“I made an appointment with Planned Parenthood,” she tells him, making sure to end her sentence on a high note so it sounds like she doesn’t really ended her sentence. As with most things, Killian gets it. “You want me to come with you?”

Her night in jail is the worst of her life.

It says a lot about her current situation – her body bears scars that will never truly heal and bruises that will never truly fade – and she huddles up against the wall, arms circling her knees, to be as far away from the bars as possible. The man in the cell next to her looks at her like she’s a piece of meat and he’s a starving man, and Emma forces herself not to look back, just in case. She keeps shivering, and the neon lights above her head flicker dangerously enough that she will never be able to fall asleep.

She must doze off, though, adrenaline finally gone, because she wakes up in a startle in the early morning, eyes shifting from side to side as she hugs her knees a little closer to her chest. The clock on the opposite wall reads ten past eight o’clock, and she hears Ingrid’s voice rising up and up down the hallway.

Emma knows she is doomed – running away and being arrested, one-way ticket back in the system – but relief crash through her at her foster mother’s voice all the same. She idly remembers calling her last night, swallowing down sobs of shame as she told her where she was and please, come and get me.
She doesn’t want to know how much it cost Ingrid to make the journey from Minnesota to Phoenix.

The arguing dies down, eventually, before a police officer enters the room and opens the lock to her cell. Emma doesn’t want to believe it at first, but Ingrid appears behind the policeman and, last thing she knows, Emma throws herself at her, shivering even if she refuses to cry. Ingrid pats her hair and kisses her forehead, promising that everything is over and they will be home soon.

Not once does she threaten to kick Emma out, not even when she explains that the charges weren’t dropped, but weren’t against her anyway – the owner of the watches knew it was Neal all along, Emma only an accessory to the crime. It is good, Ingrid says, but Emma struggles to believe it.

Her heart is broken and empty.

…

She falls asleep on the plane, her exhaustion finally coming back to slap her in the face, and only wakes up long enough to leave the airport and climb into the car that will drive them home. She isn’t sure she is supposed to call it home anymore – doesn’t want to get her hopes up, it always ends up badly – because Ingrid still hasn’t said anything, so maybe she’s waiting for them to get back to finally have The Talk. Emma can’t even blame her on that.

She’s wrapped into Ingrid’s woollen coat when she gets out of the car, mind a little fuzzy around the edges, enough for her to trip on her own feet. She scratches her throat, left parched from not talking for such a long period of time – Neal and she used to speak for hours on end, late into the night, and she won’t cry, she won’t.

Ingrid leads her inside, only to slow down in her tracks a little, and that is enough for Emma to turn her head. Killian in on porch of the house next door, obviously having gotten out when he heard the car pulling over. He looks – relieved and happy and something else, and Emma can only smile at him, a little, even if she doesn’t have the willpower to wave.

Ingrid tells him to, “Go back inside, Killian,” and he does, but not without one last glance Emma’s way before he closes the front door behind him. She stares until he’s out of sight, and then lets Ingrid push her inside, and up the stairs.

It’s late into the evening and she’s still exhausted – mentally – even if she’s slept all day long, so Emma doesn’t complain when Ingrid forces her into her bed. Her head falls against the pillow, the first time she’s slept in a real bed for what feels like a lifetime but really is months. It feels good, a little.

Still, she grabs Ingrid’s sleeve, tugs on the fabric.

“You gonna send me back?” she asks, because they’ve been avoiding the subject (and many other things) ever since this morning, and Emma needs to know. She doesn’t want to get attached to her bed if she’s going to be back to sleeping on a cot.

Ingrid smile, sad and loving, and caresses her cheek tenderly. “I adopted you, remember? We’ll talk about this, but you’re not going anywhere.”

There is something reassuring, but also a little commanding, about Ingrid’s words, but Emma is too tired to really focus on that right now. Her mind just plays the words on repeat – not going
anywhere, not going anywhere, not – until she falls asleep, a few seconds later.

When she wakes up, her bedroom is plunged into darkness, and someone sits on her window frame. The moon casts just enough light that she can make out the person’s shape, all gangly and tall and awkward, and Emma sighs into her pillow, loudly.

“You’re back,” Killian says, matter-of-factly.

“You’re too old to climb up the vine.”

He shrugs and moves closer to her, until he sits on his bed like he belongs. That’s Killian for you, just owning the place and fuck you if you don’t like it. She used to love it, and that’s why they were friends – she needed him when she was all rebellious and angry at the world, leather jacket and smoking behind the bleachers. Then she ran away. She doesn’t know who she is anymore, and who he is to her.

He’s her only friend, that’s who he is, and Emma scoots a little for him to have enough space to lie down next to her. He smells of smoke and tobacco, probably had a cigarette before he decides that, fuck that, he’s climbing up the vine to check on her. It’s cute, a little, in a way Emma isn’t used to.

“Ingrid went bonkers,” he tells her right off the bat, words heavy with the British accent he never quite got rid off, even after a decade spent in Nowhere, Minnesota. “We thought we would find you dead in a gutter or something.”

“I’m sorry,” she replies, like a broken record. Perhaps she means it, perhaps she doesn’t, it’s hard to tell anymore. It seemed like a good idea, at first, and so did Neal but – not so much, anymore. And she refuses to think about whether or not she would do it again, given the chance. It’s too early, the wounds too fresh, for that.

“Don’t do it again, is all.”

When she drifts back to sleep, she’s vaguely aware of Killian’s hand on her hip as he scoots closer, his breath fanning over her cheek. He leaves at some point before she wakes up again in the morning, the blankets still warm and the pillow heavy with the smell of cold tobacco, and Emma smiles sleepily.

…

“I’m pregnant.”

It’s not often Emma climbs up Killian’s vine, mostly because he only lives with his mother and she doesn’t mind him having girls over, but when she does, Emma makes sure it’s to drop that kind of bomb on his.

Killian splutters a lot, and she worries for a second that he’s going to choke on his own saliva and die. But he recovers rather quickly, and stares at her with wide, wide eyes. There is panic in them, especially when he says, “We didn’t do anything!” and his voice raises three or four octaves.

She would laugh, but.

“It’s not yours, weirdo.” She plops down on his bed, starts drawing circles on his comforter with her
finger. “I just wanted you to know, you know. Cause you’re my friend, and the police will ask you to testify if Ingrid murders me.”

He chuckles, even when he rubs a hand to his face. “Bloody hell.”

Bloody hell, indeed.

She took the bus three towns over, just to make sure not to meet anyone she knows, and drank two bottles of Sunny Delight to pee on four different sticks. All positives. She wants to cry but, as always when thinking about Neal, the tears just won’t fall. Perhaps it’s better that way.

“I don’t know if I should keep it.”

Killian laughs again, and it’s as nervous as it get. “I’m not the one you should have this conversation with.”

She knows he’s right but – she can’t exactly have this conversation with Neal, either, not that she wants to. So far, the – baby, gosh, is hers more than it is his, and it’s her body too, and she feels like he doesn’t really have a say in her decision. Also, he let her be arrested and never came back, so there’s that.

“I made an appointment with Planned Parenthood,” she tells him, making sure to end her sentence on a high note so it sounds like she doesn’t really ended her sentence.

As with most things, Killian gets it. “You want me to come with you?”

She nods, and that’s how, three days later, he’s holding her hand while she bites on her nails while waiting for the doctor to call them in. Ingrid used to slap her wrist so she would stop the biting, and she did eventually, but she’s too nervous to monitor herself today. Killian’s fingers squeeze her a little tighter, and it feels good.

She’s the one to squeeze tighter when the doctor points to something on the screen, nothing more than the blurb of a shadow of an indistinct shape – they can’t listen to the heartbeat yet, but perhaps it’s for the best. She’s already swallowing down tears as it is.

It’s like the perfectly nauseous campaign for pro-life weirdos, because she looks at the screen, and there is no way in hell she sees herself getting rid of it. Ingrid is definitely going to murder her.

“Congratulations,” the doctor tells her, all soft voice and softer smile. “You’re pregnant.”

…

Emma lies on the bed, head propped up on Killian’s stomach. He reads a book, which means he has his reading glasses on his nose so she can make as many nerd jokes as she wants and he can’t complain about it. Life is great.

There is a little bump on her belly, just enough that it’s obvious when she wears tight shirts. She’s taken to only wearing hoodies at school, and it helps that it’s the end of September and it’s starting to get cold. It will show, eventually, and then everyone will be gossiping about the orphan who ran away and got knocked up, but right now she’s doing just fine hiding it from the world and keeping to Killian.
“Stop thinking so loudly,” he tells her without even looking up from his book.

He’s reading A Storm of Swords, because it came out last month, and she wants to ask who’s dying. From the look of it, frown permanent on his brows, basically everyone and their pet wolf.

“You’re not fun.”

“I gave up on smoking for you, shut up.”

She grins at that, and goes back to drawing circles on her belly with her finger.

Ingrid will be back from work in an hour or so, and so Emma will have to leave Killian’s house in fifty minutes or so – Ingrid isn’t too keen on them spending time together, for some reason. Soon she’ll look like a disgusting whale, what does Ingrid fear anyway? That her knight in shining armour will sweep her off her swollen feet?

(Oh, the dream.)

“I was thinking–” He clicks his tongue and she swats at his chest, making him chuckle. “I was thinking, maybe Henry for a boy and Hermione for a girl.”

Pause for effect.

Then, “Harry Potter,” and he cackles. She punches him this time. “No, ow, come on. I do find it hilarious that Harry seems too much for you, but you have no problem with Hermione.”

She huffs and puffs, and then some more when she struggles to sit up. Killian makes a disapproving noise, but she shrugs him off when he tries to grab her wrist and pull her back to him. Emma stands up and grabs her jacket on the back of his office chair – her mood swings haven’t been terrible so far, but she always reacts badly to Killian’s criticism, for some reason. Some reason she refuses to dwell on.

“Come on, Swan.” He stands up too, and pulls her into a hug, ignoring the way she pummels his chest, harmless. “Those are lovely names.”

She sags against him. There is something comforting about the warmth of his embrace, body solid against hers. Emma has never been one to trust people easily, especially men, but she feels safe with Killian now – he never probed and never judged, and for that she is grateful, and relieved.

“You think?” she asks, and hates how weak she sounds.

“Aye. Little nerdy, but lovely.”

She smiles against his collarbone, mostly because she knows he won’t see it.

…

There comes a day when Emma can no longer tie her shoes all by herself, and she cries herself sick for hours until she finds the strength to call Ingrid and to hiccup about her problems. She sobs again once she hangs up, for the heck of it, and feels like shit for an entire week after that.

Ingrid buys her an entire new wardrobe of stretchy pants and lace-free shoes, and it’s the worst thing
ever when you’re a seventeen-year-old girl with sore boobs and stretch marks all over your ass. She looks at herself in the mirror and hates what she sees, but mostly she hates Neal, hates him so much she could literally kill him with her bare hand if she ever crossed his path again.

For his sake, and her own, she hopes never to see him again.

“T’ve got a gift for you,” Killian announces as he struts into her room.

Ingrid has finally given up on keeping him outside, half because he’ll enter by her window anyway and half because he’s good at helping Emma when she has a meltdown over her body, her pregnancy, school, or the three at the same time. Ingrid rolls her eyes a lot, but she lets him in anyway.

He offers her a plastic bag with an extravagant flourish of the hand, completely useless and adorable. Emma rolls her eyes even as she takes it from him – the bag is a light green and very little, and it hides a little baby onesie. ‘Mommy’s little pirate’ reads in bold letters on the front, with complimentary anchor, and is the most fucking adorable thing Emma has ever seen in her life.

“Bloody hell, Swan, are you crying?”

She most definitely is, heavy tears rolling down her cheeks and out of her control. She tries to swallow them down but there is no way around it now that the watergates are open. Emma manages to laugh through her tears, aware of how silly she is right now – damn the hormones, really – and Killian grins too, relieved, before he pulls her into a hug.

He’s been doing that a lot, lately.

“Thanks. I love it.”

He chuckles, and presses a kiss to her forehead. “I can see that.”

She grins and wipes away the tear. Killian helps, thumb against the apple of her cheek as he smiles down at her like she’s the eighth wonder of the world, and then some. It does nothing to loosen the knot in her stomach, and sometimes she wishes he didn’t look at her like that, because she is pregnant with another man’s child and can’t even begin to entertain the kind of thoughts his eyes sparkle.

“Let’s watch a movie,” she deflects.

Killian blows the dust off an old VHS tape and they bundle up on his couch to watch a shitty recorded version of The Goonies, with commercial breaks and all. He draws mindless patterns on her belly, and she falls asleep against his shoulder.

…

Emma’s waters break in the middle of a trigonometry class, which is the most unfortunate thing that could happen to her, seriously. Colours drench off her teacher’s face at the puddle at her feet, everyone staring and gasping – one girl Emma never talked to before is clever enough to run to the nurse’s office when she sees nobody else is reacting.

The ambulance arrives quickly enough, but by then everyone in school is aware of what is going on,
gathering in the hallways to watch as the nurse helps her to walk, one arm firmly wrapped around her waist. It’s only when Emma is sitting in the ambulance, one medic checking her vitals and asking if she’s having contractions yet, that Killian pushes his way through the crowd, yelling her name.

He does something out of a superhero movie, almost in slow-motion, jumping into the vehicle with his hair falling in his eyes. The medics are not impressed. Emma is, totally.

“Who are you?” one of them asks.

Killian runs a hand through his hair, and nods toward Emma. “I’m with her.”

“Are you the father?”

Emma wants to reply a clear-cut no but Killian replies an even more unequivocal “Yes!” and she widens her eyes at him. The asshole winks, sits next to her, and grabs her hand, patting it a little. She’s going to kill him.

She’s going to kill everyone, panting in agony as she waits for her contractions to be closer so they can do something about it. They put her in an empty room, and she paces the hell out of it, hands on her back as she bites down on her lip when a jolt of electricity up her spine takes her by surprise.

They’ve been here for hours, literally, Ingrid and Killian sitting together in silence and not daring to say anything, least they make it worse. She almost ripped Killian’s eyes out when he tried to force her to sit down, three hours ago. They’ve stopped trying.

The neon lights above her head flicker, like they’re badly bolted, and the ‘tink tink’ of it drives her up the wall too.

This isn’t helping.

Thankfully, thankfully, the time between her contractions gets short enough that two nurses come and bring her to another room. Killian jumps to his feet the moment he realizes what is going on, and Emma actually wants him there with her because she feels like he won’t blame her for breaking his fingers if it happens. But Ingrid is the one to follow her, and so Ingrid’s hand is the one she abuses when her throat gets hoarse with her screams of pain, when tears fall freely down her cheeks and her sweaty hair stick to her forehead.

Emma knows pain, was a little too familiar with it in the past, but nothing she went through had prepared her from what she is going through right now. She wants to give up, plain and simple, but can’t – it’s a damn fucking miracle when a shrilling noise swallows down her own yells, finally, finally.

“It’s a girl,” the doctor tells her, all grins and happy eyes.

Emma cries, but the tears are joyful this time.

She passes out soon after she fed Hermione for the first time, the baby napping against her chest when they bring them both back to the room. When she wakes up again, the sun is rising outside, and Ingrid is pacing the room with the baby in her arms, and Emma wants to cry all over again.

Her hand is in someone else’s, and she looks down to Killian sleeping with his upper body on the mattress while he sits in the chair next to her bed, and her heart swells a little at the sight of him. She cards her fingers through his hair, ignoring the purple bags under his eyes when he blinks up at her, all crooked smile and dimples.
“Hello, daddy,” she teases him.

Her body hurts and she feels like she will never not be exhausted after that, but hell if she won’t tease him about his sudden urge for fatherhood yesterday. He crunches up his nose at her.

“Shut up, it was the only way to stay with you.” He sits straighter, raises his arms above his arms to stretch, and she distinctly hears some of his vertebras pop. She winces. “Where’s my daughter anyway?”

“Oh god, shut up.”

Ingrid stares at them funnily, before she tells Emma it’s time for Hermione’s feeding. Killian turns red all over and stammers something about going to buy coffee, and do they want anything? It’s the most awkward, most obvious exit ever, all because he doesn’t want to see her boobs, and Emma openly laughs at him when he leaves the room.

She takes Hermione from Ingrid’s embrace, and opens her shirt. The baby goes straight for her nipple, like she hasn’t eaten in a century, which makes Emma laugh. She’s so in love with that tiny human already it’s almost obscene and ridiculous, but everything about her daughter is flawless, from the cute button nose to the soft fuzz of blonde hair to her tiny tiny toes. Emma is so in love.

“How are you, duckling?” Ingrid asks as she caresses Emma’s cheek. It’s been a long while since the last time she used the nickname, and Emma grins at her with fondness.

“Exhausted, mostly.”

“No surprise there.” She cards her fingers through Emma’s hair, unknots a strand or two. She looks pensive, lips pursed into a pout, like she wants to say something but doesn’t know how. “Killian stayed here all night.”

Ah. Here it is.

“He’s my best friend.”

Somehow, the statement sounds hollow.

…

Hermione’s hair is the exact same blonde as Emma’s, and her eyes stay blue. It’s the blue of a clear morning sky where Killian’s are the blue of the sea on a summer afternoon, but all Emma can think is how grateful she is that Hermione took it all from her instead of Neal. She wouldn’t have been able to look at her daughter and see the man who broke her heart.

“Perhaps one of your parents has blue eyes,” Killian tells her.

He looks really serious about it, even if he’s never been good in sciences of any kind – like he looked it up, or something, which is adorable. Everything is adorable to Emma, lately, and blaming it on the hormones is easy.

“Yeah, maybe…”
Hermione’s first, real word comes out of her mouth when she’s eleven-month-old.

Mother and daughter are playing with multicolour cubes in the living room, Emma splayed out over the carpet, when the front door opens and closes. It’s too early for it to be Ingrid coming back from work, so it can only be Killian crashing over for his daily visit. No surprise there.

What comes as a surprise is the way Hermione just lightens up at the sight of him, clapping and laughing like he’s god’s gift to babies. She opens her mouth, probably to babble a little, but instead she yelps a clear “Daddy!”

Emma freezes.

Killian freezes.

They both stare at each other.

He raises a hand to point at the baby, slowly, as if afraid to spook either of them. “I swear I didn’t teach her that.”

Emma knows but – she also knows Killian has been coming over every day for the past eleven months, and he knows how to change a diaper, and which lullaby to sing before Hermione’s nap, and where they stock powder milk. He knows Hermione likes her blue blanket, not the green one, he knows Emma is cranky in the morning, and he even went with them for Hermione’s first doctor appointment. He was with them then, and at Hermione’s birth, and he is now.

He’s pretty much Hermione’s father, at this point.

Then never talked about it – Emma entertained the thought of asking him to be the godfather, at some point, but never did. She heard an argument he had with his mother during the summer, when he refused to go to college and instead found a job at a bar in town – about how he was wasting her life, for a lass who wasn’t his. Emma still doesn’t know if Maureen Jones was talking about her, or Hermione.

Emma shrugs, her way of tell him, your choice, buddy.

She won’t be upset if he refuses but –

“Aye, daddy’s home,” he grins, and plops down next to them. He grabs one of the cubes, a red one, and makes all the ahs and ohs Hermione needs to be rightfully entertained. They build a tower, and destroy the tower, before Killian puts one of the cubes on top of Emma’s head and tells her not to let it fall. Hermione laughs her little heart out until her eyes become heavier with the nap she desperately needs to take at that time of the day.

Emma stands up, and scoops her daughter up into her arms, blowing a kiss Killian’s way before she heads towards her daughter’s bedroom. There is a fair amount of fussing and complaining before Hermione agrees to calm down, and she babbles something happy when Emma closes the door behind her.

When she goes back downstairs, Killian is sitting on the couch, but he jumps to his feet when he sees her. They stare at each other, not daring to move, not knowing what to say – is there anything to say?
There is, apparently.

“I love you.” She gasps. Loudly. “I love you, and I love Hermione. I don’t care if I’m not her father, because she is mine in all the ways that matter, and I’ll be damn if I do to her what this wanker did to you.”

He takes a few steps closer to her, enough to grab both her hands in his. His face is open, his eyes hopeful, and Emma wonders how they went for so long like this, how it is now slapping her in the face with how obvious it all is. Her heart flutters a little as she takes the last step between them, and wraps her arms around his neck.

Killian grins down at her, a little smug and a little sheepish, and she’s a goner. So she leans forwards, rising on her tiptoes to capture his lips into a kiss, delicate and tentative. When she breaks away, her eyelids flutter too, and her breath itches in her throat at the way he pounces on her, kiss more fervent and passionate, so loving it leaves her breathless and dizzy.

“I love you,” she tells him. “Killian, I love you.”

He grins, and laughs, and kisses her.

…

“Mom, Mom, look!”

Hermione tumbles down the stairs, so fast it make Emma’s head spin a little, fingers reaching for her phone, 911 at the ready. The girl slips on the last step, and Emma’s heart stops beating altogether for a moment – her daughter will be the death of her, seriously.

“Mom!”

Hermione hugs something to her chest, something huge, and Emma raises both eyebrows. It isn’t uncommon for Ingrid to buy gifts for Hermione, but enormous books usually don’t make the cut. Emma shares a glance with her foster mother, but the older woman looks at puzzled as she does – it doesn’t make sense.

“What is it, kitten?” Killian asks, when she doesn’t.

“It’s a book, and Mom is in it!”

Hermione beams as she says that, jumping up and down like she’s half-child half-spring, and drops the book on the kitchen table to open in flippantly. She points to an illustration, one of a baby wrapped into a blanket that looks a lot like the one Emma has owned her entire life.

“Look, it’s you.”

“Come on, kiddo. Don’t be silly, it can’t be me.”

“Emma.”

She looks up to Ingrid. Her foster mother’s lips are drawn into a thin line as she keeps staring at the book, not exactly confused, but – relieved, somehow? It doesn’t make sense. Nothing about this makes sense, it’s just a book Ingrid offered Hermione. Right?
“Emma, we need to talk.”

…

When John Doe looks at her, after she and Mary Margaret ran after him through the woods of Storybrooke, his eyes are so big and familiar and blue – the blue of a clear sky in the morning – that Emma can only gasp in shock.

It suddenly all makes sense, even if she refuses to believe it.

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