert until the murder. Helped him and his first wife flee Germany when things got heated. I guess loyalty has it limits."

"I guess. Where can I find this Zelena Hart?" Hamish asked.

"She's in Storybrooke. The last I heard about her was that she opened some kind of antique store. Flying Something."

Hamish's head whipped up so fast, dots appeared in front of his eyes. "The Flying Monkey?!"

Gaston snapped his withered fingers. "That's the name. Between you and me, I had a feeling that she was in love with Rupert. I think when it became clear that he didn't return her affections… she sold him out to the police."

Hamish's mind was working overload as he knew Diane Madsen was in charge of the Flying Monkey, but was it possible that Diane and Zelena were one and the same? And if she was…

"Oh no…” Hamish whispered in horror. He had to find Belle. *Now.*

xxxxxxx

It was funny how nervous she was, even though it was kind of ridiculous to be nervous over an apartment. Belle felt like she was intruding on a stranger, not returning to her home. She couldn't even bring herself to call it such.
Thankfully, Jefferson and Diane were there to help. Belle insisted on calling the older woman to come with her. Diane had such a calming influence, and without her, Belle knew she would be lost still.

"Lady's honor," Jefferson chirped as he held up the key to her apartment.

Belle looked at it oddly, but took it, noting that it did not spark any recognition. Shrugging to herself, Belle turned the key in the lock and pushed it open.

At once she was bombarded with various images and forms of her "artwork."

Covering her mouth with her hands, Belle could not take her eyes off every artistic style used to create the object of her nightmares.

Paper mache, pottery, oils, pastels, acrylic, chalk, miniatures, and statues.

Scissors.

Scissors done realistically, abstractly, pop art, surrealism, cubism, the list went on.

They covered every inch of the walls, floors, tables, everywhere!

As Belle walked around, she happened to notice a rather large sculpture of a pair of scissors spread opened as they were propped up on a panel of glass. She gingerly touched the cool blade, jumping away as it was made of actual metal.

Belle's chest suddenly tightened and her hand instinctively went to her throat. She wanted to flee but Jefferson was behind her and Diane was watching her closely. She felt she had no choice but to stay in this bizarre hell-hold.

Jefferson let out a shrill whistle. "You sure have a scissor fetish."

Belle laughed weakly. "I guess."

"Well, here's your stuff," Jefferson said, putting down her suitcase. "Do you need anything else?"

"No."

"I'll see you around then. Goodbye Lacey!"

Jefferson saluted her before he left, leaving Belle with Diane. The older woman continued to watch her keenly, but she sensed what was disturbing her.

"It reminds you of Isabelle."

Belle nodded. "I know it happened a long time ago but I can't help this uneasy feeling in the pit of my stomach. Almost like I could be in trouble."

"I understand dearie."

Belle frowned, wondering why that word sounded familiar. Then Diane reached into her purse and pulled out a small handgun. Belle did a side step away, yet Diane insisted she take the gun.

"For your protection."

Eventually Belle did. She cradled it in the palm of her hands. She didn't know what to do with it
other than setting it on a table where it couldn't do any harm. Diane was already gone and Belle was finally alone. Alone with the scissors.

Sleeping tonight was going to be difficult.

Hours later Belle was stepping out of the shower to an alarming knocking on the door. Hastily she put on her robe, tying it tightly, and as she was rushing to the door she paused where she put the gun. The knocking continued followed with her name being shouted.

Hamish.

Belle slipped the gun in her pocket and twisted the dead-bolt to unlock. She opened the door a few inches before Hamish burst through, almost knocking her backwards. Startled, Belle immediately put her hand in her robe pocket, feeling the ice cold gun, as Hamish began to furiously pace the floor, his hands moving about with excitement.

"I'm really sorry to disturb you but this can't wait. I spoke to Gaston Baker and I have reason to believe that Rupert didn't murder Isabelle. He wouldn't. They loved each other and on the night of the murder… Rupert was working on his new opera in a different part of the house. He was nowhere near Isabelle when the murder took place. Isabelle was in their bedroom when she called Baker to tell him their friendship was over and to leave her alone. She was thinking about what to do with another concern of hers—one that involved the housekeeper. Isabelle suspected Zelena Hart was in love with her husband and was trying to drive a wedge between them. Rupert had been acting strangely and he was constantly asking her about Baker, which Isabelle had told him that Baker was a friend from school. They weren't close and she would speak to him on occasion, but it was nothing more than polite conversation. Yet Rupert was acting like there was something more to it. Isabelle had reason to believe that Zelena was listening in on her conversations, but Rupert kept refusing to fire her. She knew Zelena helped him escape Germany, but Isabelle felt there was something more to her loyalty than Rupert would admit.

"Her husband was never unfaithful. Zelena was beautiful but Rupert never noticed her when she entered the room unless she directly addressed him. Rupert always had eyes on Isabelle. In fact, Isabelle was going to talk to Zelena when Miss Hart came into the room in a rage. She wanted Isabelle to leave Rupert and when Isabelle refused… Zelena came up behind and as Isabelle turned to demand her to leave… the scissors were in her hand. Zelena killed Isabelle."

"Wait… How do you know this?" Belle's mind was in a tailspin. First, Hamish was ignoring her and now he was here spouting about the murder as if he had a first-hand account of it. Of course, it was impossible since it happened almost a half century ago, but Hamish really seemed to genuinely believe what he was saying.

Suddenly, he stopped pacing and grasped her shoulders.

"I know this because I'm Isabelle," he stated as bafflement and shock covered her face. "Don't you see? Don't you get it? I was never Rupert. You're Rupert. And Zelena… she's Diane Madsen."

"What…? Hamish, you're not making sense."

"Belle," he said firmly. "Zelena murdered Isabelle out of jealousy. She stole the anklet and blamed Rupert for everything. She changed her name for what reasons I don't know. And I don't know why she sought you out other than she must have thought you were Isabelle. All I know that is no good will come from being around her. She is dangerous."

"But she helped me," Belle said, confused over the whole thing. "Why would she help me only to
"Look, I don't have all the answers. All I know is that Diane is bad news and you're not safe. At least not alone you're not. Come with me back to my apartment. We'll think of something to stop her."

"Hamish..." Belle was uncertain about everything he had said. It was so surreal and crazy but yet... it made sense. It would explain her memories of the past. Though, just to be certain, she had to ask. "You're absolutely positive that Rupert didn't kill Isabelle?"

"Yes!" Hamish exclaimed. "They loved each other just like I love—"

"Well done Mr. Gold!"

They turned to find Diane—no, Zelena—in the doorway with a wild manic look in her eyes. Gone was the comforting and matriarchal figure. Instead a horror was in her place.

Belle took out the gun and pulled the trigger. To her astonishment nothing happened.

Zelena laughed. "Did you really think I would give you a gun with actual bullets?" She had her gun out and motioned the couple to move. "I never thought I would come face-to-face with you again, but it seems fate has led all three of us together."

"So it's true," Belle said. "Everything Hamish said."

Zelena nodded. "Yes. Rupert was a fool not to see Isabelle wasn't worthy. No matter how many times I insinuated she was cheating on him... he never did anything. At least he didn't leave her like I wanted him to do. They fought about it. But then one look was all it took for all to be well and I was forced to realize that nothing was going to be done unless I did something about it."

She had Hamish and Belle backed up against the wall with a queer smile stretching on her lips. "This is going to be very simple and tragic too. First, Belle shot poor old Mr. Hamish Gold." Zelena aimed the gun at Hamish and fired.

Belle screamed as Hamish's eyes rolled to the back of his head as he fell to the floor. Zelena was soon in her face as the older woman sneered, "It is a pity about your lost memories and how you didn't get over your fears. You thought Hamish was going to murder you like Rupert did to Isabelle. Especially since he had these in his hands." Zelena reached into her suit jacket and the gold-plated scissors were being waved in front of Belle's eyes. "You shot him just as he stabbed you with these. Sadly, no one survived."

As Zelena raised the scissors, she didn't notice Hamish twitching until Belle closed her fist and jammed it as hard as she could into Zelena's nose. The woman dropped both weapons as she shrieked in agony. Belle scooped up the gun as Hamish rose on shaky legs and tackled Zelena.

Belle tried to train the gun on Zelena but Hamish was in the way. She glanced down to see the scissors and had an idea.

Running to the big replica she created, Belle steadied it as Hamish and Zelena got to their feet. The former saw what Belle was doing and shoved Zelena as hard as he could as she fell back and impaled herself.

Another object fell from Zelena's hand and Belle could not believe it was the anklet that had been missing this whole time. She seized it and ran over to Hamish to make sure he was all right.

"I'm fine. The bullet... just grazed me. Not even close range and old age mix well," he joked as
Belle sighed in relief.
"We need to call the police," she told him.
"I am the police but I think you're right."

She rolled her eyes. "If you're Isabelle, then I should return this." She held up the anklet but Hamish shook his head.

"No. These are for you," he said. "The rubies will clash with my suit."

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It was hard to believe that a year had passed that the incident with Diane Madsen, formerly Zelena Hart, occurred. With Hamish and Belle's unusual story, no one seemed to believe there was truth to it until the Flying Monkey was searched and everything about Isabelle and Rupert Strauss was found in her home. Even after their deaths long ago… Zelena still obsessed over them. Apparently, she anticipated that the lovers would return one day and she was waiting for Hamish and Belle. The resemblances were naturally uncanny and the news spread in Storybrooke.

As for the rest of the missing gaps to the story, they were filled thanks to the Isabelle and Rupert's memories courtesy of Hamish and Belle. They went under hypnosis again (this time by an actual expert Dr. Hopper) and revealed what had not been told.

Isabelle confronted Zelena in the bedroom. She demanded to know if Zelena loved her husband and if she had something to do with Milah's death. The accusation slipped out but there was no denying the look on the housekeeper's face that confirmed she did. When Isabelle started to run away to get Rupert, Zelena stabbed her with the scissors to keep her from calling for help. As Isabelle lay dying, she felt Zelena take the anklet, then darkness.

Rupert was done working on his opera and headed to his room when he found his beloved. Running to her, Rupert held her as he cried for help, but only Zelena came. She told him about the burglar and how she tried to stop him, but it was too late. Isabelle was dead. She told Rupert she was sorry for this terrible event but they had each other at least to get through this pain. At that moment, it clicked with him that what his wife had said was true. Zelena did love him. Caught up in his grief, Rupert told Zelena that Isabelle was the love of his life and without her he would rather die. It was no surprise that with his rejection that she turned him into the police. Rupert didn't care. He was going to be reunited with his Isabelle and that was all that mattered.

Happy that Rupert Strauss was vindicated, Belle wasn't sure what to expect. Neither did Hamish. The detective didn't think she would want to see him anymore, but Belle told him to shut up and kiss her.

Now, her name was officially changed (she couldn't be Lacey. That life was gone) and they were getting married. She fell in love twice and in this lifetime… she and Hamish were going to have their happily ever after.

Chapter End Notes
Next… we will wrap up the Ghost Whisperer prompt.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: Medium Belle French is working with Mr. Gold's ghost to solve his unfinished business with his son. What she uncovers is a horror story and the unexpected happens. (Rated M for violence, child abuse, implied rape, and character death)

Chapter Notes

Thank you for everyone sticking with me. Finishing this is taking longer than I anticipated but the Muse calls when it calls. I am drawing a little bit of inspiration from the real-life case of the Oakland County Child Killer aka The Babysitter Killer, but a lot of it is made up.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Ghost Whisperer Inspired

Belle had to admit that she and Gold made a pretty good team. Well, as good of a team as one can be when one of them was dead. Not to mention they had gotten off on the wrong foot. Belle was investigating the haunting of Storybrooke's library in the hopes she could bring peace to the restless spirit of Mr. Gold. Instead, she met her match in the cankerous ghost and while he made it perfectly clear he didn't want her services, she was not going to give up.

She felt his pain and knew something was keeping him from crossing over, and she was determined to find out. What Belle had not expected, though, was the extent of Mr. Gold's unfinished business. As it turned out, Mr. Gold had a son—Bailey—and he was taken when he was six by the notorious child kidnapper Pied Piper and was never seen or heard from again. By all accounts, Bailey was presumably dead but a body was never found.

The same went with the rest of the Pied Piper's victims: all young boys, age five to eight-years-old, and no bodies were ever recovered.

This case was familiar to Belle. In fact, she doubted if there was a single person who hadn't heard about the Pied Piper. The disappearances took place in the late seventies and the early eighties, around the same time as another nationwide case that took place in Michigan. The only difference was that the bodies were found, but the Pied Piper hid his victims so well that the police had no leads, nothing to help the families find closure. It remained unsolved and was still opened as far as Belle knew.

Not all of the victims' names were known to the public. Some families chose to keep it private for the sake of their sanities, and it was obvious Mr. Gold had been one of them. The moment she discovered the headline and article in the library, Belle's heart immediately leapt to her throat. She could only imagine the depth of that anguish and sorrow of losing a child in such a manner… never to find the truth, always wondering and always imagining the most horrific things. It made perfect sense what Mr. Gold was doing and why he would frighten away guests from this spot.
"What the Hell are you doing?!!"

She should have known he wouldn't take her meddling kindly, and in that heat of the moment, she could see how truly menacing he had been in life too. But she stood her ground and told him with a steely grit in her voice:

"We're going to find Bailey and bring him home."

That caught Gold off-guard. Usually after only one encounter from him, no one would be stupid or brave enough to return. The fact she came back proved she was incredibly stupid or idiotically brave—which one, he could not decide; however, this medium had guts and she wasn't going to back down. He begrudgingly had to admire her gumption but he had to know what did she think she could find when he had spent close to thirty years trying to find his son?

Belle smirked, her blue eyes glittering at the prospect of a challenge. "For starters, I wasn't here but I am good at uncovering the truth."

Thus started the unlikely partnership and Gold had to admit she was quick and sharp as a whip. It didn't take her long to update herself on all the case file notes he had and she also organized all the information too, which Gold's order was a haphazard mess. At least with Belle's record keeping it was easy to see and trace the events for each victim.

Bae was not the only child to go missing after going to get ice cream. There was at least two other reports where the parents said they gave their sons money, but they didn't watch them, assuming the transaction would only be a couple minutes. Yet the Pied Piper's cunning did not stop with ice cream as a lure. There were a dozen or so reports of strange music late at night that sounded like a flute playing. Not that anyone witnessed the mysterious flute player but usually a child would wind up missing. Then there were reports of someone dressing up as a clown and offering balloon animals as well.

The clown lead did not prove to be a strong one as the appearance of one brought too much attention to the individual. No, the Pied Piper preferred tricks. Belle found one story where the parents of a five-year-old boy, Michael Darling, had spoken about his new friend Peter before he vanished. They had assumed Peter was an imaginary friend of their son's, never suspecting that he was real.

There were at least ten confirmed reports where the Pied Piper was the suspect, but Belle found other possible ties that could be linked, which would bring the total number to twenty-five. Of course, this spanned about fifteen years and several different states before the kidnappings suddenly stopped.

"Police had a couple suspects that they were investigating, but there wasn't enough evidence to say for certain who was responsible. Even with the name of 'Peter' as a possible lead did not help much. But I did find something interesting," Belle told Gold one evening.

She showed him a mugshot of a known pedophile that was arrested for child pornography in 1955. His name was Malcolm Spinner and Belle also found out that he had a fetish about being young. At the time of his arrest, Malcolm told police that it was okay for him to possess such photos as he was a child himself. A psychiatrist did evaluate him but did not see him as a threat to himself or the public. He had no interest in touching children. He wanted to be like them, envying their youthfulness.

During the time of the Pied Piper, Malcolm Spinner was a name that popped up, but nothing was found to link him to the kidnappings.

"Why do you think he might be the one?" Gold asked her. "The police had no proof."
"No but he, too, also disappeared right around the time the kidnappings stopped. Sometimes a coincidence like that shouldn't be ignored."

Belle found an address for Malcolm Spinner and was going to go there but Gold insisted he go with her too. At this, she raised her brow and asked him how was he going to do that? Gold's spirit was attached to the library and there was no way he could walk out the door.

It was Gold's turn to smirk. "For your information, I'm tethered to an object that I hid in this library before I died."

"But you died from a heart attack. How could you have…?"

"I was diagnosed with heart disease so there was always the possibility that cardiac arrest would take me. I was advised to stop my search for Bae as it was putting too much stress on my heart, but I ignored the doctor and continued. I was here when I began to feel an attack coming so I did some quick thinking." Gold bent down and pointed to the leg of one of the tables.

Belle kneeled beside him as he instructed her to lift the leg and unscrewed the bottom part where she hadn't noticed until then that it was partially loose. Inside was a tiny ripped handkerchief folded over. Belle pulled it out and opened the cloth to find a ring. It was a silver setting with a round and smooth blue gem for a head.

"I was able to hide it before I was found. By then it was too late and I woke up at this very spot as they were taking my body away," he explained.

"You died here?" Belle repeated. That was a factoid Mrs. Lucas failed to mention. Gold chuckled at the expression on her face.

"She never forgave me for dying in her library. It kept people from visiting lest they should also die from exposure to books."

Belle snorted as she rolled her eyes. "I guess you can come with me after all." She slipped the ring on her ring finger and it was his turn to have a strange look overcome his features.

She realized what she had done, and shrugged nonchalantly. "It's the only finger that would fit it."

Gold nodded but didn't say a word. The truth was… during this time working together they developed a friendship and if he was being perfectly honest with himself he was becoming fond of her. *Really* fond in fact. But Gold knew she would never look at him in such a way. Not because he was a ghost but even in life Belle would not have given him the time of day. He wouldn't blame her. He became unbearable after losing Bae. Perhaps it was a blessing their paths hadn't crossed when he was alive. And yet, Gold felt himself longing to be able to touch her. Just once… Even if it was a simple caress. That comfort would suffice.

Likewise, Belle was also struggling with her feelings too. She knew getting close to him would not be in her best interest. She was here to do one thing, and one thing alone: help Gold solve his unfinished business so he could pass over. But she found herself enjoying his company and wished she had the chance to know him when he was alive. Then again, he was such a miser and would be undoubtedly infuriating. Nevertheless, Belle saw the good in him and how devoted of a father he was. After learning more about Bailey Gold, she found herself falling in love with the little boy and the hope and joy he brought to his father.

And it made her want to find him desperately as much as Gold wanted.

With Gold's ring in her possession, Belle was able to transport Gold as she drove across state lines to
Malcolm Spinner's home in New Hampshire. The house was dilapidated and surrounded by open fields. It was truly a place in the middle of nowhere and it gave Belle the creeps just by looking at it.

Mustered her courage, she faced Gold and took a deep breath. "Ready?"

He nodded once. "As I will ever be."

As they approached the building, Belle was instantly swarmed with emotions so intense that she physically had a reaction as she quickly turned and vomited into the weeds and tall grass. She closed her eyes to gain some control but she was already getting flashes of the agony that was inflicted.

The smell of terror was high as a child was being dragged across the field, tears falling down as he tried to grip the railing to keep from being pulled into the house. A sharp, ripping pain shot through his arm as splinters from the wood jammed into his palm. Then darkness as another pain, this one tearing him in half, overcame him as he cried out for help.

There had been a tree and he was suspended in the air, floating practically flying, and he was being pushed around to pretend he was soaring. He begged for mercy, for it to stop, but he was forced to stay outside like that. When he refused to play, the mean man would loop a lasso around his neck and choked him until he agreed. But it was the rain that made it worse. He would be stripped in order for the rain to clean him and he was cold… So cold…

She saw their faces. They were glimpses but she saw each boy being brought to this Hell and the fear in their eyes when they realized they had nowhere to escape, no one to turn too to help them. Worse of all, she saw Bailey.

Wiping her mouth, Belle clenched her fist as she rose on shaky legs. She wasn't going to tell Gold what she saw done to his son. She would spare him that horror.

"It is him," Gold murmured after watching her. "He was responsible."

"Yes," Belle answered. "Let's go inside."

The torment didn't end as they entered the house. Belle felt the presences at once as tears gathered. They were all here. Every single boy that had gone missing. They were trapped and terrified and she had to bite her tongue from losing her composure.

"I don't see him. Belle… Why can't I see him?" Gold demanded, the urgency in his tone betrayed his own fear that Bailey may not be here after all. That maybe it was someone else who had his son.

"They're hiding," she whispered. "Come on."

Relying on her senses, Belle followed the trail to the basement. Gold was not far behind her and when she flinched he held out his arms to catch her, but Belle kept her balance though a hardened look crossed her countenance. She seized a shovel that was propped against the wall and began digging like a madwoman.

"Shh… Do not cry. Don't you see? We will be young forever!"

"It won't hurt. Just a little sting and it will be all better."

"My children… My own Lost Boys. We will have so much fun together."

Gold watched her as a woman possessed and perhaps she was… Her fury aided her as she began to
dig up the remains, only stopping long enough to change her direction as she resumed her gruesome task. Then Gold saw the children appearing one by one as they all watched Belle find them. Among the throng, Gold looked for one familiar face.

Belle knew she was reaching the end. She was close to finding the last boy and she dropped the shovel, falling to her hands and knees as she began to push the dirt aside, scrambling to see his face. When she was brushing the earth away from his skull, Belle froze as a new vision gripped her.

_Bailey was the last boy; his sobs had stopped when he realized this was it. There was no use in fighting as Malcolm knelt in front of him. One hand covered in blood from holding a knife, the other held a gun. He was making them choose, and in return, he promised it would be painless._

"Are you excited?" Malcolm asked. "Soon we will get to play with each other forever. No rules, no adults. And no growing up. It will be Paradise. Now, Bailey, what would you like?"

_He made up his mind. As his life was slowly seeping out, Bailey could only watch above as Malcolm threw dirt over him, covering all of them up, as he talked to himself about wanting to keep his friends warm. Then as his vision began to blur and become hazy, Bailey saw the glint of the gun as Malcolm lifted it to his temple…_

Belle barely felt a thing as the shovel hit the back of her head, a deafening crack resounded in the empty basement.

A small smile played on her lips as the last thing she saw was young Bailey Gold running into the arms of his father.

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There he was! Bae! His sweet, precious Bae!

Gold practically cried out with happiness as Bae ran to him, and he felt his son as if he was solid and real, and in that moment, he was alive to him. He held Bae tight, never letting go, as his son also squeezed him back in return, weeping loudly, "Papa! Papa! Papa! You came! You came!"

He didn't know until afterwards, after hearing a horrible crack that Gold looked and what he saw curdled his nonexistent blood…

Malcolm stood over Belle with the shovel in his hands, anger lit in his eyes, as he began cursing her for ruining everything. He never noticed Gold, which was just fine, as the father tackled him, pummeling his fists at any spot he could reach. Gold howled and screamed for all the lives this monster took. Killing him would bring a small dose of pleasure but since he was already dead… Gold would settle for choking him for all eternity.

He took his son, took all these innocent boys, and Belle.

He would never see her again. Never get the chance to thank her, to tell her how he really felt…

Then, he felt something pressing on his shoulder. It was gentle, and soft, and warm.

"It's over now," Belle whispered, touching his back and nodding to Malcolm who was beginning to fade. Of course, the last part of him that disappeared was his eyes, which were widening in panic and fear, the only indicator where he was now.

"But… he… How?" Gold sputtered.
She lifted her shoulders. "I don't know. I'm just as astonished as you are."

"Papa, who is she?" Bailey asked shyly. Then, he added, "Are you an angel?"

The other children were murmuring at once, running up to Belle and taking turns in hugging her. She was too stunned to speak but Gold grinned as he ruffled his son's hair.

"Yes she is Bae. Yes she is."

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Fortunately, they were discovered. Or, Belle's body was discovered. The police tracked the GPS on her phone, and to their surprise, they found not only one body but all the missing children too.

DNA tests would confirm each boy's identity and their families were notified so they could give their loved ones the proper burials they deserved.

Indeed, each ghostly child began to cross over as soon as they were reunited with their families. All that was left was Belle, Mr. Gold, and Bailey.

"You have no more unfinished business," Belle told him. "I promised you we would bring your son home."

"That you did," Gold conceded. "Belle, you risked your life for us. I don't know what to say."

Looking over his shoulder, she saw something that brought a huge smile on her face. "Maybe you can buy me a drink at whatever bar they serve up there."

"What?"

He turned around to see a tunnel of light and his lips curved. "You got yourself a deal."

Chapter End Notes

Okay, I figured this is the best conclusion for these prompts. I hope you all liked it, and I know it had to have been tough to read… It was hard to write! But it was a fitting way to give Gold his happy ending in finding his son, and for him and Belle to be together. Spoiler alert… they became a family in Heaven. You know the drill! Please leave a review.
Chapter Summary

Grace5231973 prompted: Belle confronts Grayson. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

I was originally going to include part of this request in the last installment of Indecent Proposal, but it seemed to me that this needed its own chapter. I can't begin to tell you how vindicating this was for me to write. After all, if someone I loved was willing to make a deal to pass me off to another… I would be so pissed. Then again, if it's someone like Robert Carlyle, I might have to forgive them just a little bit.

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

Indecent Proposal

It was almost a week since the almost disastrous business dinner with potential partner David Nolan that Grayson could have ruined. Belle had to thank Providence and whatever other Powers That Be for allowing David to want to align himself with Gold despite Grayson almost revealing that Belle and Gold were together under false pretenses.

She still could not believe how Grayson showed up and wanted to end the deal with Gold. For so long she had wanted that outcome to come to life. But the days became weeks and then months and Belle pretty much gave up on the idea that Grayson would ever break the contract. Then out of the blue—during the critical part of the contract—Grayson interrupted the business dinner, drunk and looking absolutely terrible, demanding Gold to end the deal and let Belle come home with him.

In the heat of the moment, Belle did not find Grayson's behavior "heroic" rather it was irksome. She couldn't stand his gall that after months of nothing from him, and then this! Furthermore, she knew they were getting super close in closing the deal with David.

No, she told herself. Gold was getting close. This was HIS deal, not mine.

And yet, Belle felt she was part of the business now. After all, she was Gold's "wife" and after spending all this time with Thomas, Belle was committed to making this deal with David Nolan a reality. She surprised herself over how easy it was to slip into the role as a supportive and doting spouse and she truly wanted this to work out for him. When Grayson stormed into the restaurant, she feared Thomas would lose his chances, especially since his comments about how he "wanted out" and he thought Gold "locked her up" and "screw the money." It all sounded perverse and wrong and if David got the wrong impression about Thomas…

Well, it wasn't far from the truth. Apart from the locking up part, that is.

But right then and there Belle took offense at Grayson. She didn't want him there; she wanted him gone.
Fortunately, it all worked out well in the end.

However, it served as a reminder how close things could have went if David hadn't dismissed Grayson's words as a raving drunk and spurned ex-lover. Indeed the damage control Belle did was to elaborate that part of her drifting away from Grayson was his drinking habits. For her, it wasn't a total lie. Grayson did enjoy his beers a little too much, but he was never abrasive or anything. He loved hanging out at *The Rabbit Hole* since they moved here, and while it wasn't her favorite spot for a date, she tolerated it on his behalf.

Now she was seeing her fiancé in a new light.

Even later that night when she and Thomas spoke about what happened with Grayson…Belle knew something was wrong. It took her longer to admit the facts, but since her relationship with Thomas was changing, she was starting to see the obvious when it came to Grayson.

No one—*no one*—in their right minds who loves someone so much that they want to spend the rest of their lives together would *sell* that someone regardless how sweet the deal sounded.

Even though *The Book Escape* was in danger, Belle was starting to open her eyes and realize that nothing was worth it when saving a store required going along with a contract that involved *her* as a condition. Of course, she never wanted to go along with it in the first place, but she was beginning to see that Grayson's insistence was a red flag.

And…

She was falling out of love with him.

The truth was a bolt of lightning and she was surprisingly not heartbroken over the revelation.

If anything, she was impassive.

Maybe it was a good thing that the bookshop was losing business. If she married Grayson…

Belle shuddered to think how *that* would have turned out. Then again, would she have known? Would she realize that Grayson wasn't the man she wanted to spend her life with?

Was it Thomas Gold?

One thing for certain, Belle knew she didn't love Grayson anymore. At least this indecent proposal had something positive that came to light. Now, it was time for Belle to do something she should have done when Grayson said they should take Gold's deal.

xxXXxx

Finding Grayson wasn't difficult.

He was sitting inside of *Granny's* nursing a cup of coffee with a half-eaten plate of scrambled eggs, bacon, and toast. There was some color back in his complexion, and he didn't look as exhausted or stressed like he did the previous week.

Belle stood at the door, her hand holding the strap of her purse over her shoulder. She bit her lip and took a deep breath. This wasn't going to be easy, but was anything ever easy?

She knew everyone in the diner had their eyes on her as she walked to Grayson's table. But they didn't matter and she didn't care what they were thinking or what they were whispering.
"Hi," she said softly.

"Hi." Grayson was surprised to see her but there was also some happiness and relief on his face. "You're here Belle. You left him."

"Can I sit?" she asked without skipping a beat. Grayson nodded and she slid into the booth across him. Before she could open her mouth, Grayson was already reaching and catching her hand as he kissed her knuckles.

"You have no idea how relieved I am to see you," he said. "These past months… I was so sick and worried about you and how he was treating you and I can't begin to tell you how many times I almost broke our contract. When I saw him with you…. His hand on your back, holding your hand… It made me sick to my stomach, Belle. That lecherous, twisted, old pervert. I know he had to be getting a hard-on for having someone like you at his side. And it's my fault. It's all my fault and I hope you forgive me, Belle, I really hope you do. I will make it better, I promise. Seeing you here gives me the hope that we can make it work. If we have to close the store… so be it. We will start anew. We'll move if we have to. Anything! As long as we're together—what?"

Belle's instinct was to draw her hand back, but as soon as she saw the joyous look in his eyes… She couldn't and when Grayson started his impassioned speech—it was difficult for Belle to look at him as she dropped her gaze to the table. She had every reason to believe that he meant everything he said. It was everything he said that was right, and what she wanted to hear so long ago. But things had changed. She changed.

As soon as she remembered her purpose, Belle lifted her head resolutely and looked at him determination.

"Grayson," she began. "You have no idea how long I waited for you to say you regretted this. I know you meant well but the truth is… This was all wrong."

"I know that now," he interrupted. "Believe me, I regretted it the moment you walked out the door. I wanted to stop it immediately but I didn't want to disappoint you and lose the chance of losing our store…"

"Disappoint me?" Belle repeated. "Grayson, I hated this idea. I was against it from the start or have you forgotten that?"

"No!"

"Well, you're acting like I wanted to do this. I told you that if we had to close the store, then I was fine with it. We were losing money. There was no point in keeping the store open if we're not making sales. We agreed to close it! It wasn't until Thomas showed up with that deal—"

"Whoa, Thomas?"

"Grayson, you have to realize that this whole thing was ridiculous from the start," she went on without acknowledging her use of Gold's Christian name. "The point is this whole situation showed me a side to you that I never knew before. I want to forgive you, I do, but I can't see how we can move forward after this. I'm sorry Grayson."

"Wait… Belle, what are you saying?"

"I'm saying Grayson that you and I… We can't do this anymore."

"You—Are you telling me you didn't leave him?"
"No. I know part of the stipulation was that you and I cannot be seen with each other, but I couldn't wait until the end. It would be leading you on and I can't do that. Unlike you… I don't like pretenses and parting ways now for us is better than later."

Grayson's nostrils flared as he panted in disbelief. "You don't want to break Gold's deal?"

"I'm already in the middle of it," she explained. "I like to keep my promises and I'm not going to start breaking it now."

"But your promise to me means nothing?"

"That's not what I mean," Belle argued. "I did promise you to be your wife. But that was because I didn't know you were willing to throw it away so easily."

"Easily?" he scoffed.

"Grayson, I don't love you anymore." There. She said it.

Hurt flashed in his eyes. "You don't love me?"

"I'm sorry," she offered again as if it could soothe the sting. Belle wasn't naïve to think it would, but she had nothing else to give him that would make it better. "I wish things could have turned out different. I do."

"Do you love… him?" he sneered.

Belle inhaled sharply. "No. I don't know. I do know that Thomas wouldn't have done what you did."

"Why would he when he came up with it himself?"

"I don't excuse what he did too either," she defended. "The truth is that he is not as bad as you think. Or what others may think. That's why I am okay with seeing this business deal until to the end."

"For him?"

"Yes."

Grayson looked to the side, his fist clenching and unclenching. "Belle…"

"This wasn't easy for me to do," she told him. "Grayson, I do care about you. We were friends first and I hope that one day we can be friends again. But it's not fair for us to pretend otherwise. Let us go our separate ways. In time you will see I am right."

"Will I?" He asked this more to himself than to her, but Grayson looked at her. "He's not…?"

Knowing what he meant, Belle shook her head. "He is good to me. Considerate, kind."

"I wouldn't have associated that with him."

"No. No one would." She smiled.

"You really want to do this?"

"Yes."

Grayson took a deep breath. "I was an ass that night, right?"
"'Fraid so. But it turned out all right. Thomas' business partner agreed to a deal."

"Ah." Grayson played with his napkin. "I suppose that is good. He got what he wanted."

Belle wasn't sure how to reply, but she conceded. "Grayson?"

"Yeah?"

She rested her hand on his and gave him a half-smile. "Do what you think it's best for the shop. You have my full support."

"Oh. Right."

"I don't regret our time together, but promise me you will find someone else."

He didn't say a word but he held her hand, promising her he will try.

"Good."

Meanwhile, across the street, Thomas Gold stood looking into the diner at Belle and her fiancé holding hands.

Chapter End Notes

Oh boy… This is interesting. Next week will be another Indecent Proposal prompt. You know what to do!
Chapter Summary

belle'sdarkangel prompted: Belle and Thomas Gold are happily married, or are they?  
(Rated K)

Chapter Notes

This is a future prompt for this verse and I wasn't sure how to fit it in until the last one gave me the opportunity. You may or may not want some tissues on hand. ;)

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Indecent Proposal

The alarm clock went off exactly at 5:15 AM or actually it was more the baby that provided the bells.

Belle yawned and stretched only for a second before she quickly slipped on her slippers and threw her robe on before hurrying to the nursery at the end of the hall. The cries grew louder as she opened the door but she already knew what was wrong.

"You need a fresh nappy, huh, Gideon?"

The cries became sniffles as her son gazed up at her as Belle reached into the crib to pull him out. Immediately, she knew a diaper change was needed at once as she carried him to the changing table. The routine she had was down-pat and within seconds she had a clean diaper on her little trooper and the dirty one disposed.

Gideon was much calmer but he was wide awake. One thing for certain, he was going to be a morning person.

It was fine since Belle was a morning person herself. Her husband… not so much. But she knew how to make his frown turn upside-down.

Belle dressed her son in an onesie and then carried him downstairs so she could start making breakfast. Thomas would be waking any minute and she wanted to get the coffee down first.

With an expertise born from several months, Belle held Gideon with one arm as she started the coffee machine and proceeded to pull out the pans needed to make eggs and sausages. She cracked the eggs into a small bowl, whisked, and poured them into the frying pan before moving onto the maple brown sugar sausages.

Breakfast was cooking and the coffee nearly finished, Belle cooed and sang softly to Gideon who was all smiles and giggles until she heard the coarse, "Good morning."

Turning around, she grinned at Thomas already dressed in his usual suit and cane. The morning gruff always made his brogue thicker and Belle got a little thrill every time she heard it.
"Morning," she greeted. Then, taking one of Gideon's tiny hands, she waved it. "Morning Daddy."

Thomas chuckled as he moved towards his family. He ruffled the soft mop of brown hair on Gideon's head before bending to kiss Belle on the lips.

"Good morning," he repeated, his eyes lighting up.

"Good morning," she echoed.

Tenderly, he moved his hand to catch and play with a strand of her hair. "Every time I see you…” he said. "I can't believe this is real. I keep thinking this is a figment of my imagination, but—"

"I know," Belle replied. "I feel the same way."

"I love you Belle."

"I love you too Thomas." Closing her eyes, Belle tilted her face for another languid kiss—

**Beep! Beep! Beep!**

Belle's eyes pop opened as the annoying screeching of her alarm clock woke her up. Flicking the switch off, she closed her eyes at the burning sting of tears.

It wasn't fair to have that same cruel dream every night, but every night Belle dreamt that she was still Thomas' wife and they had a baby boy and life was perfect and happy. But that wasn't her life now and things have ended. He got what he wanted from his contract with her. Belle was no longer required to be his wife, and as he promised, the divorce was swift and painless.

Well… not so much painless. She hadn't counted on her heart getting hurt in the process. And when she told him that she loved him…

It was best not to remember those horrible things he said.

Yes… Best not to dwell on the past. Or so Belle tried to tell herself before she went to bed every night.

Wiping away the tears, Belle took a deep breath and tossed back the covers. She may not have the baby and husband she wanted in her dreams, but she had to hope that things will get better.

At least that was what she told herself.

Chapter End Notes

I assure you… there is one more prompt left in this verse.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: A brief account of what's passed; Belle does some soul searching and learns the truth about Thomas; a happily ever after. (Rated T)

Chapter Notes

I know what a lot of you were thinking from the last one, but fear not! This will be the last prompt for Indecent Proposal. After this I will have 4 prompts for The Lost World left to post before this is over. I hope you all enjoy it!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Indecent Proposal

After speaking with Grayson, Belle felt like she was in a better place. At least she had been able to reach a mutual understanding with him and managed to get him to see her perspective on how their relationship changed. She suspected there would always be lingering feelings on Grayson's side, and she would mourn what could have been, but the truth was she had been over him for months. It took some time for her to realize that and as she was leaving the diner, Belle knew without a doubt that she was in love with Thomas Gold.

Funny. She had fallen in love with her husband who was not meant to be her "husband" but her husband nevertheless.

"I love him," she whispered, mouthing the words as a warm feeling spread all over her limbs. Her lips curved into a breathtaking smile and she knew she had to tell him. They wouldn't have to go through the divorce. They could stay married and the farce would be over. David Nolan would never know the truth and all will be well.

Belle was certain of it.

Bursting with anticipation, she jogged the rest of the way to the pawn shop where Thomas would surely be. To her surprise, the store was closed.

_Maybe he went home for lunch_, she thought. It wasn't unusual. Sometimes Thomas preferred the comforts of a home-cooked meal rather than heading to Granny's.

She went to her car and drove back to the Victorian house. Pulling alongside Thomas' car, Belle's heart was starting to race. This was going to be a new change for them and doubts started to appear. _What if he doesn't feel the same about me? Could I have misjudged everything?_

Belle didn't think so. After all, they had shared several passionate kisses and no one could kiss like that unless feelings were involved. She didn't think Gold to be that good of an actor. _No_, she firmly told herself. _He has feelings for me. I know he does. I'm going to have to be the first to tell him._
course, he could have easily told her how he felt, but she wondered if he kept it to himself out of respect. Truthfully, he probably thought she would react badly if there were real feelings, and he wasn't wrong. In the beginning, she would have said and done something regrettable.

Not anymore.

Belle approached the front door and stopped long enough to check her appearance from her reflection on the glass frame. It was now or never.

She pushed her way inside. "Thomas?" she called out. The house was eerily quiet but a quick peek into the kitchen told her he wasn't having lunch there. Perhaps he was in his study?

That was the next logical place. And it was where she found him, sitting behind the desk with the phone in his ear. She stayed in the doorway as he finished his call and until he noticed her, which didn't take long.

"Belle," he greeted, but it was his tone that had her heart skipping a beat. It was flat and his grin did not reach his eyes. Rather, they were sharp and piercing just like when he first came to her bookstore with his proposal. Like a shark circling his prey.

"Was that David?" Belle decided to ask.

"No. It was my lawyer. You kept your end of the bargain, and so I am with mine. I am filing for divorce."

His words floored her that she didn't know how to respond. But she knew it was too soon. He had a timeline for this.

"W-W-What?" she finally managed to get out. "What are you talking about?"

"Divorce. I got my deal with Mr. Nolan and I no longer require your services as my wife."

"Yeah but…" She shook her head. "It can't be. Not now. You said—"

"I am capably aware of what I said. And I changed my mind on the timeline for our divorce. Mr. Nolan will understand when I tell him that I found out my loving and charming wife was cheating on me. I could not abide such immoral values and I'm sure he wouldn't either."

"Cheating?" she repeated. "That wasn't… Wait, what the Hell do you mean?"

"What I mean dearie is that I saw you with your former fiancé and might I add… you looked rather cozy together."

Like that, her heart dropped to her stomach. He saw her with Grayson?

"It wasn't what you think. I know I wasn't supposed to see him but I had to in order to clear some things up. Thomas…"

"It's Mr. Gold," he replied coldly. "We can stop the niceties now. Your skills were superb as were mine and we convinced the one person that we needed convincing and that's all. Grant you, you did break that one stipulation of our contract, but I am not mad. He is your fiancé and I can respect your wish to see him. I had not expected you to go this long without seeing him. So I commend you for keeping your word as long as you did. Therefore, I will follow through on what I said and give you the money needed to keep your business afloat and for that dream wedding of yours. All I really cared about was that contract and there is nothing else I need from you. If you would be so kind, I
think it might be best you pack your things and spend the night in a hotel. I will give you the funds you need, but this is where our deal ends. Thank you for helping me Belle."

It was like the rug was pulled right from under her. He couldn't be... He wasn't...

Realizing he was serious, Belle grasped for the one thing she thought would fix this. "You can't Thomas. Look it was a misunderstanding. I only saw Grayson to tell him that it was over between us. I don't love him. I haven't in months and I'm starting to realize how miserable I would be with him if I had stayed. Thomas, I love you and I know you feel the same!"

She blurted it out as he was walking away and watched as he visibly flinched. Slowly, he turned around and Belle looked at him with her heart on her sleeve. He must see she was being earnest. He must see she love him.

"Love? Did you honestly think I might have had feelings for you? I'm a monster if you haven't noticed. I practically forced you into this deal in the first place."

"Yes but it was really Grayson who wanted..."

He scoffed. "It wasn't Grayson. Although, I did make sure he was desperate enough that accepting would be that much easier."

Her confusion had him chuckling. "Ah, you hadn't figured it out. Well, let me enlighten you, my dear. The reason your bookstore was losing business was because I made it so. I wanted this deal with Nolan and I knew you would be the perfect 'wife' for me. Not only were you beautiful but you had a brain and I knew there was no way you would messed this up for me. So, yes, you were the perfect choice and I needed to make you and your fiancé desperate enough to accept my proposition. It was too easy to do and your fiancé was practically salivating at the prospect of my money saving you."

Stunned, Belle couldn't believe it. "You couldn't have. There's no way..." But why would he lie about that? And it was odd that after doing so well for business to suddenly lose their customers and profits... A look of horror overcame her features. "You did that? For a deal?"

"Why else?" He sneered, pushing his tongue against his teeth. "Of course it did have its perks." The look he was giving her was enough to make her feel ill and as he continued laughing, Belle couldn't help herself as she slapped him across the face.

The stinging slap echoed in the room but she didn't stay there for a second longer.

Gold stayed in his office until he heard the front door slammed shut and Belle's car start up. Only then did he let himself cry.

xxxXxx

Six Months Later...

"Damnit," Belle muttered. Once more she had the same dream—the one where she and Thomas were happily married and with a child. It all felt so real, which made it all the more tragic. And to think... what might have been if that horrible day hadn't happened. Would they have that domestic bliss? Would there be a child?

Sighing, Belle got out of bed and began the task of getting ready for the day.

A lot had happened in those short six months. Of course, it felt much longer than what it actually
was. Since Thomas revealed he was behind her bookstore's failing, Belle couldn't help but feel sick and used. She began questioning everything about him and whether the moments they shared were real or by design to satisfy some perversion of his.

In the beginning, her fury kept her away from Thomas. She didn't trust herself in his presence. The divorce was swift and painless as promised, and she didn't have to be near him. It was all arranged—even her belongings were sent back to her apartment she shared with Grayson. Well, she wasn't planning on living with her ex but Grayson told her she could have it. He moved in with a friend of his instead.

As for The Book Escape, she and Grayson tried to focus on a business partnership. It didn't last long. Grayson still had lingering feelings for her and he thought that since she was no longer bound to Gold that her love for him would return. Unfortunately, there was only disappointment to be found, and so it was with a heavy heart they parted ways in the regard. The bookstore became Belle's sole ownership, and business was picking up.

True, her "marriage" made her a pariah in the community. There was a lot of sympathy for Grayson, some still in fact; yet the divorce made her a welcoming sight. Of course there were a few that distanced themselves from her and her indecisions. Not that Belle didn't mind. No love lost on from the high and mighty of Storybrooke. However the residents' hypocrisy really opened Belle's eyes. And it had her re-evaluating her feelings for Thomas.

There were some things you couldn't fake or pretend. Infuriatingly so, Belle felt Thomas was far more honest and didn't conceal the truth about himself, unlike some people. He never hid the fact he was a beast, and the town refused to acknowledge their own shortcomings. On one hand, she shouldn't be surprised that Thomas did do what he did to get what he wanted. The man stopped at nothing. But then she recalled the heartfelt and emotional telling about his son's death.

The cancer was swift and merciful but there was no time to adjust or process. His son was literally ripped from him. It was a cruel act of nature plain and simple. She supposed his bitterness could not be helped. Yet the pain was still raw and it showed there was a heart beneath the rough exterior.

And the kiss…

He had kissed her and it was not like the other ones shared before.

He wanted her.

It could not have been an act.

Yet she didn't reach that conclusion until she faced a predicament that almost had her become a victim once more.

xxXXxx

Ruby insisted having a girl's night out and so they wound up at The Rabbit Hole. Belle forgot how long it had been since she blew off some steam and had fun. After a couple drinks, she was feeling much better.

They played pool where a couple young men, catching Ruby's fancy, asked if they could join. Huck and Sawyer were sweet and charming in a goofy way. Besides they were more into Ruby, which was fine with Belle. The way her love life was going… she rather not make it any more complicated than it already was.

"Anyone want a drink?" Belle asked.
A chorus of answers was her reply, and chuckling, she went to the bar. Scanning the bar, she noticed another man staring. Well, more like ogling. She knew who it was: Keith Nottingham.

More of an acquaintance to her; he was friends with Grayson but only for watching sport games with. Grayson said Keith was all right to cheer alongside a team but that was as much as he could stand with the man.

Belle knew what Grayson meant. There was something about Keith that didn't sit right but couldn't pinpoint why. He was nice enough, good looking, if you were into really tall men with an unusual sense of brutish humor. Nevertheless, Belle had nothing really to complain. But she couldn't explain the odd feeling in her gut whenever she was around him.

Wisely, she looked away and waited for her orders.

"Funny, seeing you here."

Belle started, not expecting someone to be speaking in her ear. She turned to find—surprise, surprise—Keith.

"Keith! Hi!" She forced a grin and hoped it appeared friendly.

"Heard you were married to Gold. I never thought he would let you come here," he said, cutting to the point and bringing his beer to his lips.

"I'm not. Not anymore. And even if I were, it's my choice. No one could stop me if I wanted to."

"And Grayson? He's not here?"

"Your powers of observation are something."

"Why thank you." He smiled at what he thought was a compliment. "What are you drinking? I'll buy."

"That's nice of you Keith but I just bought these for my friends." She motioned to the pool table. "Next time." Picking up the pitcher of beer and her own sangria, she went back to the table.

This time she was nursing her drink but Keith decided to insert himself into the game. It was obvious to those already present that he was being a nuisance but Keith was either thick or purposefully ignoring the looks. Not even Ruby's infamous glare could put him in his place.

He was waving his hands about as he spoke and wham! He smacked Belle's drink out of her hand as it shattered all over the floor. Luckily, no one was hurt but the expression on Keith's face was full of remorse as he began apologizing over and over.

"At least let me buy you another. Sangria, right?"

"Um, yeah but you..." Too late. He was gone.

Huck and Sawyer exchanged looks and snickered. "He's not exactly subtle."

"You have no idea," Ruby retorted.

In minutes, Keith was back with her new drink and Belle gingerly accepted it. She took a sip and set her glass on the edge of the pool table.

It was her turn to play.
She had a few small mouthfuls but not enough to make a dent in the sangria. Yet she couldn't help the slight shiver as Keith would not stop staring at her.

Finally, she had enough and let out a short yawn.

"Thanks Ruby. I needed this. I'll see you later." She hugged her friend and nodded to her new friends. "It was nice meeting you."

It wasn't until she got outside that she felt the effects of the sangria. It was minor but for a second it really knocked her equilibrium out of whack. Shaking her head, Belle stood still to gain her bearings before she started to walk again.

She didn't get far when she heard some footsteps behind her. Then in a flash, she was being pushed down the alley and slammed against the brick wall.

She recognized Keith in an instant and flinched when he was placing his lips over her neck and his large hands were rough on her hips. Belle reached for his shoulders and pushed with all her might. He was far tipsier than she was and it proved easy to get him off her just enough she could slip away.

However, Keith blocked her with his arm and she was back against the wall.

"Not… getting… away… again," he mumbled as he latched his mouth on hers.

Again!?? Belle was growing frantic but he was so intent on what he was doing that he was muttering things that had her even more confused.

*What does Thomas have to do with him?*

Eventually, Belle was able to lift her knee and smash it as hard as she could into his groin.

Keith collapsed like a deck of cards, squeezing tears out of the corner of his eyes. "You… *bitch!*" he moaned, grabbing himself and crying in pain.

She didn't care. He was going to… going to… She couldn't think it but she knew she had to get away before the pain subsided. Belle ran back to the bar as it was the closest place with people.

Suffice to say, Ruby was astonished to see her again but Belle went towards the bar and told the bartender to call the police. She hadn't realized she was hyperventilating until Ruby approached her and helped her sit down as Belle tried to explain what happened.

By the time Graham showed up, Keith was already gone but the Sheriff's look of disgust said it all when he told the girls this was the second complaint he received.

"When I find him, and I will, he won't be seeing a bar anytime soon."

"Thanks Graham. That means a lot," Ruby told him. "I'll take Belle home."

As the two friends walked back to Belle's apartment, Belle was struck with the strange sense of *déjà vu*. It was a long time ago and it was in the back of her mind, but Belle recalled a situation where she had left the bar, not feeling well, and then passing out. She vaguely remembered feeling someone touching her but it didn't last long and all there was left was a feeling of warmth and protection.

*So what did Keith mean about that 'crippled asshole'? Did he and Thomas get into some kind of disagreement?*

If so, then why would Keith take it out on her?
"You have that pondering look on your face. Are you imagining torturing Keith in a million different ways?" Ruby asked. "Cause I am."

"No it was something he said about Mr. Gold."

Ruby stiffened and Belle sharply looked at her. "What?" she demanded but Ruby was shaking her head. "Seriously, Ruby, what is it?"

"It's just… it reminded me of that other time when we were all at the bar. You told Grayson you were going back to the apartment and you didn't look right but I was close to being four sheets to the wind that I didn't pay that close attention, but you left and before you know it… Gold comes running into the bar and tells Grayson he should go outside and call the police. We found you in the alley but you were out cold."

Belle inhaled. "Thomas was there?"

"He was really worried. Nervous. And then as soon as Grayson had you, he was back to being the crotchety Mr. Gold we all know. I bet that was Keith then and Keith now. He must have tried drugging you! Oh my God! I can't believe I didn't see it!"

Belle wanted to assure her that it wasn't her fault, and that not even she thought Keith would do something like that.

She couldn't get her mind off that and how Thomas was the one to get her help. And yet…

Belle went to see Grayson to ask him about that night. Her former fiancé confirmed Ruby's accounts. "I thought you had too much to drink. I can't believe Keith slipped you a roofie and tried to…"

Belle cut him off right there. Well, now she knew why it was that she could not stand being around Keith.

But it brought her back to Thomas.

If he didn't care, then why did he rescue her from being assaulted?

There was only one place to go to get the answers.

xxx

The past several months had been Hell for Gold. And it was by his own hand too. God knows he wanted to blame her too. After all, she was the one that broke the deal by going to see her fiancé. However he couldn't bring himself to break his end since she had helped him get that contract with Nolan. He owed her that much and it was why he made sure the divorce was not dragged out and that she had her personal belongings returned in a timely fashion.

As for Nolan, he was sad to hear about the unfortunate news. Yet Gold could not find it to say it was due to an affair as originally agreed. He could not say that about Belle. Thankfully, Nolan didn't ask why.

Nevertheless, Gold was haunted by the last time he saw her. He couldn't forget her confession that she loved him, and he had been so quick to dismiss it as a lie. It was him that didn't deserve love or hers for that matter.

He was a monster, a beast. The look on her face said it all when he told her how he had purposefully ruined her livelihood for his selfish reasons. He didn't fault her for avoiding him altogether.
The last thing in the world he expected was to find Belle in his shop.

Her hands were on her hips, her blue eyes glowing with determination. "We need to talk. You owe me that," she said.

To his chagrin, he found himself gulping before motioning to the backroom for privacy.

Belle didn't have to be told twice as she went back there. As soon as Gold locked the storefront and went behind the curtain, Belle was ready to pounce.

"I want you to tell me the truth. No lies, no tricks. Just the truth no matter what."

Gold hardly nodded as Belle licked her lips, preparing herself. "A couple years ago. I was with Grayson and some friends at The Rabbit Hole. I wasn't feeling well and left early. I passed out. The same thing almost happened the other night. Nothing happened but I heard you were there the first time. Did you stop Keith from raping me?"

His hand reflexively clutched the handle of his cane. "Yes."

She began to tremble and her hand went to his work table to keep her from falling. Exhaling slowly, Belle looked back at him and without breaking his stare, she whispered, "Why?"

"I thought it would be obvious—"

"Don't!" she snapped. "I could have been any girl. Why me?"

"What do you want me to say Belle?"

"The truth!"

He felt his own ire growing for no other reason besides that he wanted to march out of there and find Keith Nottingham and beat the man to a bloody pulp. He refrained since Belle was there and she kept him from leaving with that don't-mess-with-me expression.

"Well?"

xxx

A Year Later...

"Push! You can do this Belle! Push!"

Belle arched her back, gritting her teeth, and gripped her husband's hand tight. Thomas was at her side, cheering her on even though his voice was strained from her grasp.

A few more agonizing pushes and she heard the wailing cry as their son finally entered the world. Tears of happiness flowed down her cheeks as she turned to kiss Thomas.

"I love you," he said.

"I love you too."

It took some time before they were able to work things out. The time for lying was over and as soon as Thomas decided to be forthcoming… he and Belle were able to clarify any misunderstandings. And Belle did give him a piece of her mind for interfering with her bookstore.
In the end, they dated for a while, got engaged, pregnant, and married. Life couldn't be better.

As their son was placed in her arms, Belle lovingly gazed at him. She had the perfect name for him.

"Gideon."

Chapter End Notes

There you go! A happy ending as promised! You know the drill…
6 The Lost World Rated K+

Chapter Summary

Sage_of_Earth prompted: Rumpton, Belle, and Prof. Mills are searching for Nolan who is apparently chasing the ghost of their missing colleague—Prof. Hopper. They are confronted with memories of the past, and Rumpton and Belle continue to grow closer… Inspired by episode 2x21 A Man of Vision. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

When I received this prompt, I was super excited but then realized… I might have mistaken which episode this might be. I'm hoping this is the right one requested, and if not, my apologies.

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Lost World

The day was promising to be another beautiful one in Paradise, except for the fact that the three explorers were on a mission to find Nolan. Apparently, the night before, during a thunderstorm, Nolan believed he saw a ghost of Professor Hopper and decided to find him. Rumpton, Belle, and Mills learned of this after returning to the Treehouse from a successful trip to the friendly Zanga tribe and discovering Nolan's letter. As for Snow, she was also missing, but from the contents of the letter, she was not with Nolan. So, the others quickly wrote a note to the jungle princess to let her know what they were doing and once they gathered their weapons and supplies, they were back into the wild.

They had not traveled far when they were quickly ambushed by a tribe of cannibals.

Unfortunately, one lucky cannibal managed to get the best of Lord Rumpton, promptly knocking him out, and it wasn't long before Mills and Belle were captured. The heiress struggled against her captor's hold, but the man yanked her arms back hard and she had little choice but to comply as her wrists were tied behind a post.

Soon, her companions were flanked on either side of her, also bound, as she and Mills waited earnestly for the hunter to regain consciousness. By the time Rumpton came around, the cannibals were in the midst of a heated debate.

"What are they saying?" Rumpton asked Belle, knowing her knack for languages would prove useful in getting out of this hairy situation.

She sighed. "They're trying to decide which one of us to eat first. They think I would be the tenderest."

Rumpton couldn't hold back a smirk from forming. "Well, they clearly don't know you very well, do they? Not that I'm saying their choice in appetizer is wrong. I think you would make a fine choice for
Belle rolled her eyes but she couldn't help the little snort as she caught wind of the cannibals' next words. "Maybe not… There's a strong push for you Rumpton, being the most virile."

"Likely heartburn and indigestion," Rumpton retorted.

"Congrats Reginald," Belle said, looking over to her other side at the scientist. "You're going to outlive all of us."

"I always was partial for desserts," Mills replied sardonically.

While the debate continued, the explorers were busy trying to loosen their bonds against the posts. Out of the blue, Rumpton made the comment:

"Where's Hopper's pipe when you need it?"

Both Belle and Mills looked over in disbelief. "Hopper's pipe?!" Belle exclaimed.

"Yeah," Rumpton said. "The last time we were attacked by cannibals, they were intrigued with Hopper's pipe. So we stuffed it with gunpowder, let them smoke it. Bang."

"Yeah," Mills replied fondly. "I remember you all telling that story."

"Too bad I left my pipe back at the Treehouse," Belle said bitterly. "And all of our gunpowder is over there so any other bright ideas?"

"Still thinking," the hunter said tersely.

"Well, think faster," she hissed.

At last, the cannibals came to an agreement as one emerged from the crowd—the Chief, more likely. He carried with him a crude looking-ax as he headed in Belle's direction.

"Looks like tender it is," Rumpton remarked.

"If you were a gentleman," Belle spat. "You would offer yourself in my place."

"Come on, you two," Mills scolded. "Fighting each other isn't going to help."

As the Chief motioned to touch her, Belle quickly responded in their native tongue. The moment their language erupted from her mouth, the cannibals took a step back in surprise. Rumpton studied their faces closely as whatever Belle was telling them seemed to make several of them uneasy.

"What did you say?" Mills asked quietly.

"I told them I was cursed. If they eat me, they die," Belle explained, feeling somewhat optimistic that they will heed her warning. After all, living in this godforsaken place had taught them a thing or two in that the locals stayed away from anything involving curses and the like.

The Chief pounded his chest as he said something in kind, nodding to two of his men to release her. Now, Belle had both of her arms held as the two dragged her towards a stump.

"What's going on?!" shouted Rumpton. His hands were moving up and down at a rapid pace, praying for the rope to give way.
"He said a little bit will give him power over the curse," Belle yelled.

"What little bit?" Mills inquired.

"I rather not find out!" Belle screamed as the cannibals finally led her to the stump. She rooted her heels into the ground, determined not to go further, but one took her right arm and started to stretch it out. She continued struggling, but their grips were too strong and she couldn't hold back the yelp as the one stretching her arm gave it a sharp tug. The Chief stood off to the side with hunger in his eyes. The next thing she knew he was raising that ax in the air and was charging at her.

Belle screamed but the ax stopped mid-air, caught by none other than Lord Rumpton. The cannibal was clearly caught off-guard as Rumpton slammed his knee into the Chief's groin and elbowed the two—holding Belle—in the face. Mills was also free as he made a mad dash to their rifles. Belle grabbed the nearest object to her (a bone) and used that as a weapon to keep another dirty cannibal from grabbing her.

A gunshot rang out as Mills shot the Chief, causing the others to flee in terror.

"We should leave," Mills advised.

"Good idea," Rumpton said, nodding to the scientist for saving him. Meanwhile, Belle dropped the bone as she gratefully gazed at her arm in a new light. She was very close to losing it and she walked over to the hunter, appreciation and gratitude glowing in her features.

"Thank you for saving my arm," she whispered.

"You need to keep a close eye on those parts of yours," he said.

"For you… I will try."

"I would like that very much."

For a second, the two continued to stare into one another's eyes. Rumpton didn't want to admit it, but watching Belle being dragged over to that stump and having her arm displayed to those starving fiends, had his heart wildly palpitating. The times they had brushed against Death were a constant cycle, but he never felt so helpless or powerless than in those short seconds. He didn't want to think what could have happened if his bondage didn't give way when they had.

Belle, on the other hand, knew she had been close to that brink where her arm would be served as a lá amputee. It was startlingly to discover how much she depended on Rumpton being there to save her, and when she saw that ax splicing the air… She shuddered to think the end result if he had not stopped it. Of course, she would never tell him to his face that she needed him, but Belle felt a certain sense of comfort in knowing the hunter was there at her side. Even when there were times she knew she didn't deserve to be protected. If Rumpton only knew the truth…

Belle blocked out the horrible thought as Mills made the announcement on making camp for the night. Nolan was out there but they would be little good to him if they weren't refreshed. Thankfully, the explorers didn't think they would have to fear from the cannibals. With their Chief good and dead, they would have plenty to eat.

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Once night fell, Belle had a difficult time in going to sleep. No matter where she turned, she couldn't seem to get comfortable. She sat up and saw Rumpton sitting a few feet ahead keeping watch for any dangers.
A teasing grin pulled at the corners of her mouth as she thought about playing with him. He seemed to be lost in thought so sneaking up on him was too much to be resisted as Belle crept over and murmured, "Boo!" into his ear.

Rumpton started but relaxed when he saw who it was. "Almost gave me a heart attack."

"Yeah right," she told him. Losing all trace of her teasing, Belle asked, "Do you think Nolan is okay?"

"He might be a reporter but he is built with sturdier things," Rumpton answered confidently. "Of course, I don't know how much I buy the ghost chasing."

"It's been a while since any of us talked about Hopper," she said. It was true. About six months ago there had been an incident where the explorers were caught in the middle of a feud between a war-faring tribe and the humanoid lizard Killian. The stupid reptile decided to sell the secret to gunpowder to the warmonger leader, which led the tribe in terrorizing the local tribes. The explorers were reluctantly dragged into the mess after their attempts to leave the Plateau were sabotaged and Killian needed them to help him when Hades wanted more gunpowder. It led to a confrontation on the Bridge and Hopper shot with an arrow in his stomach. He had fallen off the ledge as did the rest of the men. In the end, only Nolan, Mills, and Rumpton were found safe and alive. Hopper… disappeared.

The explorers searched up and down the river where Hopper could have washed up, but their search led to nothing. Not a single trace of the botanist could be found. Eventually they had given him up as dead until that storm flew in. Now, memories and dreams of Hopper would not leave them alone.

"I'm sorry if it brought up any bad memories about your brother," Belle said, her expression soft. Hopper's disappearance hit Rumpton the hardest. As the hunter and protector, he had sworn to keep everyone on this expedition safe from harm and he had failed his duty. He failed Hopper. Just like he had failed his brother.

Rumpton could only look straight out into the jungle. "All I remember is that look in his eyes when I shot him."

"You shot the ape that attacked him," Belle corrected, her brow frowning. "I'm sorry the bullet also hit him too but you have to know you're not at fault."

"That's what I tell myself," Rumpton whispered. "One thought, one word wherever I go or do… the past is always there."

Belle could relate. "Even here," she said quietly. Her past was an ever constant reminder of who she was and how if her friends ever learned the truth… they would feel betrayed.

"If only I can put enough time and space between then and now. Would that make a difference? Shouldn't I be able to start again?"

"Where would you begin?"

Rumpton glanced over his shoulder as he smiled. "You don't think it's possible even more than I do."

Belle laughed. "No you're right. But it is something we all seem to have in common: that urge to escape the past. To start again, fresh and new."

There was that tone in her voice. Rumpton would on occasion pick up on it, but he knew something was eating at her. Something she wanted kept hidden. Time after time he tried to bring Belle out of
her shell. While there were times he proved to be successful, other times he was frustrated on how her self-preservation got the best of her. It was difficult for her to be vulnerable, to expose that side of her for him or anyone else to see. She was a woman of many secrets and Rumpton hoped he would be there to show her that none of it mattered.

For right now, he settled on the fact that she was there with him. She didn't have to but she was.

"Thank you."

The following night Rumpton woke up to find Belle was still awake. They already had another long day of coming face-to-face with memories starring Professor Hopper and a run-in with a very angry T-Rex mother. The explorers were reminded of moments in where they faced extreme perils and how Hopper (in one way or another) rescued them.

Indeed, it was an emotional, draining day. And, of course, they still hadn't found Nolan.

Belle was propped against a tree, her hand rubbing her forehead as she was forced to deal with these unwanted memories. As much as she had grown to adore Hopper, she didn't want to think back on those earlier moments when she had been rude and cruel. And seeing the memory of the German pilot holding a gun to her while Hopper stepped in front… He had no idea what he was doing. Yet, he was determined to take the bullet for her if necessary. No one ever willingly put their lives on the line for her. It was strange and new and she didn't know how to respond. Luckily, it all worked out in the end and one of her secrets was never leaked. She wasn't sure if she would be able to explain her participation in the War if it did. No doubt everyone would have seen her as a traitor.

"What are you doing out here alone?"

Quickly, she wiped away a stray tear and cleared her throat. "I'm not alone. I'm surrounded by memories."

"Won't let you sleep, huh?" he suggested with an understanding look.

"Yeah something like that."

"Staying awake isn't better either," Rumpton pointed out.

"What is better Lord Rumpton?" Belle asked sweetly. "Giving in to simple desires here and now? Giving up my hopes and dreams for the future?"

He didn't know what spurred this on, but he shrugged. "You don't have to give up on anything Belle. You know that."

She narrowed her eyes. "What if my hopes and dreams don't include you? How does that work for the here and now?"

Then it clicked with him. After all, it was no secret that he had feelings for her. In fact, Rumpton had been pretty opened about them lately. She was a difficult woman, true, but he liked that about her. He liked that she wasn't like the simpering women he had been accustomed to in London society. He knew she had lived a hard life and it was why he was drawn to her.

Not that Belle encouraged him. She had done her best to detract him, but there were moments, even one like this, where she would let her guard down just enough for him to see through the cracks and the real her. If she thought that after everything they have been through he would leave her behind or
deny knowing her when they returned home—well, she was in for a surprise. Rumpton wasn't planning on letting her go that easy.

"For the here and now it works well. As for the future? It's always up for grabs so I'll take my chances. Will you?" There. He put himself out there for her to do with as she pleases. To him, there was always a future for the both of them. It all depended on her and whether or not if she was going to take that leap. What Belle might not know was that Rumpton can be very patient. Even if Belle refused him, he wasn't giving up.

"We both agreed you can't forget the past."

Despite how much the man infuriated her, Belle respected and admired his tenaciousness. He never gives up, she thought. Perhaps, if things were different and the circumstances were not so grim, then they might have a chance at happiness. But Belle was pragmatic. Rumpton may think he loved her now, but if he knew the truth about who she was and what she had done… He would not look at her so lovingly and trustingly. He would scorn her, condemn her, curse her. He would be mortified to having any feelings for her.

However, it would be the disappointment that would break her.

She knew she was a fraud. She knew this, and yet she couldn't help falling for him. Loving him was a curse and the poor sod had no idea what he was getting himself into with her. Belle felt sorry for him and she wanted to do everything in her power to make him loathe her, but Rumpton had this uncanny ability to see through it. He knew all along she put up a façade. He knew she cared when she tried to be indifferent. Even when everyone else had little faith in her… Rumpton continued to be her champion.

And she had to wonder… Would he still feel that way despite the truth?

Gazing at him shyly, Belle licked her lips. She could tell him. She could tell him right now.

But she clammed up and held her arms tighter against her chest.

"You're stalling," he told her.

"There are too many demons," Belle protested. "Besides, the past will haunt you no matter what. There is no escape."

He frowned. "You can't possibly believe that."

"Believe me, Lord Rumpton. I know what I'm talking about."

"Do you remember the first time we met? In Mills's study?"

How could she forget? The smarmy Lord, the proclaimed titled hunter? She took him down a couple of pegs but there was no denying the shock and awe in his eyes when she fired a round between his legs.

"Yes."

"Didn't you just think the moment was right somehow? Didn't you feel it?"

God knows he couldn't forget that glorious scene. He had been so intrigued with her. She was an enigma and he wanted to know everything about her. Looking back, Rumpton knew it wasn't only lust that drove him onward. They were meant to meet.
He stared at her intently, silently willing her to agree with him. He felt that connection. He knew she felt it too. How else could they explain this entire phenomenon? There was a reason Belle French was thrown into his life. There was a reason why the Plateau kept bringing them together.

It was fate, bloody simple it was.

Belle felt the heat of his body as he drew closer to her, and she couldn't help the loosening of her muscles or her arms falling at her side. His brown eyes were mesmerizing and she wanted nothing more to drown in those pools and feel the warmth he was offering. She was losing track of her surroundings, even failing to feel the featherlike sensation crawling up her back. All she could think about was him, breathing in his masculine scent, and how soft and inviting his lips appeared.

"Yes," she breathed. This was it, she thought. She was finally submitting to her feelings without considering the repercussions.

"Don't you feel it right now?" He was dangerously close, his eyes drifting across her incandescent beauty. Never had she looked so enchanting or so bewitching in the moonlight… He could hardly believe she was standing in front of him, and she wasn't a figment of his imagination or a dream he didn't want to wake from.

As Rumpton came nearer, he tilted his face to the side, his eyes closing as Belle lowered hers. Then she cried out.

Rumpton drew back in concern as Belle looked up at him with panic and alarm. Her hand was on her neck as she gasped:

"What was it?"

At first, he hadn't a clue what she was talking about. He didn't hear anything and it was unlikely the cannibals were following them. But something moved out of the corner of his eye, just inches away from her on the tree she had been leaning on.

He reacted at once, smashing at the thing that brought her pain. When he opened his hand to see what it was, Rumpton lifted his head as he gazed at her with insurmountable horror. "Scorpion."

Just that one little word was all it took as Belle's eyes rolled up in back of her head, her body falling into his arms.

"Belle!"

Rumpton's exclamation woke Mills as the scientist reached for his rifle and started running in his friend's direction. He stumbled upon the hunter who had his lips fastened on Belle's throat.

Initially, Mills feared that Rumpton's vampirism had returned but the hunter looked up at him with desperation and fear.

"She was stung!"

Immediately, Mills rushed over to check her pulse. Rumpton continued to cradle her, his hand nervously stroking her curls.

"I killed it." Rumpton pointed to the spot he had tossed the creature before returning to his task of sucking out the venom.
Mills went over and picked up the arachnid to check what type of species it was. "It's too late."

"What?" Rumpton stopped as he turned to face the professor. "She's not going to die. I won't let her die."

"Relax old man. It's only a tree scorpion. They have a relatively low neurotoxin that causes immediate paralysis, but only temporary. Belle will be right as rain in a couple hours."

"You're certain? She's going to be all right?"

Mills chuckled. "Yes. Although, who would have thought a scorpion would hurt Belle?"

Rumpton glared at the other man. Sometimes no words needed to be expressed.

Chapter End Notes

We are getting close to the end. I have 3 more The Lost World prompts and that will conclude Seasons of Rumbelle for now.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: The explorers are being held hostage by a WW1 pilot who has no idea the war is over. They come to a startling discovery that their paths had crossed once before during an interrogation over a crate of stolen iridium from the Royal Navy five years prior, resulting in the reveal of one of Belle French's secrets. (Rated T for guest character death)

Chapter Notes

This is based on one of my other favorite episodes—3x19 Tapestry. If you are a fan of The Lost World, I purposely wanted to do this one first before the big reveal on the biggest secret that Marguerite/Belle has from her friends. In this one, I'm keeping Nolan in the picture so unlike Malone… he doesn't go on that journey of self-discovery. The next prompt will feature Belle's reason for funding the expedition in the first place. Don't forget to review!

The Lost World

The whole point of this expedition was to escape her past and possibly start life anew. Yet, time and time again, Belle was forced to confront her demons in the face of danger.

For the most part, she was able to keep her secrets safe. Her friends never knew who she really was and she thought that this time it wouldn't be anything different. She would find a way to get out of trouble without anyone being none the wiser. Of course, that blew up in her face and now she, Reginald, Rumpton, and Nolan were at the mercy of the deranged pilot who was terribly confused and still hell-bent on keeping his mission safe.

Thankfully, Snow was not there as she had went off to follow a possible lead into her parents' disappearance. As for their new companion—a girl from the future—Emma Swan was also not present. If anyone had a chance to return to help the explorers, then it would have to be Emma.

At least as long as Emma doesn't get caught in the crossfires of one Lieutenant Jefferson—member of his Royal Navy Airforce. Then they were all doomed.

How did this happen?

Jefferson's gun was pointed in her face but Belle kept her composure for losing it would only make matters worse. Funny… It was quite easy to slip back into her old role as she calmly looked into the pilot's eyes, the picture of complete tranquility as if she had nothing to hide. Of course, considering her line of work from five years ago… she had to conceal any trace of emotion.

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"Ah, Baroness. Good evening. We are glad you have joined us."

Belle narrowed her eyes, her tone haughty and dripping with sarcasm. "Oh? I was under the impression if I didn't appear, then I would be arrested."

Two men were with her in the room, an interrogation room to be exact, with a sleek shining table and three chairs in total—two on one side, one across—and on one side of the wall was a large piece of glass. She strolled towards it, her head tilting to the side as she examined the one-way looking mirror.

"Such quaint accommodations. You boys cannot be all that comfortable trapped in here."

The first one that spoke to her was a middle-aged gentleman. Tall in stature with peppy hair and a perceptive gaze, he greeted her with a charming smile that lit up his brown eyes, but there was something somewhat sinister lurking within their depths as if trying to unlock her most hidden and private secrets. The second was much younger than his counterpart and a bit fidgety in Belle's opinion. He had slick blonde hair and blue eyes behind his wire-rimmed spectacles, which did nothing to impress her.

"May I inquiry as to who my humble hosts are?" she asked sweetly.

The young man opened his mouth to give a retort, but his partner beat him to the punch. "Pardon me, Baroness. How could I forget my manners? I am Sidney Glass from MI-5 and this is my colleague Henry Jekyll."

"Charmed, I'm sure," she said.

The memory shook her from within her core. She had been in London on holiday with her then-husband Baron von Helfing, a Prussian exile that was sympathetic to the Ally cause. At least… that was how she introduced herself to those two men. They had no idea who they were really dealing with.

Reginald was sitting next to her as he was attempting to fix the radio that Jefferson had on his plane. Nolan and Rumpton were standing off to the side, their guns taken, but intently watching the pilot to determine when to make their move. Yet, she caught Rumpton's glance as she imperceptibly shook her head. He still had an expression of astonishment as the crate of iridium—the source of all their troubles—was resting comfortably on the floor.

Indeed, what a shock it had been.

The day had been like any ordinary day. Reginald and Emma left to survey a nearby field to make a new map, Nolan was writing in his journal, and Belle and Rumpton were on their own. As usual, the heiress and hunter got into an argument and Rumpton stormed off into the jungle. No doubt to work out his temper on some poor unsuspecting dinosaur.

Belle retreated to the treehouse, feeling awful about the fight. Rumpton did nothing wrong only he had asked her a question about some insignificant tidbit about her childhood. He had been regaling her with stories about him and his brother that he asked her what her favorite game was as a child and she snapped at him. He had no idea what her childhood had been like and it wasn't fair for her to take it out on him.
So she decided to bake him some cookies to apologize.

Now, as gifted as Belle was in languages and her extensive knowledge in geology and gems, she was a lost cause in the kitchen. Whenever it was her turn to cook, the others would politely find excuses not to be around when dinner was ready. There was some additional work to do in the lab, a sample to be collected, a story to be extracted from a local friendly tribe, etc. She knew she was an awful cook but they could have had the decency to be somewhat less obvious. Only Rumpton managed to put on a good front and eat whatever passable meal she made.

"What's burning?" Nolan shouted from his room.

"Damn!" Belle muttered, pulling out the tray from the fire as the cookies were literally smoking. She had been watching them but like everything else she attempted to do in the kitchen… it would find a way to skip from being done right to overdone. The cookies were charred and any indistinguishable feature was eradicated. They looked like mounds of charcoal.

Tears of frustration started to well as Nolan started chuckling behind her.

Angrily, Belle spun on her heels as she glared at the reporter. "Like you can do any better!"

That sobered him up. While Nolan was a decent cook—baker he was not.

"You have a point. But why are you…?"

His question was cut off as the elevator began working. The last thing neither expected was Reginald carrying a crate and the man wearing a rather large and full backpack with a rifle behind him. When the elevator came to a stop, the man pushed Reginald inside, causing the scientist to trip and the contents spilling from the crate.

Immediately, Belle's eyes were drawn to the metallic looking bars as her brain automatically clicked to their identity.

"The Royal Navy iridium…" she murmured in surprise.

Reginald gasped while the stranger pointed his rifle at her. Nolan started to move but a quick change in aim in his direction had Nolan stopping where he was. Recognition also flashed in his eyes as he looked from Belle to Reginald and to the disheveled and agitated man.

"Belle, how do you know about the iridium?" Reginald demanded.

"How do you know Mills?" Nolan questioned, locking contact with his fellow explorer.

"You know about this too?" Belle asked her friends as all three were equally dumbfounded over the discovery.

"Shut up!" The man ordered. Training the rifle back on Belle, he shouted: "What do you know?!"

"Not much. I was interrogated," Belle explained. "I was an interpreter for many foreign companies and they made me a suspect."

"As was I," Reginald said in awe. "I was devising a way to end the Great War that would have saved millions of lives, but my shipment I had ordered was gone. They thought I stole my own iridium!"

"And I was writing a story for my paper," Nolan said. "The agents I spoke to were not interested in
"It was quite a scandal," Belle continued.

"Yes… I didn't hear much about it after the fact." Reginald frowned.

"I did," Belle confessed. "It was a surprise considering that it was a spy who stole—"

"Silence!" The man stomped his foot, getting their attention, as his finger curled around the trigger. "Secrecy must be preserved! You know too much!"

"Wait!" Belle cried, holding her hands up. "Listen to me. All I know is that the chain of spies were discovered; their leader arrested. That's all!"

"You were going to say his name!" the man said petulantly.

Reginald and Nolan looked to Belle as she continued to stare into the barrel of the gun. "I don't know his name," she replied slowly. "I only know his position and code name. He was an officer in MI-5, a double agent who fooled everyone, but he was arrested and his co-conspirators were arrested as well. He was known as Gideon."

"The wise and compassionate hero," the man recited softly.

"Yes. He was sentenced to life in prison; his identity never revealed."

The man smiled, exhaling in relief. "He is safe."

After the intense moment passed, Reginald introduced the man as Lt. Jefferson and how he had a radio that needed to be repaired. A storm was brewing and while the tubes were intact, the wiring and insulation needed to be replaced. Reginald advised waiting until the storm passed before he hooked the radio to the windmill to avoid electrocution.

But Jefferson wasn't hearing it. He wanted it fixed now.

Belle and Reginald began to work and Jefferson had Nolan gather up all their weapons and placed them inside the crate of iridium where he locked it up. Then he had the reporter pick up all the pieces of iridium that had fallen earlier and count each bar aloud so Jefferson knew exactly they were accounted for. They performed their tasks without complaints. No one was ready to upset the man further.

However, Belle knew he posed a threat regardless what they say or do. She had to find a way to be alone with Jefferson…

"Excuse me," she said gently. "I need to use the little girls' room. If that's okay…?"

The pilot grumbled but he yanked her up by her arm and motioned Nolan to take her place at the dining table.

"Keep working," he told the men as he pushed Belle forward.

She thought about what to say and knew she had hit close to home about Gideon. How much did this man really know?"

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"How long ago did you marry a German?" Jekyll asked.
"And when did that become your business?" she batted her lashes as the young man sputtered.

Glass, the only one with a sense of purpose, cleared his throat. "Forgive him Baroness. This is all rather new I'm afraid."

She rolled her eyes but held her tongue as Jekyll shot Glass a look. Finally, he started saying, "You were in Shanghai four months ago. Constantinople, three months ago. Then Paris and Vienna."

"I have been busy," she answered flippantly. "Lots of places to travel; new sights to see."

"It goes with the job."

"Oh?"

"We are in the same line of work."

At this, Belle grinned. "Do tell Mr. Jekyll. You also marry rich older men, poison them, and inherit their fortunes?"

The man blushed furiously. "You, um, do that?"

This time she did not hide her scoff. "Of course not. But people will gossip as they are wont."

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"How long have you been stuck here?"

Jefferson glared at her. "Do not stall. Do what you need and let's go."

"Right. It's just… I can't help but think what is the point in this? The war is over and your network is gone. What is left to protect? Some useless bars of iridium? You might as well stop all of this and we can work together to find a way home."

"You think I'm a fool?" Jefferson spat. "I know my orders. I know what I must do. Enough of this delay. Get back to work."

He brought her back to Reginald and Nolan. Apparently, Jefferson wasn't the talking type or one to be reasoned. He forced Nolan to move so Belle could take her place.

Before anyone else could speak, the elevator was moving again. They turned sharply to see who it was now.

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"What about Baron von Helfing?"

"What about him?"

"Are you planning on murdering him?"

She laughed. "You must be kidding. There is nothing more irritating than having my time wasted and by a government clerk who has been hardly out of prep school. Excuse me, gentlemen, but I must bid you a good evening."

As she rose from her chair, Jekyll began to stammer she couldn't leave and he actually tried blocking her exit.
"What does Papa Bear have to say?" she sneered, looking down at Glass who kept silent during the exchange.

"You are free to leave whenever you wish," he told her.

"No!" Jekyll exclaimed.

"All we have to ask is one simple question. I'm afraid Mr. Jekyll didn't get to the point and for that I do apologize if it seems we are wasting your time."

"Very well. What is your question?"

"Have you ever heard of iridium?"

"Is it anything like platinum? I do love platinum." Belle caressed the bracelet around her wrist as Glass coughed.

"No. Iridium is used mainly in military merits, not decoration."

"Ah. And you are asking me this because...?"

"Some of it has gone missing. Pinched, in fact."

"Pinched?" Belle repeated. "You think that I 'pinched' this iridium?"

"I am sorry to say this, but as you can see, we are in a delicate situation. So we must ask."

"Indeed. Well, to save time and everything, I did not 'pinch' your iridium. Is that all?"

"Yes. Thank you for your time Baroness."

As Belle began to walk away, she overheard Jekyll ask Glass if she really poisoned her husbands.

"Haven't you heard? They call her the Black Widow of Vienna."

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"Rupton!" Belle gasped, and then winced when Jefferson seized her shoulder, digging his nails into her. The hunter raised his rifle but realized it was going to cause more problems so he lowered it to the ground.

"Lt. Jefferson is a little tense," Nolan explained with a weak shrug.

"Get over there!" Jefferson gestured Rupton to stand next to Nolan. "I'm getting tired of these interruptions!"

The pilot strode over to pick up the hunter's rifle and tossed it over the railing of the treehouse. Then he removed the pistol at his side and waved it in her face. As she was the only female present... she made the perfect target to keep the rest of the men compliant.

Rupton gritted his teeth, his fists clenching and unclenching. She knew he wanted nothing more to punch Jefferson in the face, but she couldn't risk Rupton getting hurt for trying to save the day.

Then... something flashed in his eyes. Belle frowned as the hunter stared at the pilot as he questioned:
"Lt. Stan Jefferson? Of his Majesty's Airforce?"

"You know my name?" Rumpton had Jefferson's attention and Belle frantically wished she knew what the stubborn idiot was doing.

"Yes. I have wondered what happened to you. I know what you did. You and your partner took an experimental air transport cargo. It was iridium."

Rumpton knew about it too.

How?

"I know everything about this," Rumpton continued, his eyes hooded in memory. "After all, I was arrested for its theft."

"What?!" "No!" came the resounding cries from his friends as they looked at the hunter in a new light.

As for Jefferson, he was downright thrilled to meet the mysterious Gideon. "You, sir, must be my leader!" He clicked his feet together as he gave a salute. "Gideon, the greatest and masterful espionage player the world has ever seen!"

"Gideon… yes that was my code name," Rumpton confirmed.

The other explorers could not believe what they were hearing. Rumpton… a spy?! Belle shook her head profusely.

"No! You're not a spy John. You know that!"

"You're not the only one with secrets Belle," he told her.

"A traitor… Impossible!" Reginald kept shaking his head. Nolan lost his color as his reporter's mind was connecting the dots. "I knew it was an inside job," he whispered.

"Wait." Jefferson narrowed his eyes as he watched Rumpton carefully. "She said you were in prison for life."

"Well, the British didn't have a stomach to send one of their own to jail. It was easy to make a deal."

Like that, Jefferson became enraged. "Deal? You sold our secrets to save yourself? You betrayed us!? I have spent the last five years in this Hell because of you!"

The pistol was now on Rumpton and any loyalty the pilot had felt had dissipated in seconds. "I stayed true to the cause! You… you betrayed both sides!"

"Stop! Lord John Rumpton isn't a traitor!" Belle cried. "He betrayed no one!"

Her tone must have conveyed enough sincerity to garner Jefferson's attention and to keep from shooting Rumpton.

"How could you possibly know what he didn't do?"

"Because I'm… I'm Gideon."

Now, all the men were facing her as she bravely stood up. At last, the time was now or never. Nodding, she calmly stated it again. "I'm Gideon. I'm the one who infiltrated MI-5 to steal the
"But… but… you're a woman!" Jefferson's jaw fell as Belle closed her eyes, relieved she was able to say this truth out loud.

Whirling on Rumpton, Jefferson was confused but the hunter smiled. "I was the army's liaison senior officer to MI-5. I volunteered to be the one arrested in Gideon's place to protect his identity. Not even I had the clearance to know that Gideon was a woman."

"This cannot be!" Jefferson started hitting his temples. "Gideon was a spy working for the enemy! He ran the entire spy operation ring in England! He was the greatest double agent in history!"

"Triple agent."

Belle opened her eyes as Rumpton winked at her. "It was every enemy spy willing to give their secrets to a British woman who they thought was working for the enemy, but truthfully, she was working for England all along, keeping those secrets safe."

"The iridium…" Jefferson insisted.

Belle took her turn. "We had to give him a success to convince Berlin he was defective without jeopardizing the war effort."

"My work…" Reginald trailed off as he realized that he was being used to keep up pretenses.

"I'm sorry Reginald. But your work was deemed to be ineffective in the long run," Belle explained. "It was decided based upon the Hopper Committee that reported on defense projects and judged the likelihood of their success. Not that they knew that. But it was the perfect sacrificial lamb."

They all jumped to a series of gunshots as Jefferson fired round after round into the ceiling.

"Shut up! I don't want to hear anymore!"

Thunder started clashing as he ran to the radio and picked it up. The radio was already connected to one of the cords from the windmill and Reginald and Nolan quickly backed away. A spark of lightning lit up the treehouse as the electricity ran up the wire and right into Jefferson.

The man hit the ground before anyone could do anything.

The only distraction came with the elevator running again, and this time, Emma and Snow appeared.

"What the heck happened?" Snow asked as the explorers all looked at each other.

"We have a story for you…" Nolan said as he went over and embraced Snow.

"So this is what you guys do when I turn my back?" Emma teasingly joked. "And here I thought I would have the best story of all running into Snow here."

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It was decided Jefferson would be buried alongside his co-pilot. The iridium was also buried near the plane wreckage where it should properly stay considering.

Hardly anyone spoke about the recent events and so Snow filled the silence with her findings on how she met a shaman who knew her parents and gave her a pendant that her mother used to wear.
"He said it was my turn to wear it. Why… I don't know but it's something."

Belle and Rumpton hung back from the rest of the group as they walked back to the treehouse.

"So… you're the Black Widow of Vienna, huh?"

"It's not how it sounds," Belle half-argued.

"I can't believe you were there that night," he said. "I was there too. I was watching the interviews and I wondered who that alluring vixen was who kept putting Jekyll to shame."

"He was a little impetuous." They shared a chuckle. Then Belle grew serious. "You're not mad, are you?"

"Mad? Why would I be? Belle, you're a hero regardless of appearances. It was an honor to be chosen to protect you."

"Yes but at what cost?"

"It's over now. There is no need to be ashamed."

For the sake of arguing, Belle agreed but she couldn't help the bitter thoughts from forming.

*If you only knew what else I had done John. You would not feel the same about me.*

But that was for another day. For now, the explorers thought it best to bask in the knowledge that good prevailed and won the war in the end.
Chapter Summary

Prompt: When someone from Belle's past threatens her friends, she is forced to admit her real intentions for funding the expedition, which also reveals her darkest secret. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

This is based on another of my favorite episodes from season 3- #14 The Secret. We will now know why Belle came to the plateau. Enjoy!

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The Lost World

It was another day in Paradise and everyone off doing their own thing: Reginald Mills was out looking for an elusive species of cricket, Emma was practicing shooting her crossbow, and Snow and Nolan were tending to the garden near the electric fence.

As for Belle and Rumpton…

"Promise you won't laugh?" the Scottish lord asked the beauty.

Belle smirked. "I can't make any promises but let's see how you fare." She went to the phonograph and moved the needle as a waltz began to pour from the funnel. Belle took her position with her arms stretched and Rumpton took a hesitant step forward. The moment they were each in their embrace, Belle started to count the beats as she took the lead.

Belle couldn't keep a straight face as soon as Rumpton stepped on her toes. No matter her counting, he continued to land his big feet on hers. Then finally she stopped dancing and waved her hands for him to stop too.

"I think we did enough today."

"No. I think I have it figured out now."

Belle raised her brow. "Are you certain? My feet are not."

Rumpton grinned. "I am very certain." Then he pulled her flushed against his chest. "The problem is… we're not close enough. The waltz is a deliciously improper dance that both partners need to be left completely breathless."

Before Belle could make a sound, the hunter was moving in time to the music, carrying Belle with him. He danced with such precision, such grace that Belle suspected he was pulling a farce this whole time and he could actually dance!
Rumpton saw the look on her face, laughed, and held her tightly around the waist as he lifted and spun her around. Belle couldn't stay serious and she tossed her head back, and laughed as well. It felt so… nice. To be in his arms and have the treehouse to themselves. Belle knew that things between them were difficult… well, complicated was the better term.

They often disagreed and their fights were explosive. He could be as stubborn as a mule and pig-headed and annoying, but he was brave, selfless, compassionate and she was—

Not.

Despite Rumpton's insistence she was a hero to the war, Belle knew she was a coward. The only reason she participated was the deal she made with Winston Churchill. He would ensure she was pardon from any crimes she committed and would be provided a hefty sum for the troubles she would find herself since she was going to be involved with dangerous men. It was a no brainer and it allowed her to see more of the world as she engaged in their own personal quest. But Rumpton wouldn't be able to understand. No one would.

Besides it was getting harder to maintain her aloofness as she found herself becoming closer to Lord Rumpton. Belle dared not voice what her feelings could be because admitting them would only lead to heartache, pain, and hatred and she couldn't put him through that. He deserved so much better. But then she would find herself in a moment like this—utterly perfect and romantic—and she never wanted it to end.

Yet Fate had other plans in store when the music suddenly stopped and Belle mourned the loss of contact as Rumpton grumbled, "The electric fence must be down."

Snow and Nolan were below and both knew better than to mess with the fence. Belle and Rumpton got on the elevator, armed with their pistols in case it was raptor interference, and to their horror they found their friends lying unconscious.

Rumpton went to immediate action as he checked his friends for injuries and Belle inspected the fence. To her bewilderment, she saw what looked like a black cloth tied around two lines. Beneath was a calling card with two distinct symbols.

A chill crawled down her spine as Belle covered the tile with leaves. Rumpton was too busy he hadn't noticed her change in countenance as she scanned the jungle with wariness and worry. The cloth she was able to get loose and stuffed it in her pocket. Then she glanced at the hunter as he hoisted Nolan over his shoulder.

"Do you think you can get Snow?" he asked.

Belle nodded, bending down to throw the young woman's arm over her shoulders as she half-dragged, half-carried Snow to the elevator. Once they were safely inside the confines of the treehouse, Belle grabbed her rifle and slung the strap over her head.

"What are you doing?"

"Going to find Reginald. He can help tend to them."

If it was who Belle believed it was, then she had to be careful and find her friends.

Rumpton looked at her strangely but he didn't question her. "Be safe" was his parting words as Belle headed off into the jungle. The safety was off her gun, her finger curled around the trigger, as Belle waited as she put some distance behind her before she started shouting:
"Dragon! I know you're here! I got your message. Show yourself!"

Nothing.

She continued to move in a circle in the hopes to draw him out, but to no avail. Just as Belle was about to give up, she saw what looked like Reginald's hat. A few feet ahead were the scientist's bug net and beyond that was a few of his glass jars to collect samples. Reginald, though, was nowhere to be found.

At once the heavy lead in Belle's stomach grew harder as she started to run in the direction of his supplies.

"No, no, no, no, no…" Belle prayed he was all right but a figure materialized in front of her causing her to skid to a halt.

It was a woman dressed in black martial art robes with her long jet black hair pulled into a ponytail. Her almond-colored eyes narrowed into dangerous slits and before Belle could shoot… she was quickly disarmed. Belle went to her hip for her other gun, but the warrior kicked the pistol from her hand and managed to get behind Belle, holding the beauty in a chokehold.

"My Master requests you return the treasure you stole from him," the woman said.

"I didn't steal anything!" Belle choked but the woman tightened her grip. "The Dragon's mad!"

"Oh? You believed everything he said. Why would you go to such lengths to hide yourself Miss Smith? No… Lacy Beauchamp or is it Arabella Montclair? You have so many names it is hard to keep track."

Belle grunted as the warrior lowered her voice. "You have until sundown tomorrow to return what is rightfully his or your friends will suffer the consequences of your greedy and insolent heart."

Then the warrior was gone, leaving Belle gasping for air.

"Damn you Mulan!" Belle coughed. But time was the essence. She had to find Reginald and fast. Returning to the trail, she followed the breadcrumbs Mulan left until she came upon Reginald. "No!"

The scientist was out cold and tied up to a tree. The perfect snack for a passing dinosaur. She had to cut him down before that became a reality.

Yet a loud crashing behind her had Belle seizing her rifle and aiming it where the sound came from. Thinking it was Mulan, Belle was getting ready to fire, but it was Rumpton chasing after her.

"Relax Belle! It's only me…" His voice trailed off when he saw Mills strung up. "Bloody Hell!"

He stood in front of the scientist to catch him as Belle cut his bonds. She was grateful Rumpton found her but how?

"Nolan and Snow woke. They told me that they were attacked." He said this pretty deliberate as he watched her carefully to gauge her reaction.

Belle swallowed but refused to meet his eyes. "I was with you remember? How would I know who attacked them?"

"I don't know but something doesn't seem right to me." Rumpton saw something out of the corner of his eye and picked up what appeared to be a card. He looked sharply at the beauty and there was no
denying the flicker of recognition in her blue eyes. "You do know who did this," he accused. "What's going on? Tell me!"

"All right! It's my fault, isn't it? It's always my fault," Belle retorted bitterly.

"What?"

"I have to tell you the truth. I can't hide it any more." She lifted her eyes to the hunter. "I have to tell you why I really funded this expedition."

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Reginald came to when they returned to the treehouse. Emma was back and helped the others take care of him while Belle and Rumpton spoke privately at the base of the tree so he could repair the fence.

"Start from the beginning," he demanded. "Leave nothing out. No more lies."

"The person who attacked our friends—her name is Fa Mulan. She's a soldier of sorts. Mercenary to be exact. She follows an old time warlord called Shanghai Dragon."

"Shanghai Dragon?!!" Rumpton interrupted, his brows reaching his hairline. "Belle do you have any idea what that man is capable of? Hell, I crossed paths with his smugglers from Kenya to Tibet."

"I know, all right!" she sighed. "I know he's a dangerous man and I shouldn't have gotten involved, but I had no choice. It started when I heard about this plateau about five years ago."

"Five?!" he repeated, knowing it was three years ago when news about the plateau was mentioned in Reginald's speech.

"Yes. I was in Shanghai working as an interpreter when a business negotiation was going south. The Dragon then made me an offer I couldn't refuse. There was a debt that needed to be honored. I had no choice Rumpton!"

"There's always a choice!" he exclaimed. "So what is this deal? What did the Dragon want?"

"He wanted me to find something for him, but more than that, he thinks I stole from him too."

"Did you?"

She nibbled her bottom lip, wondering if she should tell him, but he wanted honesty. "Yes. But only because it would aid me to fulfill my end of the bargain."

"Which is what?"

The electric fence hummed back to life and the two breathed in a sigh of relief. At least they had some protection.

Belle didn't want to show him out in the open, especially when she adamantly told Mulan she didn't have it. She moved to the elevator and Rumpton followed suit. The trip up was silent and tense, and he wasn't sure what to think. He knew Belle had her secrets but this was a whole new level.

Once inside, Belle held on to a chair as she used a knife to manipulate the heel of her boot until it slid apart and she could pull out a small wrapped package. All the others had joined them as they watched Belle unfold the cloth to reveal a partial piece of what looked like a snake biting its own tail.
"The uroboros," Belle said, holding it up in the air. "I had this with me since I left Shanghai. I have always kept it with me." Then as she glanced around the room, a queer glint filled her eyes as she drew her lips back in a snarl. "And I would rather die before I return this to the Dragon."

The news startled the inhabitants and they didn't know what to do, except Snow looked at the piece as her forehead creased at the familiar sight.

"I think I've seen this before," Snow said. "There was a cave not far from here where I used to play. There was an engraving on the wall of a snake biting its tail. I'm positive it's the same!"

"Really? Are you certain?" Belle asked.

Snow nodded. "Yes. I can draw you a map."

"I'm going with you," Rumpton told Belle. He would brook no argument. "I know you're hiding something else, but first we need to save ourselves from this Mulan."

Once the map was in their hands, the two explorers took off. Belle tried telling him she took it because according to the legend... to find half of an uroboros was to use the other half.

Within minutes they found the cave but after twenty odd years the cave became volcanic. Yet there was no stopping with a threat hanging over their heads. The two began their descent as they entered the tunnel. They entered a large cavern where a bridge connected over a river of lava.

Belle and Rumpton cleared the bridge very carefully before a tremor shook the cave and pieces of rock came crashing into the lava river. The tremor sent Belle into his arms as they clung to each other.

Rumpton touching her meant more than Belle could say despite the pain on his face.

"John," she spoke softly. "I know you're angry with me but I need you to know... I was protecting all of you. It doesn't seem like it but I was."

Rumpton had to bite back a caustic remark. Belle looked so vulnerable and regardless of her actions he still truly cared for her. She once said in her dry sense of humor way that she was a difficult woman to love.

That was no lie.

They soon came upon the engraving that Snow mentioned. Dirt covered it but there was a bright light glowing from behind. Rumpton handed her a larger knife so she could dig through. With each clump she uncovered, the light became brighter and brighter until deep inside was the missing half.

Belle took her half out and set it next to the other piece, closing her eyes to shield them from the blinding light that joined the two pieces together.

She did it.

After all these years, Belle did it.

"Take it. Go on. This is what you came here for."

But Belle hesitated. She had told him that legend says that whoever touched the restored uroboros could be transported to their heart's desire.

What did that mean to her?
However, the decision was made for her when Mulan ambushed them. She sent Rumpton flying backwards, colliding into the wall with Belle after him. Mulan reached in and grabbed the medallion.

"The Dragon sends his regards," she said. "The deal is over; the bargain is completed. It's a shame you failed Miss Smith. I'm sure the Dragon will burn the birth certificate you were so desperate to have."

Then the woman disappeared in a flash of light leaving Belle and Rumpton in darkness.

She collapsed to her knees, tears streaming down her cheeks.

She had failed.

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At the treehouse, Belle was sullen and quiet. She moved with no purpose as if in a daze.

Rumpton trailed after her knowing the incident in the cave left her shaken. He had more questions, but the one that was the most pressing was the comment Mulan made before she vanished.

"Belle?"

She looked up with her vacant stare and he forced himself to say: "Was the birth certificate…?"

"Yes," she answered quickly. "It was mine. I was going to trade the uroboros to find out who I really am."

"You don't…?"

"No. I don't know anything Rumpton. Please. Leave me alone."

She needed space and while he wished he knew what it must feel… he couldn't imagine never knowing who he was or who his family was. It was something one would take for granted.

But Belle…

His heart went out to her but pushing the matter would make it worse. He hoped that out there, wherever the birth certificate was located that the Dragon wouldn't destroy it. And when they found a way off this plateau, he would do everything in his power to find Belle's birth certificate so she could finally learn the truth about her identity.

Chapter End Notes

There you have it. I always loved that about the original show. Some episodes from season 3 are on YouTube but if you ever watch it from the beginning… Marguerite is a very complicated person and you knew something was up about her, but not knowing her identity was a brilliant twist. You can imagine anything else but that. So what now for our explorers? And what about Belle and Rumpton? One more prompt to go…
9 The Lost World Rated K+

Chapter Summary

Prompt: It is two years later and the explorers have made it off the Plateau. Rumpton made a promise to himself when Belle's secret was revealed and he is finally able to fulfill it. (Rated K+)

Chapter Notes

I wanted to do one more prompt for The Lost World to give it closure. Unfortunately, the show never had a chance to wrap it up so I am using my imagination combined with the original intent the writers had for this. Hope you like!

See the end of the chapter for more notes.

The Lost World

To say the last five years was an adventure was grossly understated. It was a literal trip to Hell and back and then some when the explorers, including Snow and Emma, had to face the biggest fight for their lives and the life of the Plateau.

Snow's parents, in particular her mother, was the Plateau's Protector. An ancient bloodline passed down from mother to daughter to keep the balance of good and evil, and it was Snow's turn to take her rightful place in the city of Avalon as her mother was dying. Her father, sadly, was already dead—killed by a man called Isaac Heller, a member of another bloodline from the Plateau whose only desire was control and destruction. Heller wanted to wipe out the Protectors and harness the power of the Plateau for himself. His ancestor was almost successful when he recruited a Druid High Priestess named Belladonna to help him. She used her powers to create a storm so massive and destructive, but the Protector was able to fight back. Isaac was trying to repeat the same tactic with Belladonna's reincarnated form:

Belle.

He almost succeeded too were it not for Rumpton and their friends. Somehow Isaac convinced her that everyone would be better without her and that evil coursed through her veins. It was why her parents abandoned her in the first place. Of course, Isaac had orchestrated Belle's lonely childhood with the help from Shanghai Dragon. She was kidnapped as a baby and given to a couple who had been cruel and made her feel unwanted until she was left at an orphanage. They gave her up as the money wasn't worth it anymore.

Yet Isaac died and took with him the secret to Belle's real identity.

With balance restored, Snow had the power to lift the fog surrounding the Plateau so the explorers could leave for good. Nolan and Emma stayed—Nolan because he was in love with Snow; Emma because she saw her as the sister she always wanted.
Hopper was alive—not dead like they had thought. When he fell from the bridge he had been severely injured and was taken in by the Avalonians where he learned the truth about Snow and Belle's purpose. Belle was meant to be the deciding factor and Rumpton was the anchor she needed to stay on the side of good. Love really won in the end and now they were home.

But…

Belle was avoiding him.

Rumpton couldn't figure out why since he told her he loved her and she had said the same. He had proposed to her the night before they left the Plateau and she said yes. Now Belle was avoiding him like the plague.

At first he thought it was because of the attention.

After all they were missing for five years and presumed dead, then Belle's past involvement from the war made her a lot of enemies and if someone recognized her… they might go after her. Yet all was quiet on the espionage front and Rumpton wondered if it was about Belle's lack of knowledge on whom she was and who her family was. If that woman thought he would be ashamed or regret what they shared, then she had another thing coming.

He found her and told her he loved her now and forever. He told her he was going to leave for a bit but he expected her to not run away.

Rumpton went to Shanghai and demanded an audience with the Dragon. He persuaded the crime lord and returned to England with his prize. His only concern was whether or not Belle would keep her promise and had stayed in London.

To his relief, she did.

She waited for him and when he reunited with her—Belle surprised herself when she didn't run for the hills.

"Almost," she said. "I almost left but I knew I had to stop running away."

"I'm glad you didn't," he told her. "I have something for you—something you have been searching your whole life for and thought it was lost."

Rumpton pulled out the envelope that contained the birth certificate and handed it to her.

She looked at him with a mixture of disbelief and fear and hope and she gingerly took the document. She couldn't believe she had it in her hands. Her name… her real name was here and all the answers to her questions she had been longing to know.

Lifting the tab, Belle closed her eyes and breathed in deeply before she looked down and finally discovered her true identity.

Her hand went to her mouth, tears welling up, as she fingered her name.

"Belle," she choked. "My real name is Belle de Villeneuve. My parents are Maurice and Collette. I was born in Melbourne and—and—" Her knees gave out as Rumpton caught her. He held her as she wept into his shoulder. He held her until the sobs subsided and she could look again.

There were other papers. And it was evident her parents were alive and well. In fact, they were blue blood like Rumpton.
"You know now," he said. "They loved you. They have been searching for you."

Indeed, the couple has been offering a reward for information on their missing daughter. Even after all these years… they were looking for her.

Belle tearfully gazed at the man she loved and kissed him. She couldn't stop kissing him.

At last she found home.

Chapter End Notes

Also, this will wrap up the story for now. I know there are a few other prompts within this story that could be added on, and perhaps I will, depending on the Muse. For now, I think it will be best I mark it as complete. Thank you everyone for sticking with me and for giving me such great ideas and prompts over the years. This means a lot and I hope you enjoy reading these and maybe even re-reading!

End Notes

So… I have like a bazillion ideas to write with Rumbelle as the focus, and unfortunately, I don’t have all the time to write each one separately in its own story. Then I decided to use prompts that I have given myself and ones that I (hopefully) will get from you! All of them are based on various books, movies, and TV shows that I love plus some random universes/scenarios that’ll involve Rumple and Belle. To get the ball rolling… I’m going to write 4 prompts/chapters for each verse before moving to the next one. I will go back and write more for that verse based on your ideas and any other ones that I’m inspired to do. I will post all 4 at once before I move to the next one. To give you an idea of what to expect, this is what I have planned:

Edward Scissorhands
X-Files
Otherworld series (by Kelley Armstrong- were!Gold and half-demon!Belle)
Let Me In
Lost
Cowboys and Aliens
Indecent Proposal
Rebecca
A Long Fatal Love Chase
Scarlet Pimpernel

Those are just a sampling. There’s even more but I figured that would be a good enough teaser.

I do work 2 jobs so I may not always be quick with the updating, but I will pick the ones that inspire me and I will try to be good with the posting.
Again, ratings will vary depending on the prompt and I will make sure to include what that particular prompt is rated within the chapter title to avoid any unpleasantness. I hope you all like what I have in store and thank you for reading this! Don’t forget to review!

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!